



Fostering Order In The Indo-Pacific

What the EU Can Learn From and
Do With Australia, India, Japan,
South Korea, and Vietnam

Special Paper | February 2025

Richard Ghiasy
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Abbreviations

ADB	Asian Development Bank
AIIB	Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCDCOE	Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence
CEPA	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
CMF	Combined Maritime Force
CMP	Coordinated Maritime Presences
CPV	Communist Party of Vietnam
EEZ	Exclusive Economic Zones
EPC	European Policy Centre
ESIWA	Enhancing Security in and with Asia
EU	European Union
EUDIS	EU Defense Industry Strategy
EUNAVFOR	EU Naval Force Operations
EVFTA	EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement
FOIO	Free and Open International Order
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FPA	Framework Partnership Agreement
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GIGA	German Institute for Global and Area Studies
IP4	Indo-Pacific Four (Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea)
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
ISDP	Institute for Security and Development Policy
IUU	Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated
JETP	Just Energy Transition Partnership
KASI	Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
NCG	Nuclear Consultative Group
PESCO	Permanent Structure Cooperation
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SWP	German Institute for International and Security Affairs
UN	United Nations
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
US	United States
WTO	World Trade Organization

Executive Summary

One of the most critical challenges of this century is fostering order in the Indo-Pacific. (Dis)order in this space will significantly affect the international order. Not only do many Indo-Pacific residents lead efforts to probe and reform international order and concepts of order, but the superpower competition between the United States (U.S.) and China primarily unfolds here. The EU is already cognizant of this. Yet, it is not just about what the EU and its members seek to accomplish in the region but just as much the interpretations of and preferences for order of key Indo-Pacific resident actors. What are their views on EU strategies and contributions to order? Indeed, major and middle powers from the primary maritime regions—Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam (abbreviated as the “five powers”)—are proactive and have much agency in Indo-Pacific affairs. In their ways, they attempt to do what is best for them and what they perceive as fostering order in the Indo-Pacific. What can the EU learn from and do with these five powers?

Order in the Indo-Pacific is characterized by forces that simultaneously sustain, strengthen, erode, expand, and reform it. The predominant force is the re-emergence of Asia at large as an economic, (geo)political, and technological force, particularly China, India, ASEAN, and

actors in the Islamic world. As power balances shift in favor of Asia, and in particular China, the Indo-Pacific is in an ordering dynamic in which new institutions are being founded, rules and principles such as sovereignty and non-interference are simultaneously violated and emphasized, and new principles and norms regarding cooperation and security are promoted.

Amidst this backdrop, the interpretation of order fostering in the Indo-Pacific of all five powers essentially converges. While geographic focus varies from the international (Japan), the Indo-Pacific (Australia), the Indian Ocean (India), to the regional (South Korea and Vietnam), a stable, free, and open rules-based Indo-Pacific that enables economic integration, open sea lanes, and unimpeded trade flows, and that excludes anyone’s unilateral actions are essentially their shared understanding of order.

However, rather stark differences exist in their preferences for fostering order in the Indo-Pacific. Australia, Japan, and, to a lesser degree, South Korea, bonded by a volatile Korean Peninsula, perceive the balance of power vis-à-vis China as the most critical and effective way to sustain order in the Indo-Pacific. They see the U.S. as a critical security

balancer with whom they, as active agents, can help foster order. To them, there was a stable and economically facilitating order in the Indo-Pacific that a stronger China is uprooting due to its maritime and territorial claims in the South and East China Seas. From their perspective—and among other approaches—it is critical to sustain a balance of power so that China does not trespass on order parameters.

Time will tell the efficacy of this approach, as the inherent mistrust and instability of power balancing, generally an exercise of friction, does not necessarily guarantee sustained peace, stability, cooperation, or order. Yet, it may indeed discourage China from any unilateral actions. In turn, China considers this U.S.-led power balancing as destabilizing, the Hub-and-Spokes alliance system as an exclusive hegemonic military configuration, and neither as part of the international or Indo-Pacific order. As an extension of that stance, India and Vietnam, while still pursuing hard security and an Asia that includes the U.S., favor a more balanced approach to order fostering that prioritizes inclusive dialogue, genuine multilateralism, multi-aligned networks, and cooperative rather than collective solutions to security. India, South Korea, and Vietnam also strongly prioritize economic development. These differences highlight how geographic distance, domestic political and economic priorities, material capabilities, strategic culture, historical relationships and legacies shape each power's interpretations of and preferences for order in the Indo-Pacific. These five powers cannot be considered a grouping that thinks and acts in unison or has identical views on order fostering in the Indo-Pacific.

The five powers' views on the EU's engagement in the Indo-Pacific thus far and how the EU could help foster regional order also vary. These hover over an amalgam of realism, disillusion, and optimism. The Australian, Japanese, and South Korean aspirations for greater coordination with the EU lie in the hope that it can move closer to the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific military alliances, informally or formally, directly or indirectly. India and Vietnam place a much stronger emphasis on diversifying external relations and on a more plural or multipolar Indo-Pacific where firm security reliance through collective security on the U.S., or anybody for that matter, is largely discouraged. This represents the overall Indo-Pacific barometer for order, stability, and cooperation more than the Australian, Japanese, and South Korean approaches.

This report does not claim to know which of these five powers' individual or shared preferences for order fostering is the most effective way. Each interpretation and preference has a degree of rationale and merit. What is clear is that if stability and cooperation are the highest goals of order—and these should be—then order in the Indo-Pacific should be characterized by genuine multilateralism and based on international law. This automatically equates order in the Indo-Pacific with the international order. While order in the Indo-Pacific has unique characteristics and regional institutions, it falls under its aegis of international order—particularly international law.

Therefore, the best way for the EU to contribute to fostering order might be a two-pronged

approach. The realities of China's territorial and maritime claims and power balancing cannot be wished away. The preferred *modus operandi* of some of the area's most notable middle and major powers, Australia, Japan, and South Korea, to power balance and rely heavily on the U.S. is firm—this needs to be respected. If the EU believes in this approach, it may expand on current support to these regional countries' endeavors (in)directly.

Yet, most of the Indo-Pacific, India, and Vietnam included, do not see power balancing as *the* remedy for order fostering. Therefore, the EU's order fostering opportunity lies 1) in diplomatic engagement by facilitating (or joining) genuine multilateralist track I and track II dialogues with international law as the point of departure and that considers all stakeholders' core concerns; and, 2) through non-traditional security cooperation, both bilaterally and multilaterally with the five powers, and other powers, in maritime,

economic, and cyber security—these are elaborated on in the Recommended Policies section (4.1).

Importantly, the EU should consider working with all like-interested states, not just like-valued ones. The like-valued states are limited to the IP4 and a few others, which will not cut it in a region as large and diverse as the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, the desire for stability, cooperation and order fostering is not exclusive to democratic states.

These ways forward do not require a new EU Indo-Pacific strategy but rather a recalibration of approaches more closely with all regional actors. This will include reconciling different interpretations of and preferences to foster order. Importantly, if international law is the cornerstone of international order, those fostering stability in the Indo-Pacific must champion it—equally for all, by all, and with all.



CHAPTER 1

Introduction

The Indo-Pacific, the maritime space and littoral between the western Indian and Western Pacific oceans, has become the world's most geopolitically and geo-economically consequential theater—and will remain so for at least some decades. Order in this vast space partially dictates the maintenance or disruption of international order. Indeed, a) Indo-Pacific residents primarily lead efforts to probe and reform international order, b) the superpower competition between the United States (U.S.) and China primarily unfolds here, c) the region's geo-economics will only gain more influence, d) the region will significantly impact climate change (reversion), and e) the tech war primarily takes place in the Indo-Pacific. Climate change and technology are not direct drivers of order but can serve as important disruptors and shapers.

Thus far, much of the focus and debate among the European Union's (EU) few proactive members on order in the Indo-Pacific has been in response to trade dependency, Chinese unilateralism, U.S. hard security strategies, and unchecked Sino-U.S. contestation. By now, several of these EU members have come to understand each other's positions on the Indo-Pacific through the EU's "EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," and individual strategies, guidelines, visions, or approach and position papers (10 in total).

While reference to 'order' is prevalent in the EU and many of the individual member-states strategy papers, gradually, there is a realization

that it is not just about what the EU and its members seek to accomplish in the region but just as much the perspectives and priorities of key Indo-Pacific resident actors—and their views on EU strategies and contributions to order. Indeed, major and middle powers,¹ such as Australia, India, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam (abbreviated as the "five powers"), have much agency in Indo-Pacific affairs. They actively try and sustain what they perceive as order in the Indo-Pacific and attempt to curb any Chinese and U.S. unilateral aspirations and order disruptions.

A brief elaboration on why these five powers are selected is warranted. We selected one major or middle power from each of the five maritime Asian regions, barring West Asia, but including Australia: South, East, Northeast, and Southeast Asia. This led us to whom we perceived as having particular agency: respectively India, Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam. Australia is not strictly Asia but a significant and active middle power in the Indo-Pacific. Besides this geographic criterion, we attempted to strike a balance between economically and technologically advanced actors and less advanced actors.

We also took into consideration their strategic security thinking: Australia, Japan, and (to a significant degree) South Korea are essentially status quo powers that strongly favor a U.S.-led security order and architecture.² In turn, India is a strong proponent of the notion of multipolarity and pursues a strategy that

encourages strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. At the same time, Vietnam also practices the latter and is, regarding order fostering in the South China Sea, an active member of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Indeed, as Vietnam is located at the heart of the South China Sea, a critical chokepoint and flashpoint for regional disputes such as Taiwan, it has a proactive stance on maritime and international law, and since the South China Sea is the strategic heart of the Indo-Pacific, Vietnam's inclusion was given.

Perhaps the question of why Vietnam has been selected over Indonesia may surface: Indonesia could be a contender as well, but Indonesia's agency—arguably—is not as commensurate with its size and population as Vietnam in Indo-Pacific ordering pursuit. Certainly, Indonesia's long-standing non-alignment pursuit is commendable, but the country's stronger domestic focus and quieter foreign policy may lack some 'spirit.' Similarly, ASEAN is too diverse a group and lacks cohesion in Indo-Pacific order fostering; selecting it over Vietnam would also have added an intergovernmental organization to a list of individual powers.

As a result, by design, these five powers cannot be considered as a grouping that thinks and acts in unison or has identical views on order in the Indo-Pacific. In their strong siding with the U.S.-led security order and architecture, Australia, Japan, and (to a slightly lesser degree) South Korea are less reflective of the Indo-Pacific barometer than India and Vietnam—most countries do not side strongly with either the U.S. or China. Similarly, it is a

given that these five are not treated as unitary actors individually. Internally, among the policy, academic, and think tank communities, there are divergences in how to best foster order in the Indo-Pacific.

