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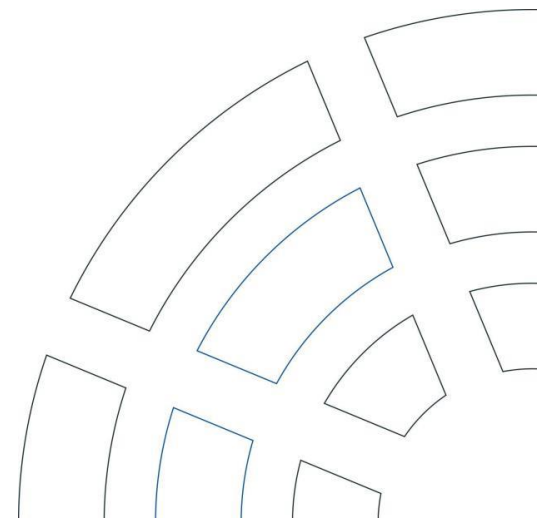
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**PRELIMINARY DRAFT REPORT**

## NATO AND THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

Preliminary Draft Report  
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*Founded in 1955, the NATO Parliamentary Assembly acts as a consultative interparliamentary organisation which is institutionally separate from NATO. This working document only represents the views of the Rapporteur until it has been adopted by the Political Committee. It is based on the information obtained from publicly available sources or from meetings held in the framework of the NATO PA, which are all unclassified.*



Although the collective defence of Allied territories is still its primary role, the end of the Cold War has prompted NATO to redefine its role and missions in terms of a broader vision of security, which has driven it to create a versatile network of partnerships with third countries over the past 25 years, particularly the seven “Partners across the Globe” – Afghanistan, Australia, the Republic of Korea (DRC), Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand and Pakistan – which is becoming increasingly important today as the world’s geopolitical centre of gravity is shifting towards the Indo-Pacific region.

But in addition to the numerous tensions implicating state and non-state actors, all of which constitute destabilising factors in the area – some of them long-standing – today there is a strategic shift stemming from the Sino-American power rivalry. Thus, the Indo-Pacific region is affected by a shift in geopolitical balance that poses major risks for the region and, in turn, for the rest of the world.

The nature and extent of the future incorporation of Indo-Pacific issues into the Strategic Concept is a source of debate among Allies. The serious threats currently facing the Alliance’s immediate environment should motivate Allies to identify carefully together how and where their security interests are being affected by developments in the area and to promote, with their partners, a shared understanding of the capabilities and activities of Indo-Pacific actors, where necessary or appropriate.

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## I- INTRODUCTION

1. The 1949 Washington Treaty defines NATO as a regional alliance of European and North American nations. Protection of freedom and sovereignty of these nations is the *raison d'être* of the Alliance, as stipulated on numerous occasions, including in the Communiqué issued during the last NATO Summit in June 2021. In the light of the turmoil caused by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it is imperative that it reaffirms this *raison d'être* in its new strategic concept. Although the collective defence of Allied territory remains its foremost role, the end of the Cold War prompted NATO to redefine its role and missions through a wider perspective on security – a perspective that was enshrined in the 2010 Strategic Concept in the shape of three core tasks for NATO: collective defence, crisis management, and cooperative security.

2. Cooperative security relates to NATO's legacy of over 25 years of building a flexible network of partnerships with non-member nations. While the initial drive to forge NATO partnerships stemmed from the dislocation of the Soviet bloc and the emergence of new democracies, the acceleration of globalisation and interconnectedness gave an impetus to reach out to nations beyond the immediate neighbourhood. In addition to 20 partner countries in the Euro-Atlantic area, NATO also engages with seven nations in the Mediterranean region (the Mediterranean Dialogue) and four Gulf nations (the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative).

3. The next layer of partnerships – with “Partners across the Globe” including Afghanistan, Australia, Colombia, Iraq, Japan, the Republic of Korea, Mongolia, New Zealand, and Pakistan – is rapidly gaining importance for NATO at a time when the Alliance begins to adapt to the shift of the centre of global geopolitical gravity towards the Indo-Pacific. In the context of “NATO2030” and Strategic Concept discussions, NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly underscored the need for NATO to take a more global outlook, because in a globalised world “what happens far away, matters for us right here” (NATO, 2021). This report focuses on the Alliance's growing interest in the Indo-Pacific region and the development of its partnerships in this vast region.

4. Geographically, the Indo-Pacific region is the large area encompassing the Indian Ocean, the western sector of the Pacific Ocean and the portion of South-West Asia that connects them together. The term Indo-Pacific appeared through years of growing interconnectedness in this region, particularly in areas of trade and finance, but also in areas of diplomacy and security. The Indo-Pacific region is home to more than half of the planet's population; in fact, India and China together represent almost a third of the world's population. In the past twenty years, the Indo-Pacific region's economic growth rates – as well as urbanisation – were booming, turning it into the world's newest epicentre of trade and commerce. The United-States, China, and Japan are the world's second- and third-largest global economies respectively, and India and South Korea are on the list of the world's ten biggest GDPs. The growth in Indonesia and elsewhere in the region could see the emergence of more economic giants in the region.

5. At the very heart of today's globalised economy, this region is naturally at the crossroads of trade routes and some of its waterways are strategically important worldwide. The Strait of Malacca is the main seaway connecting the Indian and Pacific oceans and some 100,000 ships sail through it each year (Defense Connect, 2019). There are additional strategic bottlenecks between both oceans, including the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, through which substantial volumes of goods and cargo transit.

6. But in addition to the numerous tensions implicating state and non-state actors, all of which constitute destabilising factors in the area – some of them long-standing – today, a strategic shift stemming from the Sino-American power rivalry emerges. Given its immense potential, the

Indo-Pacific region is consequently facing an increasingly complex regional security architecture that poses major risks for the region and, by extension, for the rest of the world.

7. Today, NATO is turning its attention to the region outside its North Atlantic Treaty area of responsibility. China was first publicly mentioned in the declaration of the London Summit in December 2019 and again at the Brussels summits in June 2021 and March 2022. The Asian-Pacific partners in the so-called NAC+4 (Australia, South Korea, Japan, and New Zealand) were invited to ministerial meetings in 2020, 2021 and 2022, because the Organisation wanted to develop joint actions with these four countries in the areas of cyber, technology, resilience, arms control, maritime security and climate change, in response to the security priorities that it considers to be of common concern. However, the nature and extent of the future incorporation of Indo-Pacific issues into the Strategic Concept are a source of debate among Allies. The serious threats currently facing the Alliance's immediate environment should motivate Allies to carefully identify together how and where their security interests are being affected by developments in the area and to promote, with their partners, a shared understanding of the capabilities and activities of Indo-Pacific actors, where opportune or necessary.

8. Meanwhile, the Assembly has a long history of focusing on and engagement with the Asia-Pacific region, in some ways being ahead of NATO itself. Thus, in 1980, Japan became the Assembly's first partner outside the Alliance. Along with Australia and China, the country holds parliamentary observer status in the institution. Dedicating regular reports to China, the NATO PA has called on the Allies since 2005 to pay more attention to the Chinese challenge. Since 2006, Assembly delegations have visited China four times. In 2020, its resolution 464<sup>1</sup> outlined its vision for a Euro-Atlantic strategy vis-à-vis China "to align NATO's Strategic Concept, as well as defence planning, training, and capability development priorities with a rapidly shifting global strategic environment in which the rise of China is a key feature." In its contribution to the new Strategic Concept<sup>2</sup>, NATO PA calls for an agreed policy towards China based on interaction, competition, and defence of Allied security interests: "NATO should engage with China wherever it can and when it is in its interest to do so and use this engagement to encourage China to act as a responsible global player; working in close complementarity with the EU and other key partners, it should compete with China to maintain its scientific and technological edge and the independence and resilience of its supply chains; and it should deter China when Beijing's actions challenge Euro-Atlantic security." It also recommends using partnerships with like-minded countries in the Asia-Pacific region to advocate the Alliance's values and policies. The issue of denuclearisation of North Korea also featured prominently in the Assembly's work. NATO Parliamentarians paid several visits to Japan and South Korea and visited Australia (2008) and Singapore (2019). The Australian and Japanese delegations regularly attend NATO PA sessions.

## II- OVERVIEW OF THE STRATEGIC LANDSCAPE IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

9. The Indo-Pacific geopolitical landscape is dominated by the economic, technological and military rise of the **People's Republic of China** (PRC) which in turn is driving a number of its

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<sup>1</sup> Resolution 464 "A transatlantic strategy on China", presented by Gerald E. Connolly (United States) and adopted by the NATO PA on 23 November 2020.

<sup>2</sup> NATO PA to NATO's New Strategic Concept 2022, unanimously adopted by the Assembly's Standing Committee on 22 February 2022.

neighbours, and countries along the *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), to rethink their national security strategies in an attempt to counterbalance its growth, or even to follow suit.

10. The external perception of China has fundamentally changed between the Summer and Winter Olympics held in Beijing. Seen as increasingly open and embracing the rules-based world order in 2008, by 2022 China is widely feared and criticised for increasingly authoritarian domestic policies. The oppression inflicted on the Muslim Uighur minority has drawn international condemnation. China is also infringing on fundamental freedoms once guaranteed by law in Hong Kong and has severely restricted the exercise of the right of free enterprise by both individuals and the private sector.