With this set out, we argue that the EU is best served by gauging these five powers' approaches to order as reference, fostering and, in response, learning and aligning with them where viable, as siding unequivocally with the U.S. or China is not preferred.³

With this background and objectives in mind, this report answers three questions, each building on the previous:

- 1) What are the five powers' interpretations of and preferences for order in the Indo-Pacific?
- 2) What are these five powers' views on EU (members) strategies and their preferences for the EU to support order in the Indo-Pacific?
- 3) Why and how can the EU best position its policies more closely to those of the five powers?

The data-gathering methods of this report included a combination of desk and field research: desk research comprised a review of official and scholarly sources from across the Indo-Pacific, Europe, and the U.S. The authors also held a workshop in Helsinki and three half-day virtual workshops under the Chatham House rule to discuss the questions listed above. The workshops revolved around panelist presentations (30

by experts (see the Acknowledgments section) from/on the five powers and discussions among all attendees. Lastly, the authors conducted field research in four of the five powers in question and conducted semi-structured interviews with relevant policy practitioners.

The report proceeds as follows: Chapter 2 discusses the five powers' interpretations of and preferences for order in the Indo-Pacific order. Chapter 3 elaborates on their views of the EU's role thus far and what this role could be. Finally, Chapter 4 deliberates how the EU should proceed best.

Endnotes

- 1 While fully acknowledging varying interpretations and definitions of major and middle powers, this report does not delve into definitional specifics and parameters of these classifications.
- 2 A 'security order', traditional and non-traditional, indicates the degree of cooperation to which states may (and/or are able to) take measures to protect their individual and, when preferred, collective security interests. In contrast, a 'security architecture' involves clearer sets of obligations, commitments, and possibly even privileges, arising from and governed by treaty-institutional foundations and implications.
- 3 The EU follows an independent approach, see "The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific," European Union External Action Service, September 16, 2021, <https://www.eeas.europa.eu>.



CHAPTER 2

Five Powers' Interpretations and Preferences

After briefly discussing order in the Indo-Pacific, this chapter examines the five powers' interpretations of and preferences for order and concludes with commonalities and differences among the five.

2.1 Understanding Order in the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific is an extensive multipolar system in which the fate of its order is not solely determined by the two superpowers—the U.S. and China—but by the politics, interests, and agency of many local powers and variables. The region's foremost strategic challenges may revolve around China's re-emergence, but the area itself is not just about China. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific is an enormous theater with many challenges and institutional and regional layers, players, and stakeholders. Asserting a single Indo-Pacific order is problematic; multiple political, economic, and security orders dot the vast Indo-Pacific space. This report, therefore, refers to 'order' in the Indo-Pacific as a concept and objective and acknowledges its plurality, i.e., orders, rather than a singular Indo-Pacific order.

The Indo-Pacific strategy, predominantly led by the U.S., Japan, and Australia, is simultaneously a concept, geography, process, and outcome and is mainly geared towards

promoting democratic values, economic resilience among like-minded partners, and adherence to international law, but importantly also diluting and absorbing Chinese influence and maritime expansionism.¹ The thrust of the leading Indo-Pacific strategies is not to foster cooperation with all but about China's containment and balancing.² Many proponents firmly believe that this is the most effective way to sustain order, although others, led by China, see this containment and the U.S.' military position at the apex of the Indo-Pacific as the principal driver of disorder.³ Indeed, for many Indo-Pacific residents, this is not about shutting China out of its extended region but instead incorporating it into a multipolar Indo-Pacific order.⁴ However, what is order in the Indo-Pacific precisely? The answer to that is slightly complex. Lately, interpretations and definitions of international order—under which the Indo-Pacific falls—have floated around loosely and interchangeably among policy and scholarly circles.⁵ We must first define what order we are seeking to foster in the Indo-Pacific.

Order in the Indo-Pacific has unique characteris-

tics and involves a complex geopolitical matrix along with a set of regional institutions, but it is not separate from the international order—it falls under its aegis. We, therefore, need to discuss the international order briefly. While definitions vary, the international order can be understood as:

*A coherent set of institutions and corresponding rules, principles, and norms underpinned by international law that guide relations between states to promote stability and cooperation.*⁶

What are these institutions, then? At the international level, led by the U.S. from 1945 onward and geographically expanded further following the end of the Cold War, is the United Nations (UN) system, including the Bretton Woods institutions (the World Bank and International Monetary Fund), the World Trade Organization, but also young(er) institutions such as the Asia Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), and multilateral agreements such as the Paris Agreement. Examples of rules include prohibiting using force against any state's territorial integrity or political independence. Principles include non-intervention and the peaceful resolution of conflicts, while examples of norms, i.e., unwritten but customary standards of behavior, include aid to developing nations and environmental responsibility.

Order in the Indo-Pacific falls under this international order's institutions, rules, principles, and norms. However, some institutions are (predominantly) exclusive to the Indo-Pacific and contribute to order, too. These include more regional institutions (though in some cases geographically expanding beyond the Indo-

Pacific) such as the Asian Development Bank (ADB), Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), BRICS Plus, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Though disputed whether they sustain order in the security realm, there are also the more exclusive arrangements such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and the U.S.-led Hub-and-Spokes alliance system.

Currently, order in the Indo-Pacific is characterized by forces that simultaneously sustain, strengthen, erode, expand, and reform it. The predominant force is the re-emergence of Asia at large as an economic, (geo)political, and technological force, particularly China, India, ASEAN, and other actors in the Islamic world. As power balances shift in favor of Asia and the U.S.' unipolar dominance in the economic and security realm erodes in relative terms both globally and across Asia, the Indo-Pacific is in an ordering dynamic in which new institutions are being founded, old principles such as sovereignty and non-interference are simultaneously violated and emphasized, and new principles and norms regarding cooperation and security are promoted.⁷

Much of this contemplation, conservation, and revisionism is led by powerful re-emerging civilizational states such as China and, to a minor but growing degree, India. China, more materially developed and confident than any other Asian actor, is simultaneously fostering and selectively reforming the international order. China is doing so, for example, by making it more politically value-neutral while shaping the Indo-Pacific security and economic order in ways that erode the U.S.-led security

hierarchy in the region, expand China's influence, and create a partially reformed order that, in its view, is more just and reflective of a structurally changed power balance. Some Chinese scholars argue that since the Second World War, the international order has been characterized by hegemony, alliance, and hierarchy and is unfair.⁸ While this is not entirely inaccurate, and China has been one of the biggest beneficiaries of this order,⁹ the push and pull of China and the U.S. can be considered the primary forces that distress the Indo-Pacific order.¹⁰ This push and pull is here to stay as China will not tolerate a non-resident superpower (the U.S.) on its doorstep, as the U.S. does not tolerate anyone on its doorstep.

At the same time, it is essential to note that the international and any Indo-Pacific order was never a finished static project that had to be sustained fully without any receptiveness to reform. Order is a continuous process of sustenance and reform as power constellations change, its legitimacy is questioned, new interpretations and prioritizations emerge on fairness and equality, new institutions are founded or expanded, technology advances, and "new" domains such as ecological changes, cyberspace, artificial intelligence (AI), and space require new laws and norms.

With this laid out, the EU must promote stability and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific without the hard power to contribute to any meaningful hard security balancing. It also needs to promote genuine multilateralism and international law while simultaneously realizing that it and most of its members are not residents of the Indo-Pacific and that its preferences are second to the region's. Therefore, how do the

five key powers interpret and prefer the Indo-Pacific order?

2.2 Interpretations and Preferences

2.2.1 Australia

Starting alphabetically with the five powers, Australia is essentially an Indo-Pacific order status quo power that has become more realistic and pursues a slightly modified status quo in which it has become a much more proactive agent enhancing its security 'autonomy.' Indeed, there is a degree of realism around Australia's language and its actions now that was not there some ten years ago. Exemplary of this is a 2024 defense whitepaper that states, "Australia faces its most complex and challenging strategic environment since the Second World War."¹¹ Australia has benefited significantly from the U.S.-led post-war international economic order and the U.S.-led security architecture of East and Southeast Asia. What slight modification does Australia seek, then?

Australia's primary interpretation is that there was a balance of power that worked in everyone's interests in the West-Pacific and that sustained order. However, it has now been destabilized by China's re-emergence and maritime and military aspirations in the South and East China Seas. As a result, Australia prefers order in the Indo-Pacific by means of sustaining a power balance vis-à-vis China.¹² While Australia officially tends not to refer to an 'Indo-Pacific order,' it strongly advocates for a global rules-based order, which it believes will help sustain stability in the Indo-Pacific.¹³ Australia particularly wants to help maintain a

favorable balance of power in its near region—generally defined to include the Eastern Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia, and the West Pacific—as Chinese relations with countries in these regions are expanding swiftly.¹⁴ Australia goes about this by strengthening the existing U.S.-led security order and architecture¹⁵ through the so-called Hub-and-Spokes alliance system. Australia’s efforts to foster order and stability are thus primarily designed to support the continuation of U.S. military primacy in the region.

Indeed, Australia fosters a security-driven supporting structure for order in the Indo-Pacific that prioritizes the balance of power,¹⁶ one of two upholding pillars of the international order that Henry Kissinger identified—the other one being legitimacy, involving the acceptance of rules, norms, and the general structure of the international, or in this case regional, system by (most) actors within it. In essence, for what Australia sees as a stable and favorable balance of power, the U.S. is critical as a balancer to China, signifying a subtle shift from a U.S. primacy role to a U.S.-led counterbalance to China in which Indo-Pacific resident U.S.-allies have more security capacity and a more proactive security role. The role of the U.S. becomes more of a coordinator and ultimate “muscle” and guarantor.¹⁷

While some Australian scholars may refer to Canberra as acting anxiously and strategically, possibly “erroneously,”¹⁸ the reality is also that Australia is a vast state in terms of its geography, one of the largest maritime states in terms of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), and the naval space that it has responsibility for, but it is under-resourced demographically

and militarily for the scale of it, including defensive of its society and values from any foreign intrusion.¹⁹ As a country that primarily identifies as Western yet is geographically located south of a massive continent (Asia) with many significant powers that are very little Western culturally and in its values, Canberra’s rationale is not odd. At the same time, and for these reasons, Australia is compelled to support multilateralism and more robust economic and security cooperation among “like-minded” states.

The latter track has been reinforced in the last decade through historic firsts,²⁰ such as a strong U.S. military presence in northern Australia with actual U.S. military deployment and the AUKUS (referring to the Australia, UK, and US defense pact) technology sharing arrangement with the U.S. and UK sharing nuclear submarine and other advanced technology. Security cooperation is also advancing through other bilateral and plurilateral relationships such as with the “spokes,” including Japan, South Korea, and the Philippines, but beyond these spokes, also with the Quad, U.S.-Japan, Japan-India, and France-India. Beyond the security focus with the U.S. and existing and new partners, multilateral institutions allow Australia to try to moderate different interests and divergence of values and cultures in a region as extensive and diverse as the Indo-Pacific.²¹

Australia strongly supports what it refers to as the “rules-based international order.” It perpetuates a liberal international order vision, as reflected in its 2017 foreign policy white paper.²² The liberal qualities of the legal order that emerged in the post-Cold War era

suit Australia's interests and values, aligning rather closely with domestic organizations and values.²³ Though void of political values, there is a phrase that Foreign Minister Penny Wong likes to use that perhaps best encapsulates how Australia thinks about the Indo-Pacific: "A region where no power dominates, and no one is dominated."²⁴ Paradoxically, U.S. hard security primacy can be considered a form of dominance but is considered a benign balancer by its allies.²⁵

In sum, Australia is a realism-driven status quo power that has made minor modifications to reinforce old security partnerships and build new security and alliances. Australia anticipates this will help uphold order in the Indo-Pacific by deterring China through hard security measures and limiting any Chinese trespassing on international rules.

India's approaches to dealing with China and fostering stability and cooperation differ from Australia's.

2.2.2 India

India's interpretations of and preferences for the Indo-Pacific order are best understood through a brief dive into Indian history, especially its colonial past. This requires discussing India's preferences for order post-independence, and looking ahead as Asia re-emerges, particularly China and India itself. Indeed, India's past continues to reverberate in its foreign policy today. Ancient India had contacts with places as far as Rome, Greece, and Eastern Africa to its west and China to the East. The statecraft that followed was rarely expansionist.²⁶ For much of India's history, a constant in its foreign policy combines idealism, realism, and

independence of action. India, at present, holds a wider canvas of its strategic preferences, about who and what it wants to be in the Indo-Pacific order, and its geographic scope for this is considerable.

India, where two centuries of colonialism²⁷ resulted in a more regional and insular outlook and policies following the first roughly half-century, has come to widen its strategic geographic scope significantly throughout the Indo-Pacific. From India's perspective today, the foreign and security policy in the neighborhood covers the entire Asia-Pacific and extends to the Gulf and West Asia (Middle East). India straddles and perceives itself as the fulcrum of the region between Suez and Shanghai, West and East Asia, and the Mediterranean and South China Sea.

India's geographic vision is thus horizontally expansive.²⁸ Therefore, India sees itself as part of any economic and security order or architecture in the vast Indo-Pacific region or space. Initially, India was not focused on traditional security beyond its region, but it is increasingly veering in that direction like Australia. In essence, India is fixated on three things at the nexus of its core interests and order in the Indo-Pacific as it sees today's Indo-Pacific constraints as partially behavioral but primarily structural.²⁹ First is applying pragmatism so that the Indian economy can continue to grow (much like China's overarching policy from 1978 to around 2012) and, with that, pursuing a solid economic security strategy. Demonstrative of this is when, in 2020, the government launched the "Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyaan," which loosely translates as "self-reliant India campaign."

The second is to tout an “Asia-plus” that includes foreign powers to balance China’s growing might and improve ties with the U.S. after many decades of outright strained relations. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi said at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, “India has left behind the hesitations of history” in its relations with the U.S.³⁰

Third, in that same speech, the characteristic of India’s overarching policy for the Indo-Pacific and Asia is inclusivity, and a call for unity, cohesion, freedom, and openness. India, like Australia, is committed to the rules-based order and multilateralism, particularly to the global commons, but has a more inclusive and dialogue-driven conviction. Notwithstanding the significance of India’s continental hostilities and, in turn, the centrality of these issues in Indian diplomacy, a focused maritime outlook has become extremely important for Indian foreign policy. This is evidenced by the release of India’s Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR) vision and the launch of the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) that builds on it in recent years and their centrality in India’s Indo-Pacific outlook.

New Delhi’s vision for a multilateral, multipolar Asia aims to ensure that it can, like Australia, balance China’s growing dominance in the region but, in India’s case, also restore its historic pre-eminent status in Asia.³¹ It is important to note that India does not mechanically follow the U.S. or the EU in its interpretations of and preferences for an international order and, thus, order in the Indo-Pacific. India builds on its rich past, strategic culture, and ancient wisdom to promote order and the prevalence of rules, principles, and norms—India’s rise today

also includes the rejuvenation of a civilizational state as S. Jaishankar, Minister of External Affairs, refers to it.³²

India’s adherence to the UN system underpinned by international law is strong, and India supports multilateralism. The current Modi-led ruling administration’s approaches draw from their understanding of Indian strategic culture, including epics such as the Ramayana and the Mahabharata and ancient Vedic Hindu texts such as the Upanishads that guided, for example, India’s 2023 G20 presidency. Its motto was *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*, meaning “the world is one family” or “one earth, one family, one future”.³³ India, therefore, promotes cooperative security, much like China and ASEAN, rather than U.S.-led collective security.³⁴

Indeed, India believes in adherence to an international rules-based order and international law, particularly freedom of navigation and a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. However, this is to be achieved through dialogue and diplomacy to maintain peace and security.³⁵ As one workshop panelist stressed: “In any definition of order, you have to take into account the culture and history of the countries involved in that order.” India differs from Australia because it is comfortable sustaining the international and Indo-Pacific order, iniquitous as it may be at times, yet simultaneously, it wants to 1) reform the international and Indo-Pacific order from within through dialogue and institutions based on equality and openness,³⁶ and, 2) apply a much less aligned and hard security balancing approach to sustaining order than Australia. One such example is the aforementioned SAGAR vision, which focuses

on maritime security, economic cooperation, and collective action to address regional challenges, particularly in the Indian Ocean region—India’s traditional area of dominance.

As we continue with Japan, we notice that its interpretations and preferences are closer to Australia’s than India’s.

2.2.3 Japan

Japan’s interpretations of and preferences for the Indo-Pacific order have undergone a two-phased evolution in nuance and geographic scope. Japan’s Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP), initiated in 2016 by former Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, reaffirmed the region’s security and economic rules-based order cobbled together after the Second World War.³⁷ Since 2022, and though it was mentioned as early as the 1980s, Japan has promoted the Free and Open International Order (FOIO). FOIO’s primary objective is to consolidate order in the Indo-Pacific based on the existing rules-based international order.

Indeed, FOIO is an updated vision based on the centrality of international law to stress the interconnectedness to the rule of law in all things order, including in reference to Ukraine, Gaza, or any other violation that does not necessarily restrict itself to the Indo-Pacific.³⁸ But also because Japan has grown cognizant that the Global South, increasingly more vocal and less acquiesce, is questioning the legitimacy of a (liberal) international order whose rules and norms have primarily been shaped by economically advanced states, and chimeric approaches to rules-abidance by the West, particularly the U.S.³⁹

Japan, through FOIO, thus prudently places Indo-Pacific order under the aegis of international order, with a much more proactive and coordinative role for itself. By doing this, Japan opens the door to order and ordering, i.e., the process of fostering order, to more actors across the Indo-Pacific and stakeholders worldwide, such as the EU, to care about the Indo-Pacific order. However, Japan still sees the U.S. leadership in upholding the international and Indo-Pacific order as “indispensable.”⁴⁰ Yet, the security thinking in Japan is continuously evolving beyond the conventional U.S. security umbrella and making partnerships that may be consequential for its future. Simultaneously, Japan is not keen to see the unfolding contest between China and the U.S. venture into armed conflict, which, if it materializes, will not be far from Japanese territory.

While Japan upholds multilateralism, at the same time, propelled by shifts in the regional balance of power, particularly the rise of China and the relative decline of the United States, as its overall security strategy, Japan, like Australia, has been determined to enhance national defense by increasing its capabilities and strengthening the U.S.-Japan alliance, while also transforming its partnerships with like-minded states, such as Australia and India, into a diplomatic, and potentially military, alignment.⁴¹

Like Australia, Japan wants to become a more significant player by increasing its defense and diplomatic-strategic capabilities. Japan’s efforts to foster order in the Indo-Pacific should be understood in the context of its deeper strategic situation and, in particular, its position as a secondary but still highly influential power.⁴² Japan is actively steering the Indo-

Pacific debate and, similar to Australia, sees a stable status quo changing due to China's re-emergence and aspirations to eject the U.S. from the Western Pacific's so-called first island chain. In this dynamic, Japan, geopolitically at the geographic brunt of (re)surgent powers China, Russia, and North Korea, has no choice but to become more active in Indo-Pacific ordering. Similar to Australia, for Japan, this translates into closer cooperation with the U.S., allies, and partners to build a strong balance of power and deterrence vis-à-vis China. Success has been enjoyed, with Japan increasingly being seen as a benign potential counterweight to China in, for instance, Southeast Asia.⁴³

To Japan, in the context of order in the Indo-Pacific, the following four objectives are critical:

- 1) Maritime security and, more specifically, freedom of navigation, sea lanes of communication, and choke point security;
- 2) the promotion of free trade and investment that includes China, but at the same time de-risks from China;
- 3) cyber security and the control of critical technology flows; and,
- 4) nuclear non-proliferation.⁴⁴

Of these four objectives, objective 1 (freedom of navigation), objective 2 (free trade and investment), and objective 4 (non-proliferation) are important principles of the international order, and Japan tends to prioritize these the most in its foreign policies.

Japan differs from Australia and India in its interpretations of and preferences for the Indo-Pacific order in that, unlike Australia, it geographically and conceptually opens the

aperture and stresses the international order more.⁴⁵ At the same time, Japan, like Australia but unlike India, sticks to collective security solutions by cementing ties with the U.S., expanding its capabilities, and strengthening and expanding its security network. Japan is clear-minded about its interpretations and policy direction.

2.2.4 South Korea

Like Japan, South Korea is positioned right on some of the world's and region's most profound geopolitical fissures. South Korea hesitated to develop an official position on the Indo-Pacific order. This primarily resulted from a cautious strategic approach to the Indo-Pacific, mainly to avoid upsetting China, by the former President Moon Jae-in administration (2017–2022).⁴⁶ In late 2022, relatively belatedly, South Korea launched its pivot to the Indo-Pacific, namely the “Strategy for a Free, Peaceful and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region.”⁴⁷ With this, South Korea moved from an era of so-called strategic ambiguity to more strategic clarity concerning relations with China and the U.S., aligning stronger with the latter's security vision and architecture and with the objective of lessening (over) dependence on China in critical sectors. The South Korean strategy wants to “actively promote and strengthen a regional order shaped not by force or coercion but by rules and universal values. We oppose unilateral change of status quo by force and pursue a harmonious regional order where nations' rights are respected, and our shared interests are explored.”⁴⁸ Stressing a triad of freedom, peace, and prosperity, South Korea's interpretations and preferences partially align with Japan's. Furthermore, similar to Japan, this entails (even) closer security ties with the U.S.