11. Under the leadership of President Xi Jinping, China has abandoned Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum "Hide your strength, bide your time." According to the estimates of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, China's defence spending has increased by 76% between 2011–2020, and China is firmly the world's second largest military spender with \$252 billion, far surpassing Russia but far behind the United States (whose military spending has reached an estimated \$778 billion in 2020) (SIPRI, 2021). China is deploying the largest navy in the world in terms of ships and is making rapid progress in developing long-range nuclear-armed missile capabilities as well as hypersonic weapons and advanced fighter jets (DoD, 2021). The rate of progress of China's military capabilities had prompted Admiral Philip Davidson, commander of US forces in the Indo-Pacific, to estimate that they could reach a level comparable to that of the United States in the region by 2025 (Regaud, 2021). US analysts conclude that already now China "can challenge the US military across the spectrum of conventional and unconventional capabilities" (GAO, 2022).

12. Since 2012, Chinese foreign policy has been marked both by power moves and by the implementation of coercive or retaliatory economic, cyber and sometimes military actions, as on the Indian border (Regaud, 2021). Using a series of incremental actions, none of which constitute a *casus belli*, China is attempting to alter the regional status quo in its favour; the most notable example of this strategy is the situation in the South China Sea, where, despite the 2016 arbitration ruling against it by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in The Hague, Beijing embarked on a massive programme to build artificial islands in waters already claimed by Brunei, Malaysia, the Philippines, Vietnam and Taiwan. Another key centre of tensions is the complex relationship between the PRC and the island of Taiwan: the recent statements by senior military officials and increasing incursions into Taiwan's air defence identification zone raise the risk of incidents and escalation (Regaud, 2021). Tensions particularly escalated after China's crackdown on Hong Kong's bid for autonomy in 2019 and 2020, which reinforced Taiwan's opposition to the "one country, two systems" principle. The third regional "hot spot" is linked to the dispute between China and Japan regarding the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. In addition, China resorts to so-called "wolf warrior diplomacy" against any foreign country or leader perceived to be hostile to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) regime and ambitions. Thus, it curtailed its diplomatic and trade ties with Lithuania (when the latter pulled out of the "17+1 bloc" and then allowed Taiwan to open a diplomatic representation office in its own name) and Australia (which had requested an independent investigation into the origins of the Covid-19 pandemic).

13. Economically, since 2013, China pursues its flagship BRI where it has already invested – mainly through state-owned firms – in over 100 countries (including the United States and other Allies). While China's partners benefit from the BRI<sup>3</sup>, it is becoming increasingly regarded as an instrument for China to advance its geopolitical interests, collect intelligence, stifle criticism of the

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<sup>3</sup> In 2019, China's total foreign direct investment was estimated at \$2.1 trillion (source: <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF11735>).

country in the regions concerned, and build relationships of dependency through “debt-trap diplomacy”, epitomised by Beijing’s 99-year concession of the Sri Lankan port of Hambantota in exchange for the write-off of a little more than one billion dollars in loans (*Le Monde*, 2018).

14. Finally, the COVID-19 pandemic has led China to respond to the country’s worsening structural economic and demographic problems with increased isolation. And since the beginning of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, China, for diplomatic and economic reasons, has taken the position of a neutral observer, despite the fact that Sino-Russian diplomatic and economic relations were recently strengthened during Vladimir Putin’s trip to Beijing in February. China refused to condemn Moscow’s behaviour and the Chinese media is broadcasting the Russian version of events. However, it did abstain – rather than veto – during the UN vote on the resolution condemning Russia. This abstention demonstrates that China and Russia are not completely aligned. As the most responsible and cautious component of the Moscow-Beijing axis, China could gain a political advantage from the crisis: it is thus compelled to play a role in achieving a cease-fire. It could also benefit economically since an isolated Russia would have little choice but to re-direct its exports of hydrocarbons and other goods to the Chinese market under Chinese terms. But with much of the “New Silk Roads” passing through Ukraine, Chinese exports will inevitably be affected by the ongoing war situation in the country. China could be hesitant to become too involved in rescuing the Russian economy, for fear of being the target of sanctions itself. On 3 March, the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), founded by China in 2014, decided to freeze all ongoing business with Russia and Belarus and in particular to suspend loans to these two countries (Slate, 2022). Finally, China may have to reassess the cost-benefit ratio of a possible annexation of Taiwan, especially in light of the determination and unity shown by the Allies and their partners in condemning the Russian aggression (*France=info*, 2022). On the other hand, it can hope that the events in Ukraine will prompt the Allies to shift their defence mechanisms to Europe and thereby keep them out of the Indo-Pacific region.

15. China’s increasingly hard-line domestic and foreign policies have tarnished its image worldwide and provoked a backlash from actors both within and outside the region. Of China’s immediate neighbours, **Japan** has traditionally been the most frontal in promoting the vision of “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP), a cooperative and inclusive vision based on compliance with a rule-based maritime order in which the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) is pivotal (Péron-Doise, 24 September 2021). The 2021 Defence Book is marked by an incisive analysis of China’s coercive strategies in the regional environment of the archipelago and an explicit acknowledgement of the Taiwan issue. The white paper also expands on three other major points: the strategic competition between the United States and China; the growth of Tokyo’s defence partnerships; and the need to reinforce the country’s research and development capabilities in advanced technologies (Péron-Doise, 24 September 2021). In recent years, Japan has also considerably intensified trilateral and bilateral cooperation with the United States and Australia, as well as in the format of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) which also involves India. Japan’s willingness to consolidate the Quad has found an echo in the Biden Administration, which is keen to make it a more active mechanism and widen its scope to include new problematics that could attract more partners (vaccine production, climate change, protection of critical technologies, independence of supply chains and access to critical infrastructures) (Péron-Doise, 24 September 2021). These strategic evolutions, combined with the dispute over the Senkaku islands, the rise of interceptions of Sino aircrafts approaching Japanese airspace lately, as well as Tokyo’s signalling that it is willing to support the people of Taiwan in the end of 2021 suggest that Sino-Japanese relations are more vulnerable than before (Ashley, 2021). This was particularly blatant during the unprecedented transit of five Chinese vessels (and as many Russian ships) through a narrow waterway separating the major Japanese islands of Honshu and Hokkaido for the first time on record, a move coming right after the Quad exercises in earlier 2021 (Stripes, 2021). However, Japan’s heavy historic record and constitutional and capacity limitations on its military apparatus somewhat compromise Tokyo’s expanded role in the region. On numerous occasions, the Japanese authorities have reaffirmed their will to compartmentalise political

problems and develop economic relations with neighbouring countries. However, the increasingly wide political divide between Washington, Beijing, and Moscow could render this compartmentalised approach more difficult over time.

16. Due to its vulnerable geopolitical situation<sup>4</sup>, the Republic of Korea (**ROK**) has been avoiding open confrontations with Beijing. ROK's Prime Minister Moon Jae-In's "New South Policy" (NSP) has sought to reprioritise relationships with ASEAN and India in a way to diversify its relationships abroad, focusing on uncontroversial topics and elevating its international profile through soft power. In March 2020, South Korea took part in the Quad+ meeting which focussed on COVID-19 (the country is one of the world's top three vaccine manufacturers, along with China and India) allowing Seoul to demonstrate the complementarity between its NSP and the new objectives set out by the Quad in its March 2021 communiqué. However, the DRC also distanced itself from China in the area of technologies and innovation, moving the area of technology and innovation to the top of the joint US-Korea agenda. Along with Taiwan and Japan, the DRC is one of Asia's leaders in the field of semiconductors (through the Samsung and SK Hynix Inc. companies). However, this cutting-edge industry, which is largely dominated by the United States in terms of intellectual property and design, is missing from China's industrial and innovation capabilities. Stronger cooperation with South Korea in this area will allow Washington to gain more control over its strategic technology supply chain and will also contribute to the effectiveness of the tough-on-China policy adopted by the Trump and Biden administrations (Péron-Doise, 22 July 2021). While the DRC remains relatively neutral on the AUKUS, it has expressed surprise at this transfer of sensitive technology to Australia, which, in theory, is better positioned in terms of industrial capacity, but has been denied technical support by the United States, along with the transfer of fissile material required to build a nuclear-powered submarine (as well as an aircraft carrier and a cruise missile) as part of its national defence programme (Niquet and Péron-Doise, 2021).