South Korea has preferred the U.S. as part of the new-found “strategic clarity” for Korean Peninsular concerns, in particular since China has not been willing to criticize North Korea’s belligerent tactics, but perhaps also because China’s ordering principles of cooperative and indivisible security (see China’s Global Security Initiative) are not clear (enough)—even if rhetorically they sound appealing. This also shows that South Korea’s non-economic engagement with China remains fraught, with even the much-awaited 2024 China-Japan-South Korea trilateral summit failing to produce noteworthy results and skirting around security concerns. That China is still South Korea’s largest trade partner highlights that balancing or hedging between China and the U.S.—its top security partner—can never wholly be avoided unless South Korea gives earnest momentum to its diversification goals.⁴⁹

There seemed immense possibilities for South Korea to leverage its status as an economic-technological global powerhouse to transform its diplomatic profile, including as a “Global Pivotal State” to help foster order.⁵⁰ Yet, in the two years, the achievements have been limited due to a greater preoccupation with North Korea, embodied by the Washington Declaration.⁵¹ A notable development is a trilateral cooperation between South Korea, Japan, and the U.S., a critical strategic alignment to enhance security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region. However, in practice, South Korea’s role in the Indo-Pacific order is often forcibly confined to daily existential threats on the Korean Peninsula.

One example of this trilateral affability is in response to the North Korean regime’s

accelerated ballistic missile launches, boosting of North Korean nuclear weapons capabilities, and the recent defense pact with Russia. Indeed, geopolitically, South Korea and Japan are unlikely to be anyone’s envy. Both must deal with a resurgent Russia, a belligerent North Korea, and a China that calls these two states to calibrate to a new East Asian order that minimizes the security role of the U.S. Indeed, South Korea’s recent efforts to foster order in the Indo-Pacific are held back by strong and developing Northeast Asian security challenges. The Peninsula’s “weight” often forces South Korea to focus on its region specifically. Of course, order in Northeast Asia equates with order in the Indo-Pacific.

Examples of slow progress across the Indo-Pacific include the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI), which has been unable to truly augment its strategic cooperation with ASEAN and its member states beyond economic engagements. With India, negotiations for upgrading the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) have been relatively slow; technology and security cooperation has not found its gears despite some military exchanges; and, importantly, President Yoon Suk-yeol has not yet visited India on an official state visit.

The perceived threat from a dominant China for the Indo-Pacific is also well within the South Korean foreign policy remit despite these new Korean Peninsular constraints: both its trilateral partners Japan and the United States have openly cited China’s behavior, including attempts to “reshape the international order for its benefit at the expense of others,” as the main reason for strengthening the alliance in

East Asia.⁵² South Korea, while not verbally instigating China excessively, has not objected to such assertions. Its Indo-Pacific strategy stresses the principles of inclusiveness, trust, and reciprocity as building blocks of cooperation and order.⁵³ Bogged down with Peninsular challenges and domestic political challenges, South Korea has stipulated its interpretation and preferences regarding the Indo-Pacific, particularly stressing inclusivity, trust, and reciprocity, including concerning China, referring to it as a “key partner for achieving prosperity and peace in the Indo-Pacific region.”⁵⁴

On a spectrum, South Korea’s interpretations of and preferences for order in the Indo-Pacific lie between Japan’s and India’s, with Australia slightly more distant. Arguably, and like Japan, geographic proximity to China is a shaping factor.

Finally, we arrive at Vietnam’s interpretations and preferences.

2.2.5 Vietnam

From the Socialist Republic of Vietnam’s point of view, the avoidance of falling prey again to big power foray or coercion, the sustenance of the Communist Party of Vietnam (CPV), and economic development and pragmatism are the three primary lenses through which they view order.⁵⁵ Sovereignty and defense rule the roost in particular. Vietnam has not yet officially embraced the Indo-Pacific concept, instead preferring “Asia-Pacific,” although some of the tenets of the concept, including the emphasis on rules and freedom of navigation, closely align with Vietnamese interpretations and preferences.⁵⁶ This speaks to one of Vietnam’s

most important foreign policy priorities: finding peace and stability in the South China Sea disputes with China and other claimants. As an official communist state located along one of the world’s primary arteries of trade and right in the middle of the world’s fastest-growing markets (China, India, ASEAN), the Vietnamese authorities pursue a unique blend of ideology and pragmatism.

Indeed, amidst strong economic ties with China, Vietnam has been diversifying its relations by seeking security and defense ties with Indo-Pacific partners like the EU, India,⁵⁷ Japan, and Russia.⁵⁸ According to the “2019 National Defence Strategy,” Vietnam is set to “closely attach national peace and interests to regional and global peace, security, and stability. In addition to the goals of firmly protecting independence, sovereignty, territorial unity and integrity, peace, and national interests, the CPV, the State, and the people, Vietnam actively and proactively participates in preserving peace and stability in the region and the world.”⁵⁹ Vietnam, a first-hand victim of interference and disorder when it was traumatized by big power contestation and interference (the Soviet Union, the U.S., and China)⁶⁰ in the second half of the twentieth century, astutely pursues sovereignty and non-alignment. ASEAN remains the primary vehicle through which it interprets and prefers order in the Indo-Pacific.

For Vietnam, the ASEAN Charter has set the norms of dialogue, consensus, and non-interference in each other’s affairs.⁶¹ Vietnam sees proactive and active international bilateral and multilateral integration as its goal and highly values initiatives by major powers to

promote dialogue, including the US Free and Open Indo-Pacific, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and its "shared future of mankind," and India's Act East Policy.⁶² These initiatives overlap with its historic "Four No's" principle, reiterated in its 2019 Defense White Paper. This policy comprises: 1) no military alliances, 2) no siding with one country against another, 3) no foreign military bases on Vietnamese territory, and 4) no use of force or threat to use force in international relations. The "Four No's" principle underscores Vietnam's commitment to sovereignty, neutrality, and peaceful coexistence in its international relations and, thus, its order preferences. For this reason, rather than joining and supporting the U.S.-led Free and Open Indo-Pacific in a full-fledged way, Vietnam has chosen to work selectively on some issues with the U.S. More specifically, while Vietnam proactively embraces the economic dimension of the Free and Open Indo-Pacific, it remains cautious about security.⁶³

Still, while generally adhering to its "Four No's" principle, Vietnam has scaled up its security interactions with countries like the U.S., India, and Japan. Indeed, Vietnam is known for its "bamboo diplomacy"—referencing the bamboo plant's strong roots, sturdy stems, and flexible branches—blurring the lines of strict neutrality with the two big powers, the U.S. and China. In the words of Foreign Minister Bui Thanh Son, Vietnam's foreign policy caters to "independence, self-reliance, peace, friendship and cooperation, and multilateralization and diversification of external relations and proactive international integration."⁶⁴

While Vietnam welcomes its relationship with the U.S., it is reticent to get too close, particularly in the defense realm. Views on the degree to which Vietnam sees China as a risk and disordering force vary. For instance, U.S. scholar David Shambaugh argues that the China-Vietnam relationship is much closer than many Americans understand. Undoubtedly, China's (partial) occupation and militarization of the South China Sea is an essential concern for Vietnam. Still, the South China Sea is a more significant issue in Washington than in the region.⁶⁵ Other scholars argue quite the opposite and state as evidence the closer security cooperation between Vietnam and Quad members.⁶⁶

In sum, the keywords for Vietnam's foreign policy and interpretations of and preferences for order in the Indo-Pacific are rules-based, yet simultaneously independence, self-reliance, diversification of partners, genuine multilateralism, economic development, and peace.

Table 1 (on page 25) provides an overview of the five powers' interpretations of and preferences for fostering order in the Indo-Pacific.

2.3 Conclusions

The shared understanding between the five powers in interpreting order in the Indo-Pacific and their preferences are primarily in their response to the following factors (also see Table 1):

- 1) China's reemergence and anxiousness over its territorial (Taiwan and maritime) ambitions;
- 2) unchecked Sino-U.S. contestation; and,
- 3) economic security interests.

Table 1. Five Powers’ Interpretations of and Preferences for Fostering Order in Indo-Pacific

ASPECT	AUSTRALIA	INDIA	JAPAN	SOUTH KOREA	VIETNAM
Interpretation of Order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules-based • Free and open Indo-Pacific • Multilateralism • Anchored by U.S. leadership and military alliances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Rules-based • Free and open order • Inclusive and multipolar • Power balancing without military alliances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • International order as the aegis • Free and open rules-based • Multilateralism • Co-existence and economic integration • Anchored by U.S. leadership and military alliances 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Free and open • Trust and dialogue • Focused on economic stability • Partial strategic alignment with the U.S. and allies 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multipolar with centrality of ASEAN and ASEAN values • Rules-based • Southeast Asia focused • Sovereignty-centric
Preference for order	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain U.S.-led regional security hegemony to counterbalance any Chinese violations of order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 'Asia-plus' multi-polar order with true multilateralism and emphasis on sovereignty and autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain U.S.-led regional security hegemony to counterbalance any Chinese violations of order 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A stable trade-oriented order that leans towards the US for security and balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional balance with strong ASEAN leadership and non-interference
Geographic focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indo-Pacific & Pacific Islands 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Indian Ocean/Asia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Broader Indo-Pacific/international 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Korean Peninsula 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Southeast Asia
Security alliance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heavy reliance on the U.S. (AUKUS, Quad) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Multi-aligned, strategic autonomy 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • U.S.-aligned, Hub-and-Spokes alliance, Quad 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • US-aligned, Hub-and-Spokes alliance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Non-aligned
Economic engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration combined with supply chain resilience, Pacific aid 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration, connectivity via Act East policy, IMEC, pragmatic but increasingly supply chain resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration combined with supply chain resilience, quality infrastructure, ODA leader 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Integration combined with increasing supply chain resilience 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pragmatic, pro-integration
China policy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy of denial/comparatively 'confrontational' 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative-competitive 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative-competitive, active balancing and deterring 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative, deterring and balancing without direct confrontation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cooperative but wary
Military focus	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • High, to sustain power balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairly high and growing, to sustain power balance 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Moderate 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Fairly high

While geographic focus ranges from the more international (Japan) to the near(er) (Vietnam), a free, open, and multipolar Indo-Pacific that includes the U.S. and facilitates economic integration, free maritime navigation, and multilateral approaches to order and (any) reform is essentially the interpretation of order of all five powers. Virtually all five powers

refer to the international order based on rules and/or international law. However, many do not highlight rules and institutions too articulately, but when they do, it tends to be in reference to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Similarly, while most of the five powers seek to improve the resilience of their supply chains and

diversify their import and export markets away from overdependence on China, they all continue further economic cooperation and trade with China.