17. China's assertiveness has become a major concern for Australia and its foreign policy, most notably since the diplomatic spat and trade war that Canberra authorities were drawn into in 2020. A key area of divergence between Canberra and Beijing also includes pacific partnerships with the island nations, where Australia still seeks to remain the partner of choice, despite China's rise in the region (Australian Government, 2017). While refraining from explicitly challenging Beijing, Australian diplomacy is actively pursuing a range of bilateral and multilateral cooperation arrangements with key partners, including members of the *Five Eyes* alliance (FVEY) Japan, Indonesia, India and the DRC (Australian Government, 2017). Concluded in 2021, the AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States) "enhanced strategic partnership" aims to strengthen technological cooperation between the three countries in the field of cyber, strategic supply chains and defence, as well as the integration of military capabilities. Military capabilities are relatively limited where Australia is concerned, as the potential supply of US nuclear-powered submarines would indicate, thus forcing any strategic calculation of the Indo-Pacific region to take them into account. This is not without negative repercussions among allies and partners. Due to its size and less central location, **New Zealand** has been less active than Australia in building coalitions to balance China, but observers have begun to notice some evolution of Wellington's approach as well. Thus, unlike ANZUS, the AUKUS does not integrate New Zealand, despite its close defence ties with Australia. Moreover, New Zealand will not be allowed to harbour the said submarines, as their fuel is military-grade (like Japan, which limits the possibility of wider regional cooperation) (Niquet and Péron-Doise, 2021). But observers have begun to detect a shift in the Wellington authorities' position (Peng, 2022).

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<sup>4</sup> In July 2017, the US Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) system was deployed on South Korean soil, which led to a trade boycott of the PRC by China that permanently destabilised the former's economy. Moreover, Seoul's North-Korea policy is contingent on Beijing's goodwill (Péron-Doise, 22 July 2021).



18. **India** is a natural counterweight to China in the Indo-Pacific region. For a long time, the two regional giants have avoided direct confrontation, but, in recent years their relationships have become tense not least because of a nationalistic turn in both countries' politics. India is concerned about the Sino-Pakistani strategic partnership and about the deepening ties between its closest neighbours – Bangladesh, Maldives, Nepal and Sri Lanka – and China. While historically these states have always viewed India's presence as being dominant and unchallenged, some believe that they would benefit from leveraging Beijing against New Delhi, since they would like to have a greater say in the decision-making processes in the region (Pant, 2022). Tensions between India and China climaxed with the 2020 border incident in eastern Ladakh that claimed several lives. Confronted – even more than Australia – by a direct threat from China, India is also trying to consolidate its partnerships, particularly with Japan, but also within the Quad, while also examining the future articulation between this format and that of the AUKUS – which is perceived to be setting up a regional order dominated by Western powers – which somewhat overlap. Reluctant to enter immediately into an alliance of Western powers, owing to its history of colonial domination, its historically close ties with Russia and its fear of unnecessarily aggravating tensions in the region, India is therefore preoccupied with an apparent division of concerns between “hard security” (AUKUS) and “soft security” (QUAD) that would not meet either the threats posed by China or the way in which these threats are perceived in the region (Niquet and Péron-Doise, 2021).

19. South-eastern Asian states, members of the ASEAN, boast a pivotal position in the Indo-Pacific concept simply because of their geostrategic importance. Essentially, the FOIP concept relates to the safe functioning of congested maritime routes in South-East Asia. Collectively, ASEAN countries represent the world's third-largest population and the fifth-largest economy. The organisation has sought to embrace a greater role in the region precisely by leveraging their key strategic importance. The “ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific” (AOIP) declaration was a key starting point in this regard in 2019. (Nabbs-Keller, 2020). However, unexpected external challenges such as COVID-19 and sudden internal ones such as instability in Myanmar suggest limited room for manoeuvre for ASEAN as a coherent group (*Le Monde*, 2021). In the past, the ASEAN has been able to act together – despite the great variety among their ranks – thanks to their commitment to shared values of multilateralism and the protection of a rules-based order. Yet those same values are being challenged by a more assertive China. Additionally, ASEAN leaders have expressed fear that the organisation might lose some of its “importance” in the region because of the emergence of new coalitions in the region (Frécon, 2020). The AUKUS announcement thus generated mixed reactions within ASEAN. Indonesia and Malaysia were relatively open in expressing their reticence, while Singapore, the Philippines and, to a lesser extent, Vietnam welcomed this new partnership rather favourably. Nonetheless, there are still concerns that the presence of Australian nuclear-powered submarines in the South China Sea could trigger an arms race (Niquet and Péron-Doise, 2021), even in the distant future.