Nevertheless, there are rather stark differences in their preferences for fostering order. What is striking is that hard security is a popular choice, particularly for Australia, the geographically most distant to China and a stout US ally since the Second World War, and Japan. Both Australia and Japan, and South Korea to a minor but growing degree, see the U.S. as a critical security balancer with whom they, as active agents, can help foster order as primarily status quo powers. They perceive the balance of power as *the* critical pillar that upholds order in the Indo-Pacific.

Time will tell the efficacy of this approach, as a) China considers the collective U.S.-led security in East Asia not part of the international order but as disordering and illegitimate, and b) liberal institutionalists argue that institutions, norms, and rules provide more durable solutions to order and stability by reducing the inherent mistrust and instability of power balancing.⁶⁷ Perhaps a two-pronged approach in which order is discussed and, where agreed upon, is reformed while sustaining a power balance is the best way to foster order. Ultimately, stability, cooperation, genuine

multilateralism, and abidance by international law must rule the roost.

Indeed, while Australia and Japan adopt proactive, security-heavy strategies in the Indo-Pacific, India, and Vietnam, while not marginalizing hard security, favor a more balanced approach that prioritizes dialogue, genuine multilateralism, and more cooperative than collective solutions to security. India, emphasizing its strategic autonomy, has a robust Indian Ocean focus while sustaining that any resident or non-resident actor positively contributing to Indo-Pacific security is welcome—effectively promoting an ‘Asia-plus.’ South Korea, meanwhile, bonded by a volatile Korean Peninsula, and Vietnam, still like India on the lower rungs of overall economic development, prioritizes economic engagement over overt security commitments and power balancing. These differences highlight how, inter alia, geographic distance, domestic priorities and capabilities, and historical relationships shape each power’s interpretations of and preferences for order in the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, all five powers see themselves as active agents that foster order.

With this clarified, the next chapter examines the five powers’ views of the EU’s role in contributing to order thus far and what it could do better.

Endnotes

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- 13 Panelists, virtual workshop held in May and June 2024. See also "2024 National Defence Strategy," n. 11.
- 14 "2020 Defence Strategic Update," Department of Defence, Australian Government, July 1, 2020, <https://www.defence.gov.au/about/publications/2020-defence-strategic-update>; "2017 Foreign Policy White Paper," Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Australian Government, November 23, 2017, <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/minisite/2017-foreign-policy-white-paper/fpwhitepaper/index.html>.
- 15 In contrast to security order, security architectures involve clearer sets of obligations, commitments, and possibly even privileges, arising from and governed by treaty-institutional foundations and implications. On a global level, NATO is a prime example of a security architecture. The SCO and the African Union's African Peace and Security Architecture (APSA) are limited but relevant examples in the Indo-Pacific region. See also Krishnamurthy and Ghiasy, n. 4, Annexure 1.
- 16 Panelist, virtual workshop held by the authors in May 2024. See also "2024 National Defence Strategy," n. 11.
- 17 See also Krishnamurthy and Ghiasy, n. 1.
- 18 See Hugh White, *The China Choice: Why we should share power* (Oxford: University Press, 2012); Amy King, "Power, shared ideas and order transition: China, the United States, and the creation of the Bretton Woods order," *European Journal of International Relations* 28, no. 4 (2022): 910–933; Nick Bisley, "Australia and the Evolving International Order," in Mark Beeson and Shahar Hameiri (eds.), *Navigating the New International Disorder: Australia in World Affairs 2011–2015*. (Cambridge University Press, Volume 12, May 2024), 55.
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CHAPTER 3

Five Powers' Views of the EU's Role

This chapter briefly discusses the EU's approaches to the Indo-Pacific. It then delves into the five powers' views on whether and how the EU fosters order in the Indo-Pacific and, building on the findings of Chapter 2, what it could do better before closing the chapter with conclusions

3.1 What Is and What Could Be

The EU approaches the Indo-Pacific region through three primary policy objectives:

- 1) economic,
- 2) diplomatic, and
- 3) defense/security.

Economically, the importance of the Indo-Pacific for the EU is due to the EU's heavy dependence on this region and one that will only grow as the Indo-Pacific markets are far from reaching their potential. Over one-third of all European exports to the Indo-Pacific region transit through Indo-Pacific sea routes.¹ The EU actively promotes economic interests by signing new trade and investment agreements and diversifying supply chains in the world's largest and fastest-growing combined market. Examples include the EU-Japan Economic Partnership Agreement, effective in 2019, which has bolstered trade by reducing tariffs and facilitating market access; the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (FTA), operational since 2020, which eliminated the majority of tariffs, promoting increased trade flows; and the EU-

Singapore FTA, in force since 2019, which enhanced trade in goods and services between the two economies. Meanwhile, FTAs with both India and Indonesia are in the making. Building on the 2018 "Connecting Europe and Asia" strategy, the EU connects and promotes an alternative approach to China's BRI, enhancing transparency, sustainability, and local ownership.

Regarding diplomacy, the EU aims for a stable Indo-Pacific region based on democracy, rule of law, human rights, and international law.² The EU reaches out by employing bilateral diplomacy and promoting effective rules-based multilateralism to address various challenges from climate change, biodiversity, ocean governance, water reduction, and natural disaster risk reduction. In the defense and security realm, the growing non-traditional security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region are issues that the EU is interested in approaching, predominantly maritime security, with priority given to ensuring free and open maritime communication routes and fully complying with international law. There is also concern about unchecked Sino-U.S. contestation and

Chinese claims over the South China Sea, but the EU can barely project hard power as far as the Indo-Pacific. With this backdrop, and building on Chapter 2, this chapter expands on how the five powers view these primary objectives and the EU and its member-states' formation and implementation of their Indo-Pacific policies and strategies concerning order.

As this chapter will reveal, official documents and speeches of key leaders from the five powers are generally optimistic about the EU's cooperation with them (i.e., bilaterally) in the Indo-Pacific. This, however, should be read with caution as diplomatic language tends to be courteous and does not tell much about EU policy implementation or more nuanced views.

3.1.1 Australia

Australia supports the EU's Indo-Pacific engagement and efforts to maintain order therein.³ Comments from Australia's officials and leading intellectuals similarly express that the EU and Australia have shared interest and desire for a peaceful, stable, prosperous world that respects sovereignty.⁴

While Australia is rhetorically open to working with the EU to foster order in the Indo-Pacific, Australian observers have strikingly different views on whether Australia believes in the EU's capacity to play a significant role in the Indo-Pacific.⁵ For one thing, Canberra's focus on order-building and maintenance in the Indo-Pacific, as explained in Chapter 2, hinges on its hard security cooperation with the U.S.⁶ Australia's recent foreign policy document, the 2023 Defense Strategic Review, notes that Australia's alliance with the U.S. is becoming even more imperative and vital.⁷ This will

include working more closely with the U.S., India, and Japan in the Quad that advocates for a free and open Indo-Pacific. In addition, under the AUKUS partnership with the U.S. and the UK, Australia will acquire nuclear-powered submarines (SSNs) and participate in the joint development of a new class of SSNs, the SSN-AUKUS. AUKUS Pillar Two focuses on advancing broader defense capabilities, including cyber security, AI, and quantum technologies, further bolstering the strategic technological edge of the three nations.⁸ The EU has a limited role in this context.

As an Australian panelist in a project workshop elaborated, when we think about ways to build and foster order, there are fundamentally three different ways. The first is that actors can leverage their material dominance to impose or enforce (new) rules, much like how the European powers displaced the Chinese order in the mid-1800s. The second is that an actor can institutionalize (new) rules by forming a preponderant coalition and then punish members of that coalition that violate those rules, such as the EU in post-war Europe. We have seen the EU leveraging its rule-making and rule-enforcing capabilities, a so-called disciplining with prospective or incumbent EU member-states. The third way is that an actor cultivates informal rules by outlining inviolable guidelines, similar to ASEAN's approach.

Some voices within Australia indicate that the EU cannot perform any order-making or sustaining capabilities within the Indo-Pacific.⁹ The EU does not have its own military or meaningful military project power and has struggled to collectively address national security issues on its doorstep, such as instability in the Balkans

in the 1990s, the annexation of Crimea in 2014, and the ongoing conflict in eastern Ukraine more recently. The EU's economic power and long-term economic growth prospects fall short of those of the U.S. and China. The EU members, if they are willing to provide all their military capabilities, still could not match the U.S. or China's air or naval power. So, the EU needs more material power to impose order on the Indo-Pacific.¹⁰

Neither can the EU form a preponderant coalition to create an order with the Indo-Pacific or discipline.¹¹ Washington and Beijing are incentivized not to join an EU-led effort that would constrain their interests. Other powers such as Japan, South Korea, the Philippines, and Russia have their security strategies tied (though not necessarily fully aligned) to one of the two Indo-Pacific superpowers: the U.S. and China. While the EU does have a strategic partnership with ASEAN, ASEAN states have limited material resources themselves, and they are generally hedging between the U.S. and China, with seven out of the ten ASEAN states having strategic partnerships or alliances with both the U.S. and China. Neither can ASEAN countries force the EU or Australia to choose between the U.S. and China. In short, Australia is cognizant of the limitations of the EU's order-fostering capabilities in the Indo-Pacific.

Indeed, as a normative power, the EU is trying to socialize its preferred order by bringing in the majority of the countries, including the powerful ones, into collective efforts to advocate norms of common concerns beyond national interests, such as climate change. Nonetheless, due to the intensity of the ongoing

Sino-American competition, it has reached the point where the EU will only get buy-in from the U.S. and China on "lower" political issues like climate change. While there is positive language and amenability for cooperation, there are practical limitations—from Australia's perspective, little can be expected of the EU to help foster order in the Indo-Pacific, especially with its attention fixated on Ukraine.¹² Thus, when Canberra thinks about order-building, it focuses on cooperation and alliance with the U.S. Also indicative of perceptions of the role of the EU and its member-states is the Lowy Institute Poll 2024,¹³ where Australian respondents were asked about their view of a new security partnership beyond the U.S. and the UK. France was fourth from the top, behind India, Japan and Indonesia.

Still, avenues of cooperation exist across building regional capacity for maritime security, combating piracy, and promoting freedom of navigation. Another critical collaboration area is crisis management; the European Union-Australia Framework Partnership Agreement (FPA) intends to identify areas of greater security cooperation.¹⁴ Finally, with advanced cyber capabilities, the EU and Australia can partner to build regional cyber resilience and counter cyber threats while combating disinformation, which is also crucial.¹⁵

3.1.2 India

The push for a multi-polar Indo-Pacific, or an Asia-plus, binds the EU and India. The seven pillars of the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy (i.e., sustainable and inclusive prosperity, green transition, ocean governance, digital governance and partnership, connectivity, security and defense, and human security) are pretty similar to

how India envisions the Indo-Pacific region. Of these seven pillars, and as we saw in Chapter 2, security and defense cooperation are particularly interesting to India in its views on how the EU can best contribute to the Indo-Pacific order. Essentially, it mainly revolves around two pillars: security and defense by strengthening India's military capacity, and pillar ocean governance and security and defense, which fall together in maritime security.¹⁶

Within the EU, India has excellent working relations with France, which complements India's relationship with the EU. India's thriving relationship with France remains the epicenter of India's expanding convergence with Europe. More specifically, there are two documents worth noting. One is the Horizon 2047 roadmap, signed during Modi's visit to France on Bastille Day in 2023.¹⁷ The document outlines a comprehensive vision for the India-France relationship for the next twenty-five years. However, a more important document is the Defense Industrial Roadmap signed in 2024.¹⁸ This document, classified, holds the key to taking the defense industry cooperation with India and transitioning to a co-design, co-development, and co-production of defense equipment.

This is an essential equation to underscore because this relational equation is what India has only had with Russia so far. India's diversification of weapons away from Russia has been underway for a while and has been significantly accelerated after the 2022 war in Ukraine. European partners are critical to this diversification and indigenization. It is not just France, Germany, and Spain that have emerged as the two crucial contenders for India's

largest-ever strategic partnership in defense cooperation for the conventional submarines program.¹⁹ Sweden's SAAB also made history by becoming the first foreign company to get 100 percent foreign direct investment in the defense sector for the Carl-Gustaf weapon system.²⁰ The U.S. has already emerged as one of India's critical defense and strategic partners. These significant developments give India more leverage for a more independent stance in fostering order in the Indo-Pacific.

The significant transformation the EU has undergone after the 2022 war in Ukraine is not always well understood or analyzed in India.²¹ Regarding security and from India's perspective, two broad areas of convergence open up opportunities. One pertains to the cooperation of the defense industry, where the EU's defense industrial and technological base is revamped with unprecedented measures and policies. The EU and India can cooperate sincerely on the verticals of defense industry cooperation because India is also looking to ramp up its defense exports. The question, however, is that, unlike independent players such as France, Spain, Germany, and Sweden, with whom India already has a high degree of defense cooperation, when it comes to the EU, the space is restricted because of a lack of clarity on international partnerships within the EU Defense Industry Strategy (EUDIS).

The EUDIS that deals with forging international partnerships remains a work in progress. The advice is that the EU should refrain from taking the so-called Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO) route: The EU initiative whereby 26 of its 27 members (bar Malta) pursue structural defense integration, and its

international partnerships are forged through different legal and administrative agreements. This modus operandi is suitable only for Europe's other transatlantic allies, such as the U.S. and Canada. PESCO-like cooperation cannot be replicated with the EUDIS, especially if the latter aspires to engage countries from the Indo-Pacific, such as India. It would be tough for countries outside the transatlantic theater to adhere to administrative and legal agreements to enter defense partnerships, which could hinder potential cooperation between the EU and India. India would never be on board regarding legal or administrative agreements in security partnerships. This caveat must be fixed if the realm of defense industry cooperation must materialize.

The second pillar with greater convergence between the EU and India to foster order is the maritime security domain, which is of direct interest to the Indo-Pacific region.²² Among all the different definitions of what constitutes the Indo-Pacific and Indo-Pacific order, India and the EU's understanding of the Indo-Pacific overlap almost perfectly. This is a point that is often missed. The same, for example, cannot be said for the U.S., whose Indo-Pacific Command, the Indo-PACOM, stops at the Western Indian Ocean, or that of Australia, which is also much smaller.

However, the EU and India have specific semantic differences regarding some operational issues. For example, they define Illegal, Unreported, and Unregulated (IUU)-fishing or the dos and don'ts of peacetime differently. Nevertheless, these are not roadblocks. A multipolar Indo-Pacific and almost an exact overlap of the domain itself are a good policy

match, and that is where the strength lies. This policy match is the basis of how the two sides can push for regional multipolarity by cooperating more on a defensive posture in the Indo-Pacific. This has been evidenced in the security and defense consultations and the maritime security dialogues that occurred in the last five years, and these meetings have been accelerated after the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022.

In addition, India has been on board with EU Naval Force Operations (EUNAVFOR) such as Operation Atalanta. It has also done joint exercises in the Gulf of Aden. Such participation contrasts U.S.-led Operation Prosperity Guardian, a hard-security operation. India would be very wary of joining challenging security operations. India has joined the U.S.-led Combined Maritime Force (CMF) on a specific occasion, which was to do with drugs, but that is where India stopped. It has never really gone beyond that.

In comparison, India's cooperation with the EU is quite vast. India's cooperation with EU tools, such as the Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP), talks of voluntary but permanent deployments in the Indo-Pacific. Because CMP is committed to a defensive posture and upholding multipolarity, these two tools are essential from an Indian perspective because they show an independent posture of the EU, different from the U.S. Moreover, it also opens crucial space for India to deepen its engagement with the EU. The EU has emerged as a credible maritime security provider through EUNAVFOR Missions and tools such as the CMP. The EU-India maritime security cooperation has tremendous potential because

a significant convergence exists between the two sides' policy documents on the Indo-Pacific and their cooperation on maritime domain awareness.

Lastly, on a more technical level, the two sides have addressed the need to cooperate more on maritime domain awareness. That remains the bedrock for bolstering a defensive posture in the Indo-Pacific. The EU's CRIMARIO 2 ended in 2024. It is suggested that the EU should launch a "third mandate," building on the successful completion of the previous two mandates of CRIMARIO-1 and CRIMARIO-2, with more focus on other areas of the Indo-Pacific and not just on its traditional focus area in the Western Indian Ocean.

3.1.3 Japan

Japan welcomes the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy, and Tokyo recognizes it as a fundamental shift of the EU's basic policy in the Indo-Pacific.²³ Japan's views are based on the fact that until recently, the EU and European countries had always welcomed China's rapid rise as the most significant trade and investment partner in Asia without considering risks. Japan is pleased to see that the EU has a) come to realize China as a systemic rival, particularly viewing the crackdown of the civil movement in Hong Kong and neutralization of "One Country, Two Systems" and also Beijing's enhancing partnership with Russia without limits, and b) refrained from condemning the Russian invasion of Ukraine by not halting the export of potential dual-use technologies and importing a growing amount of import of crude oil and gas. As Europe is an essential ally of the U.S., Japan believes that strategic coordination between Europe, Japan, and the other Asian allies is

becoming critically important to foster order.²⁴

Japan recognizes Europe, as per its FOIO vision, as its indispensable partner for peace and security in the Indo-Pacific. For example, late Prime Minister Abe said, "A Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency,"²⁵ and former Prime Minister Kishida said, "Today's Ukraine may be tomorrow's Far East."²⁶ Japan understands that a Ukraine war is not only a war in Europe but also a war in the Indo-Pacific,²⁷ in that China is carefully monitoring the reactions of the U.S. and its allies and is preparing for a possible invasion of Taiwan. As long as China and Russia are building up a partnership without limits and Russia is also enhancing a partnership with North Korea, which is a *de facto* nuclear power, once a Taiwan Contingency breaks out, Russia and North Korea will undoubtedly take action not only in the Indo-Pacific but also in Europe.

In June 2024, Putin visited North Korea for the first time in twenty-four years, and the two countries signed a comprehensive military partnership agreement.²⁸ In late 2024, reports surfaced that North Korea had begun sending thousands of troops to Russia for possible deployment in Ukraine.²⁹ This follows North Korea's provision of artillery and other munitions to bolster Russia's war efforts. By contributing to Russia's warfighting capabilities in increasingly direct ways, North Korea strategically reinforces the Sino-Russian alignment in its opposition to Western influence and goal of disrupting the U.S.-led international order.

To foster order, for that matter, Japan argues that "A Taiwan Contingency is a Europe Contingency,"³⁰ and that Europe, Japan, and

the other allies in the Indo-Pacific should work together to deter China from resorting to military actions on Taiwan by enhancing mutual and coordinated deterrence capabilities in military, economy, and diplomacy.

Japan is perhaps more optimistic than Australia in terms of the EU's power projection abilities and ability to contribute to order in the Indo-Pacific. For example, Germany may navigate its fleet to the Taiwan Strait.³¹ Such joint operations between Europe, Japan, and the other allies can deter China-Russia-North Korea from further assertive moves in the Indo-Pacific and Europe by pursuing a favorable balance of power. Overall, Japan believes it is critically important to develop strategic coordination between Europe, Japan, and the other allies in the Indo-Pacific because China, Russia, and North Korea are developing strategic partnerships. Japan also believes that it is imperative to establish a network of "Spokes" with the U.S. as the Hub to maintain its security commitment in the Indo-Pacific and Europe.³²

3.1.4 South Korea

As we saw in Chapter 2, the discussion within South Korea is the degree to which South Korea should subscribe to the U.S. Indo-Pacific strategy. The current government (though unstable and in political crisis) has formulated its Indo-Pacific strategy, interestingly drafted by the North American Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of South Korea; the Indo-Pacific strategy of South Korea is also an answer to the American Indo-Pacific strategy.³³ Against this backdrop, South Korea has little room to discuss the European Indo-Pacific policy and coordination with the EU. The focus in South Korea is on coordination with

the U.S., and, mainly on Peninsular challenges, to which the EU contributes little.³⁴

However, if one compares the EU Indo-Pacific strategy with the South Korean one, there are striking similarities. One can also find similarities with, for instance, the German, French, and Dutch Indo-Pacific strategies. Given the similarities, there should be room for cooperation. For instance, these documents believe they should increase cooperation with like-minded partners as they have shared values. Another similarity between the European and South Korean understanding of the Indo-Pacific is that they include the Eastern coast of Africa and the Americas. This differs from the U.S. understanding that focuses heavily on areas where there is competition with China, particularly Southeast Asia and South Asia. Europeans and South Koreans still need to understand Southeast and South Asia's geopolitical importance as the epicenters of Indo-Pacific politics. One can expect more joint naval exercises between South Korea, specific EU member-states, and other like-minded countries, port calls by European navies to South Korea, and capacity-building activities among them in Southeast and South Asia.³⁵ South Koreans are somewhat dissatisfied with their implementation of the Indo-Pacific strategy and wonder how much the Europeans have implemented their Indo-Pacific strategy.³⁶ In addition to maritime cooperation, the EU is trying to engage with Indo-Pacific actors in cyber and economic security. These two areas are of particular interest to South Korea and should be further expanded so that there are concrete areas for cooperation between the two sides to foster order.³⁷

As for cybersecurity, South Korea emphasizes

cybersecurity as an area in which to work with like-minded partners.³⁸ South Korea's security partnerships with the EU and member-states like Poland have gained steam. Korea and the Netherlands have already decided to step up their technology cooperation, including in AI and semiconductors, during Yoon's (who is facing impeachment and has an arrest warrant against him) visit to the country.³⁹ With Poland, there are reports of increased financial cooperation on the back of already grown arms sales, besides expanding on nuclear energy cooperation and supporting Ukraine's post-war reconstruction projects. Notably, the EU and South Korea signed their Digital Partnership in 2022, as Seoul strongly emphasizes cybersecurity.⁴⁰ That same year, South Korea became the first Asian country to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)'s Cooperative Cyber Defense Centre of Excellence (CCDCOE) based in Estonia.⁴¹ In the same year, it opened its diplomatic mission with NATO.