20. The nuclear and conventional threat posed by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (**DPRK**) remains a breaking point in the geopolitical landscape of the region. Almost seventy years after the signature of the Armistice Agreement in Korea (Panmunjom, 27 July 1953) the Korean peninsula remains divided while North Korea continues to pose frequent destabilisation threats to this part of the world. Under extremely severe international sanctions since the 1990s, Pyongyang's “precipice strategy” of nuclear tests and missile launches cannot be ignored by the Allies. From 2014 to 2017, the North Korean foreign policy has changed to address its greatest weakness: its reliance on China for economic and diplomatic survival since the Korean War. Consequently, the DPRK has tried to ease tensions with its southern neighbour and the United States, a move that broke the ice when, during the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, the teams marched together in the opening ceremony in a symbolic gesture of reconciliation that had not been seen for more than a decade. The reforms initiated during this period also aimed to introduce a restricted version of a free internal market that would support economic activity. However, even though the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the North Korean economy, Kim Jong-Un continues the nuclear blackmailing strategy to obtain sanctions relief. Even recently, the

DPRK claimed to have conducted two tests of hypersonic missiles. North Korea now tries to present its nuclear and missile programme as too entrenched to be undone and has invited the US to reformat the dialogue from denuclearisation to arms control that would involve accepting some level of nuclear weapons in DPRK (Revere, 2021). This gambit is unlikely to succeed. A potentially promising avenue to socialise with DPRK on the international level is to build on Pyongyang's apparently genuine interest in joining global efforts to combat climate change (Financial Times, 2022).

21. Various other **non-state tensions** also contribute to destabilise the region. The Indo-Pacific region, home to the world's largest Muslim countries (Indonesia, India, Pakistan, Malaysia and Bangladesh), has not been spared from Islamic fundamentalist or right-wing terrorism, even on its southern (Australia, New Zealand) and western (Somalia and Mozambique) shores. While piracy was booming in the 2000s, it is currently declining in the Indian Ocean but remains endemic in South-East Asia. Together, these two phenomena are a breeding ground for other criminal activities, which in turn sustain them. Lastly, this region is suffering the effects of climate change and is already affected by an upsurge in environmental phenomena that could trigger major environmental crises with major human consequences.

### III- THE EURO-ATLANTIC COMMUNITY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

#### A. NATO'S GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

22. NATO has forged links with certain States in the Indo-Pacific region chiefly in the area of cooperative security. Future "Partners across the Globe" sporadically participated in NATO workshops and other projects from the 1990s, then a more structured dialogue with these countries has been established in the following decades, mainly in the context of operational co-operation in Afghanistan. NATO's 2010 Strategic Concept and 2011 policy review have reflected its increased interest in these partnerships, the appropriateness of which was underlined in 2014 with the invasion of Crimea by Russia, which prompted Australia and other countries to worry about the consequences of the invasion for a rules-based international order to seek active engagement with NATO. As China's rise became increasingly clear, the Organisation's contacts with the "Partners across the Globe" driven by similar motivations to those of the Allies were strengthened. In December 2020, following regular meetings with the North Atlantic Council (NAC) Permanent Representatives – the so-called NAC+4 meetings – Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the DRC, which constitute the informal Asia-Pacific Four (AP4), took part for the first time in a meeting of NATO foreign ministers, during which the implications of China's increasing strength were discussed. In recent years, the security of the Korean peninsula and maritime security have also figured on the agenda of these "NAC+4 meetings". At the NATO Brussels Summit in June 2021, Allied leaders agreed to improve their relations with their "Partners across the Globe". Australia, South Korea, Japan and New Zealand imposed sanctions on Russia, following its invasion of Ukraine in 2022. In addition to the four above-mentioned countries, other partners in the region also show an interest in engaging with the Alliance (Indonesia, Singapore, etc.).

23. Among Global Partners, **Australia** has the most substantial record of co-operation with NATO. In June 2012, NATO and Australia signed a political declaration signalling their commitment to strengthen their co-operation. Two years later, it was the only partner in the Indo-Pacific region to benefit from an Enhanced Opportunities Partners status, which enables the country to take part in the early stages of operational planning for NATO-led missions. Moreover, this status opens up other forms of privileged cooperation and the possibility of participating in an enhanced political dialogue. Australia has also been one of the most important non-Alliance donors to the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) and *Resolute Support* (RSM) mission in Afghanistan. It cooperates with NATO on such issues as interoperability, disaster relief and

science and technology. The country takes a holistic view of security and considers that events in the Euro-Atlantic area also concern it. Australia, therefore, contributed to NATO's Operation *Ocean Shield* against piracy, supported sanctions against Russia in 2014 and contributed \$70 million worth of military aid to Ukraine in the first quarter of 2022.

24. **Japan** also has an ambitious co-operation agenda with NATO. The organisation's contracts with Japan (joint seminars and high-level consultations) predate the Partnership for Peace program. During the War in Afghanistan, Japan did not deploy troops, but provided financial assistance and contribution to the NATO-led trust fund projects, as well as played a leading role in the disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration track. Japan's main objectives in this partnership were to provide informed perceptions on East Asia's security environment, which Tokyo felt was not adequately understood by Europeans, as well as raise regional issues including Chinese military build-up and North Korean missile tests to the international level (Japan Institute of International Affairs, 2021). In 2013, Japan and NATO signed a joint political declaration, which was followed in 2014 by Japan's agreeing to an Individual Partnership and Co-operation Programme with NATO. Practical cooperation, originally heavily Afghanistan-centric, now includes a wide range of areas, such as cyber defence, maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, non-proliferation, as well as science and technology. Japan's growing interest in engaging with NATO also reflects the country's changing foreign policy: while, for historic reasons, its Constitution limits its international engagements – particularly militarily – Japan, under the Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, began to recast its image abroad and has put into place a set of policies to make the country a more proactive player in international affairs.

25. NATO's relationship with the **ROK** is more delicate, owing to the country's complicated geopolitical situation (ROK is still technically at war with DPRK). No joint declaration has been adopted so far. Nevertheless, ROK, which has one of the world's strongest armies and NATO engage in close practical co-operation in the framework of Individual Partnership Cooperation Programme. While, initially, co-operation focused on Afghanistan, where, *inter alia*, ROK led a Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Parwan, the dialogue subsequently expanded into other areas, including the issue of disarmament in the Korean peninsula. Allied leaders began including references to DPRK in their Summit communiqués, while ROK is now participating regularly at NATO's Conference on Weapons of Mass Destruction, Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. Their intensified practical cooperation with the Alliance reflects the extent to which the Seoul authorities fear for the strength of the post-World War II regional security order, which has brought the country an extraordinary level of prosperity, but which some East Asian leaders now see as conflicting with their interests and are striving to reverse.

26. Being the smallest of the AP4, **New Zealand** has been historically pursuing a “hedging foreign policy” strategy, trying to avoid zero-sum games and supporting multilateralism, while maintaining an alignment with the US security apparatus (Ministry of Defence of New Zealand, 2021). New Zealand has a more restrained cooperation with NATO. The country has not yet signed a joint political declaration with NATO but has made a substantial contribution to ISAF and MSR activities in Afghanistan, including the conduct of a PRT in Bamiyan province. It has also taken part in NATO maritime missions in the Mediterranean and off the Horn of Africa and sent military instructors to Iraq. The threats to the rules-based international order prompted Wellington to become more proactive internationally. New Zealand stepped up its political dialogue with NATO as well as practical co-operation in areas ranging from counterterrorism to capacity-building assistance to third countries. At the same time, New Zealand has tried to avoid antagonising Beijing in order to maintain strong economic relations. However, observers also note that – as Sino-American relations deteriorated in recent years, and also in the wake of the AUKUS deal – Wellington's hedging strategy will be increasingly difficult to sustain (*Le Figaro*, 2021).

27. Aside from the aforementioned countries, a notable NATO Global Partner in the region is also **Mongolia**. Like South Korea, it finds itself in a difficult neighbourhood and is susceptible to the

recent turbulence in international relations. Mongolia pursues a “third neighbour” policy, which seeks to diplomatically balance its reliance on Russia and China, and increase relations with western countries, and, by extension, NATO (Yoon et al., 2017). Since 2005, NATO and Mongolia have been engaged in dialogue and cooperation. Mongolia also contributed troops to the UN mission in Kosovo from 2005 to 2007, sent instructors to ISAF and deployed peace-keeping forces to South Sudan in 2021. Since 2014, the Ulaanbaatar authorities have intensified their cooperation with NATO on interoperability through NATO courses and training. In addition, they have also modernised their professional military education system to some degree, building on the organisation’s Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP) (NATO, 2021). Caught in a vice of two autocracies, Mongolia’s efforts to consolidate its democracy also benefit from participation in NATO’s Building Integrity initiative.

28. NATO’s partnership with **Pakistan** is largely centred on two themes: civil preparedness and disaster response on the one hand; and the stabilisation of Afghanistan on the other. In 2005, when Pakistan was hit by a massive earthquake, the Alliance provided the country with necessary assistance in the relief effort by deploying forces, including engineers and medical units from NATO’s Response Force. Pakistan also played a key role in supporting NATO ISAF and – to a lesser degree – RSM missions, mainly by allowing for the transit of supplies through its territory and airspace. While aligning itself for decades with the Western camp (and having the status of the US “major non-NATO ally”) especially in the context of the USSR/Russian axis with India and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Pakistan has been reconsidering its geopolitical strategy in recent years, partially due to the perception of a vacuum left by the Western withdrawal from the Middle-East and Afghanistan. Pakistan has forged a strong relationship with China and more recently, with Russia. Islamabad's proposal to host naval units from 45 countries (including the United States, China and Russia) for a joint exercise in the Northern Arabian Sea should be seen as an emblematic manifestation of Pakistan's multi-pronged tactics (Gul, 2021). Nevertheless, Pakistan remains an important partner for the Alliance, especially in terms of counterterrorism and President Joseph Biden’s “Over-the-Horizon” strategy to ensure that Afghanistan does again not become a safe haven for international terrorists.