Yoon's government's Indo-Pacific strategy had attached great importance to NATO Asia-Pacific Partners, IP4, which refers to Australia, New Zealand, Japan, and South Korea.⁴² As NATO strengthens its interactions with the EU and its member-states, South Korea and the EU can cooperate further in the Indo-Pacific arena through NATO platforms. For instance, information and intelligence sharing, capacity building, and joint exercises can all be concrete areas for advancing cooperative relationships.

Regarding economic security, both sides have shared views on the importance of supply chain resilience and joint science and technology projects. South Korean companies are advanced

in semiconductors, electric batteries, AI, robotics, 6G, and space rockets. There should be more cooperation between South Korean and European partners in the private and public sectors. For example, European firms can invest in South Korea, and Horizon Europe can sponsor joint science and technology projects.⁴³

Lastly, there is a rising trend of state or official visits from Europe to South Korea and other Indo-Pacific countries. However, sometimes Europeans must remember that they may use the Indo-Pacific framework to engage with Indo-Pacific countries. For example, when German Vice Chancellor Robert Habeck visited South Korea in June 2024, he did not express that his visit was part of any of Germany's Indo-Pacific engagements. There was no reference to the Indo-Pacific strategy. "Sometimes Europeans even forget that they have drafted those strategies while this Indo-Pacific can be used as a framework for them to engage with Indo-Pacific partners."⁴⁴

Does South Korea see the EU as a force that can help foster order in the Indo-Pacific? The answer may lie in South Korea's inability to go beyond the North Korean threat amid persistent domestic squabbles, recent political crises, and scandals to foster order beyond the Peninsula. Of course, Europe's engagement with the Indo-Pacific has changed in the last few years, with economic, technological, and maritime security emerging as critical concerns via its new policies and strategies amid a growing acknowledgment of China's ambitions. Therefore, South Korea's perception of the EU within the Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape is set to evolve, especially if the former's outreach continues with partner

states such as Poland and the Netherlands.⁴⁵

3.1.5 Vietnam

As elaborated on in Chapter 2, like India, Vietnam seeks to diversify relations with different countries to navigate geopolitical tensions and generally welcomes a multipolar Indo-Pacific order. Hence, Vietnam believes the EU's new approach to the Indo-Pacific is a promising first step.⁴⁶ However, Hanoi has tactfully avoided using "Indo-Pacific" in official documents, instead preferring "Asia-Pacific."⁴⁷ The EU's approach to the Indo-Pacific region is relatively comprehensive, while the U.S.-led FOIP focuses on containing the rise of China. Notably, the U.S. was barely mentioned in the EU statement as the EU has more narratively defined its Indo-Pacific partners, namely South Korea, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, India, and ASEAN. Vietnam views the EU's attempt to craft its Indo-Pacific independence from U.S. interests positively.⁴⁸ In many speeches, Vietnamese leaders mention that Vietnam always welcomes initiatives that promote regional cooperation and stability based on the foundation of international law.⁴⁹

The Singapore-based ISEAS-Yusof Ishak Institute publishes yearly surveys about Southeast Asia. In the 2020 survey, when respondents were asked about the case of an American absence in regional security, Japan was the top choice of most Southeast Asian respondents. However, in Vietnam, 23.3 percent of Vietnamese respondents still think that the EU could be turned to in the case of an American absence in regional security.⁵⁰ In the 2021 survey, 21.1 percent of Vietnamese respondents believed that the Indo-Pacific strategy promotes a stable, multipolar order

and effective multilateralism. The EU and Japan remain the clear front-runners for Vietnam in this strategic hedging game.

The EU's trust rating has received a substantial boost in the region. The number of respondents having confidence in the EU to "do the right thing" has increased remarkably.⁵¹ In the 2022 and 2023 surveys,⁵² the highest levels of trust towards the EU are found in Vietnam (54.9 percent). The biggest reason for Vietnamese respondents to trust the EU is that they see the EU as "a responsible stakeholder that respects and champions international law." In the cohort of EU skeptics, more than one-third (38.7 percent) are concerned that the EU is distracted with its internal affairs and thus cannot focus on global concerns and issues. This concern is most pronounced in Vietnam (65.9 percent).

The second most significant reason for skepticism towards the EU is the concern that "the EU does not have the capacity or political will for global leadership" (25.9 percent).⁵³ In sum, Vietnam's understanding of EU strategies to foster order in the Indo-Pacific is generally positive and supportive, with that caveat of actual EU capacity. Vietnam sees the EU as a critical partner in promoting a rule-based international order, enhancing maritime security, fostering economic development, and engaging in strategic and diplomatic initiatives.

The alignment of interests in maintaining regional stability and prosperity forms the basis of a strong and mutually beneficial relationship between Vietnam and the EU. Promoting relations with the EU in general and EU member-countries in particular continues

to be one of Vietnam's important foreign strategic directions in the coming time.

In practical terms, Vietnam and the EU already have a Framework Participation Agreement. Vietnam is also part of the EU's Enhancing Security in and with Asia (ESIWA) project, covering maritime security, crisis management, and cyber security. This also aligns with the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy, where Vietnam is considered a "solid" partner.⁵⁴ Notably, both the EU and Vietnam face economic coercion from China. As China is now Vietnam's largest trading partner, sudden trade restrictions hindering Vietnamese exports to China would dramatically hurt the Vietnamese economy.

In this vein, Hanoi welcomed the EU-Vietnam Free Trade Agreement (EVFTA), hoping it would give Vietnam opportunities to diversify its trading partners and thus mitigate the risks of economic coercion from China.⁵⁵ Conversely, the EU and its member-states are also trying to increase economic resilience by diversifying trading partners as they wrestle with economic overdependence on China. So, strategically, Brussels presents an excellent opportunity for Hanoi and vice versa. However, challenges remain. For example, all the EU member-states are still to ratify the Investment Protection Agreement signed along with the EVFTA. Even though this is a usual time-consuming procedure, the imperative to reap benefits as soon as possible has taken a setback amid a challenging geopolitical landscape.⁵⁶

Vietnam and the EU are particularly concerned about traditional economic development, sustainable development, and green transition.

For instance, under the EU's Global Gateway framework, the EU and Vietnam have signed the Just Energy Transition Partnership (JETP), which looks to provide a multi-project credit facility worth €500 million. This is supposed to be the EU's primary focus on Vietnam now. However, Hanoi's cautious approach in progressing for fear of falling into any potential debt trap could stymie the smooth cooperation. Projects involving vast sums of money, such as the JETP, are also practically challenging to push now as officials are afraid to be the targets of the Communist Party of Vietnam's anti-corruption campaigns.⁵⁷

3.2 Conclusions

The five powers' views on the EU's role in the Indo-Pacific and how the EU could help foster order in the region vary distinctly. These hover over a nexus of realism, disillusion, and optimism over what the EU has achieved, may have achieved, and prospects of what the EU could contribute. By and large, the scales tend to tip in a positive direction.

There is relief that the EU is taking the Indo-Pacific seriously and that an increasing number of EU member-states are developing respective strategies, position papers, and white papers. Yet, there is cognizance that the EU has a limited ability to project military power in the Indo-Pacific and is preoccupied with Ukraine. The Indo-Pacific is well aware that relations between the EU and Russia will remain sour and tense in the foreseeable future and that the vast majority of expenses in security and defense will remain grounded in Europe. Perhaps it is a blessing in disguise that the EU has limited military power projection abilities in the Indo-Pacific: it improves local receptiveness to a

more significant EU role and it forces the EU to pursue less militaristic solutions.

Still, the respective Australian, Japanese, and South Korean aspirations for greater coordination with the EU lie in the hope that it can move closer to the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific alliances, informally or formally, or through indirect support, including security cooperation and the economy. India and Vietnam place a much stronger emphasis on diversifying external relations and on an even more plural multipolar Indo-Pacific where firm security reliance through collective security on the U.S. is discouraged. Hence, India and Vietnam consider more directly linking up with EU policies across a wide range of avenues where American involvement is not per se necessary.

Considering the EU's limited ability to project

military power in the West Pacific, more realistic interests appear in maritime, economic, and cyber security. The EU and the five powers have different levels of dialogue and cooperation in maritime, economic, and cyber security.⁵⁸ Granted, common interests do not necessarily transfer directly to become common actions.

To improve, the EU can work with the five powers to expand information sharing, encourage public-private collaboration, and ultimately develop joint approaches to these three domains. In the maritime domain, in particular, many of the concerns and preferences for order fostering converge among the five powers.

The exact way in which the EU may want to proceed is discussed in the next and final chapter.

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CHAPTER 4

How Should the EU Proceed?

4.1 Key Learnings

Taking into account the conclusions derived from Chapters 1, 2, and 3, this chapter deliberates on the potential lessons that the EU can draw from the churning in Indo-Pacific geopolitics, lessons learned from the five powers on order fostering in the Indo-Pacific and ways to proceed—bilaterally or multilaterally with the five powers.

While geographic focus ranges from the more international, Japan, to the near(er), Vietnam and South Korea, a free, open Indo-Pacific that facilitates economic integration, free maritime navigation, and that includes multilateral approaches to order and (any) reform is essentially the interpretation of the order of all five powers. While China's ambitions in the South and East China seas and regarding Taiwan play a central role, unchecked Sino-U.S. contestation is another shared concern. Nevertheless, there are rather stark differences in the five powers' preferences for fostering order. What is striking is that hard security is a popular choice, particularly for Australia, the geographically most distant to China and a stout U.S. ally since the Second World War, and Japan. Australia and Japan, and South Korea to a minor but growing degree, see the U.S. as a critical security balancer with whom they, as active agents, can help foster order as primarily status quo powers. They generally equate deterrence and the balance of power vis-à-vis China as the most effective means of fostering order in the Indo-Pacific.

Time will tell the efficacy of this approach, but it

is the preferred modus operandi of some of the area's most notable middle and major powers. There is little evidence that they will change their stance anytime soon. India and Vietnam take a less military confrontational approach and advocate dialogue, inclusivity, non-/ (and) multi-alignment, and cooperative rather than collective security approaches. They do not see power balancing as *the* remedy for order fostering. On paper, these approaches may be the most sustainable order-fostering as for instance also liberal institutionalists argue that institutions, norms, and rules provide more durable solutions to order and stability by reducing the inherent mistrust and instability of power-balancing.¹ The EU could support the power balancing *and* true multilateralism cooperative security approaches. While this may sound contradictory, both approaches have their merit and rationale, and the two-pronged approach may be the most effective in the short and long term to help foster order in the Indo-Pacific and with international law as the point of departure. With the U.S.-allied power balancers, the EU can help through indirect means, considering its very limited military power projection capabilities in the Indo-Pacific.

First, however, the EU must expand its understanding of the evolution within these Indo-Pacific powers' respective diplomatic, political, and economic landscapes and the rationale of their approaches. This will help increase awareness not only about the strategic relevance in the EU to help guide policymaking in specific avenues, from climate action to

emerging and critical technologies, but also broaden public awareness and attention, be it the mainstream media, academic and strategic circles, or private sector. But cooperation does not need to be restricted to these five powers as many other states in the vast Indo-Pacific desire to foster order, though not necessarily complying with the democratic values requirement.

With this in mind, and acknowledging that efforts small and large, direct and indirect, may all have trickle-down effects, what concrete multilateral and bilateral cooperation avenues exist to help foster order?

4.2 Multilateral Cooperation Avenues

Multilateral cooperation avenues can be combined with these powers but need not be restricted to them. Ideally, genuine multilateralism is pursued with all states interested in fostering order. Considering the five powers' largely converging interpretations of order, but rather stark divergences in preferences on how to best foster order, cooperation can be on security and economic cooperation, as well as dialogue fostering and non-traditional security.

- Each of these five powers has the potential to act as a bridge between the EU and the Indo-Pacific. The EU needs a multi-pronged approach that focuses on fostering a peaceful, stable, truly cooperative, and prosperous Indo-Pacific.
- The EU must look into developing effective measures through already existing

multilateral mechanisms such as the ASEAN network (the EU as a dialogue partner and founding member of the ASEAN Regional Forum) to defend the law-based international order. This is a feasible option as all the five powers converge on the importance of nurturing a law-based regional and, in turn, international order.

- Four shared areas of cooperation include economic security, technology, maritime security, and climate change. While climate change and technology cooperation may not directly be considered as fostering order, both are an order disruptor and a catalyst for international cooperation. In all four areas, international law-abidance and making, regulations, reforms, and innovation are critical. Besides the objectives of the greater common good, this is important because all five powers, including the EU, are ultimately looking for greater strategic autonomy, interlinked with economic growth and success.
- Nonetheless, the ties must go beyond trade and investment into the strategic arena, particularly with ASEAN, where the two blocs are heavily dependent on trade for their relationship. The EU is seen as a preferred, trusted “third party” by the region amid the increasingly tense U.S.-China bipolarity.
- Certainly, the EU must not only unite to address the China strategic challenge—only ten EU members have released Indo-Pacific strategies/notes, and even they have differences over China—but also work with the five middle powers and other actors to help overcome challenges due to the lack of integration in the Indo-Pacific. Each of

these powers represents a vital maritime region: South Asia, East Asia, Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and the Southwest Pacific, which should facilitate an excellent dialogue starter.

4.3 Bilateral Cooperation Avenues

These bilateral cooperation avenues are catered in line with these powers' respective interpretations of and preferences for order fostering in the Indo-Pacific.

4.3.1 Australia

- Australia intends to pursue a realistic, modified status quo in the region, which seeks to bring back power balance, particularly in the Pacific, Indian Ocean, and South China Sea maritime regions. This allows the EU to strengthen its values-based outlook on the region while countering China through infrastructure and other developmental outreach, including third-country cooperation.
- In this context, they must reform the multilateral trading system and bolster maritime security (e.g., via capacity building and maritime domain awareness programs). The EU's new and updated maritime strategy should look into aligning with Australia on expanding or launching a "third mandate" (following the approaching conclusion of CRIMARIO-2) that focuses on other areas of the Indo-Pacific beyond the Western Indian Ocean region.
- Australia and the EU must explore cooperation on developmental aspects in

the Global South, particularly engagement with the Pacific Island states, considering Australia's focus on the Pacific. This will also be important for keeping China in 'check' in the Pacific, as China is a major regional investor.

- Accelerating efforts on climate action is one of the most vital ways to become relevant. The EU already invests in sustainable infrastructure and hydropower generation via its Green-Blue alliance. Bringing Australia as a relevant partner in the scheme would bolster climate resilience in one of the most vulnerable regions.
- Critical and emerging technologies are another area where Australia and the EU, both with advanced technological capabilities, should expand cooperation. These could include norm-setting for building an undersea cable architecture and ensuring better cybersecurity against malicious cyber activities, particularly to combat disinformation.

4.3.2 India

India sees the EU as a balancing partner in the Indo-Pacific, while India has become economically and technologically important to the EU. Moreover, their complementarities include an acceptance of multipolarity in the Indo-Pacific. As a result, both have seen a significant rise in strategic ties. However, the crucial lacunae in reaching common objectives must be mitigated nuancedly. For example, the question of "respecting mutual sensitivities," particularly in the free trade agreement talks, should be addressed sooner rather than later.

- The EU must focus on the commonalities,

e.g., multipolarity and strategic autonomy goals, and the bigger picture, e.g., trade resilience and reinvigorating multilateralism.

- On China, both are pursuing a non-confrontational cooperation approach, which allows for greater collaboration opportunities. Notably, they must unite to create supply chain resilience, including in technology and critical minerals.
- As India looks to strengthen its defense and security sector, the EU should also create business opportunities to enhance India's military capacity. The EU should also look into strengthening their maritime security cooperation, with India and the EU contributing in their areas of strength in the Indian Ocean region. They should also look into expanding this burgeoning common area of interest into other sub-regions of the Indo-Pacific.
- At the same time, the EU and India need to work on the specific semantic differences on operational issues in the maritime security domain, where convergence exists. Also, they should work with the other Indo-Pacific powers to create the aforementioned "third mandate" for the CRIMARIO project.
- The EU must consider India's long-standing defense relationship with EU member, France, and strong defense collaborations with Germany, Spain, and Sweden. The EU should facilitate such engagements for India's diversification plans to unroll, which will help ease the burden of complexities concerning India's defense ties with Russia. That the European states are technologically

advanced surely helps this scenario.

- The EU should refrain from taking the so-called Permanent Structure Cooperation (PESCO) route regarding the European Defense Industrial Strategy. If the EU expects India to enter into a strategic security partnership, it will perhaps need to look into adjusting its legal and administrative constraints, modifying them to suit India's specifications.

4.3.3 Japan

Japan's aims of pursuing FOIO would get a boost, if not contingent on the EU's plans, with the EU lending its geopolitical weight in the Indo-Pacific strategic affairs. With the EU sharpening its outlook on China as a systemic challenge, the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy aligns a little more with Japan's vision. Yet, the EU needs to step up on its commitment to deepening bilateral ties on the strategic level, including an enhanced security partnership with Japan. In particular, their advanced capabilities in technology and innovation should help achieve enhanced convergence.

- The EU should also work with Japan to frame technological norms for emerging and critical technologies. Like with Australia, the governance of new technologies, building an undersea cable security architecture, and combatting hybrid threats should become a new priority.
- Another critical area is nuclear non-proliferation and strengthening the law-based international order, where more must be done. In the area of nuclear non-proliferation in particular, the EU (and its ultimate goal of the "total elimination" of

nuclear weapons) and Japan (that seeks to realize a world “free of nuclear weapons”) have both firmly, time and again, reaffirmed their commitment. It is time to engage more with the Asian partners.

- The EU must also look into solidifying cooperation on the North Korean and Taiwan issues with Japan. The prevention of war, limited war, or any escalation in East Asia should become a priority for the EU if it wants to be taken seriously as a global security provider and help foster order in the Indo-Pacific.

4.3.4 South Korea

- The EU should make efforts to realize South Korea’s goal of becoming a more reliable partner for Europe. Not only is South Korea a technologically advanced economic power in the region, but it is also a vital stakeholder in pursuing peace and nuclear non-proliferation in East Asia.
- Notwithstanding the debate surrounding South Korea’s inability to realize its Indo-Pacific strategy objectives fully, the EU must enhance its strategic outreach to South Korea.
- Besides trade, vital avenues include climate change, new technologies (particularly in semiconductors), digitalization, renewable energy, and developmental cooperation in third countries. South Korea’s experience in its transformation into a developed economy would be significant for the EU’s outreach to the Global South. Perhaps, even in association with India, a leader for Global South.

- South Korea’s contributions and commitment to NATO, including for Ukraine and its arms sales to Poland, highlight the former’s intent to increase defense and security cooperation with the EU and its members.

- The EU should make concerted efforts to improve its perception as a significant and legitimate Indo-Pacific stakeholder that is there to help foster order. In this context, the EU should also engage more on the North Korean issue, particularly the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula.

4.3.5 Vietnam

- Vietnam’s lack of push to embrace the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific security architecture or political model should not prevent the EU from enhanced cooperation, including in defense and security.
- Vietnam’s insistence on strategic autonomy, self-reliance, diversification, and “proactive” international outreach provides a realistic cooperation scenario. Trade and investment, development, and stability and security in the South China Sea region are three vital areas.
- In this context, economic security via enhanced cooperation in building resilient supply chains is imperative. Both Vietnam and the EU have faced economic coercion from China, and increased business opportunities between the two partners will help ease the stress posed by economic insecurity.
- Moreover, as Vietnam is a significant manufacturing destination for companies

and investors seeking to “de-risk” from China, the EU should capitalize on this momentum.

- Maritime security is another vital area of cooperation, as one of Vietnam’s core concerns is ensuring security and order in the sea lanes. The EU must look into ways of building maritime domain awareness initiatives, perhaps together with Australia, India, and Japan, which are also grappling with maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. The EU should explore projects that will help improve information sharing, including understanding maritime incidents.
- The EU could also consider looking into Vietnam as a gateway to boosting its strategic cooperation with the ASEAN states. The EU should maintain a clear and consistent stance on the South China Sea — its recent statement protesting opposition to unilateral actions, referring to China, and support for freedom of navigation, as well as the ASEAN-led code of conduct, is a constructive way forward.

Endnotes

- 1 See, for instance, Robert O. Keohane and Lisa L. Martin, “The Promise of Institutional Theory,” *International Security* 20, no. 1 (1995): 39–51; Anne-Marie Slaughter, “International Relations, Principal Theories,” in R. Wolfrum (ed.), *Max Planck Encyclopedia of Public International Law* (Oxford University Press, 2011), 1–9; John G. Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars* (Princeton University Press, 2001).

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