29. The list of NATO’s partnerships in the Indo-Pacific region would not be complete without its relationship with **Afghanistan**, which ended in August 2021 in disorder and chaos, but which constituted the organisation’s main operational mission in the decades between 2000 and 2010. Over time, the mandate of this mission has changed from maintaining security around Kabul to countering a growing insurgency throughout the country, contributing to reconstruction, gradually transferring full responsibility for security to the Afghan forces and ultimately providing training and advice. The number of NATO forces deployed in Afghanistan has risen to a peak of over 130 000, with contingents hailing from 51 Allies and partners (NATO, 2015). During two decades of Allied presence, there have been positive improvements in the areas of education, women’s empowerment and rights and the development of infrastructures. Afghanistan no longer served as a “headquarters” for Al Qaeda terrorists plotting terrorist attacks on Europe and North America. Nonetheless, the abrupt fall of Kabul in August 2021 and dramatic evacuations of thousands of Afghans fleeing the resurgence of the Taliban have shattered the legacy of a two-decades-long mission and dented the reputation of the Alliance. The Allies should honestly and carefully examine the lessons learned from their intervention in Afghanistan. It was decided to do so at the end of the summer of 2021, and the first lessons were drawn during the Autumn Ministerial Meetings. A number of factors were cited to justify the final result: the late nature of the mission; the numerous

security, reconstruction, development aid and army training tasks; the new asymmetric confrontation; the lack of cohesion between Allies. (Bureau, 2022).<sup>5</sup>

## B. NATO AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

30. NATO's latest Strategic Concept, adopted in 2010, makes no reference to China. However, in recent years, and particularly during the pandemic, NATO has turned its attention to China's rise and has put the Chinese issue on its agenda. According to Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, this is "not because of any desire on the part of the organisation to be present in the Indo-Pacific, but because of China's increased proximity to it", both in terms of projecting political and economic influence (as well as in cyberspace – but there is no projection through military tools in the Euro-Atlantic area). The Alliance should increase its understanding of the issues at stake in and around its sphere of responsibility: the development of its nuclear arsenal where its nuclear strategy remains opaque, nefarious cyber activities and disinformation, attempt to impose international rules and standards in the emerging technology sector that are inconsistent with Allied values and a lack of transparency in its investments in infrastructures. The communiqué issued at the conclusion of the 2021 NATO Summit states that "China's stated ambitions and assertive behaviour present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security." The perception of the Chinese authorities regarding NATO has also changed over time: while they still see the Alliance as a vehicle for the promotion of US interests, they have, for the first time, in a joint statement by Presidents Putin and Xi on 4 February 2021, explicitly criticised the enlargement of NATO and endorsed Russian considerations on "long-term legally binding security guarantees in Europe."

31. At the same time, NATO leaders call for "a constructive dialogue with China where possible", in areas such as addressing climate change. NATO leaders have repeatedly emphasised that China is not an adversary, and that a direct confrontation between NATO and China is neither desirable nor likely.

32. The Organisation has made considerable efforts to raise Allied awareness of the issue of China; however, to date, there is no consensus on how the Alliance should tackle the issue. An analysis of Chinese activities is embedded in a range of policy documents. At irregular intervals, high-level political dialogues are held between NATO and Beijing: for instance, in September 2021, Jens Stoltenberg met with State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi. Other smaller-level contacts with Chinese officials and diplomats take place periodically. China is not formally considered a partner, but there is ongoing and functioning communication between both sides. In the past, a productive relationship has emerged between NATO and China in the context of anti-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa. However, the difficulty for both NATO and its Chinese interlocutors lies in reaching a common agenda and achieving the desired results. Specifically, NATO would like to discuss arms control and military transparency, since the Chinese growing nuclear arsenal is not yet subject to any arms control agreement. But China keeps on portraying itself as a developing country that cannot be obliged by such an agreement, in light of the vast superiority of the US and Russian arsenals. The country is also reluctant to discuss military transparency measures with NATO. Another major area of discussion between NATO and Chinese officials is the situation in Afghanistan.

33. But NATO is currently more concerned with what to do about China than with China. Mr Stoltenberg explicitly stated that the opportunity to engage in missions in the Indo-Pacific region

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<sup>5</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the Afghan situation and lessons to be learned for NATO, please refer to the draft-report of the Sub-Committee on Transatlantic Relations (PCTR) "Developments in Afghanistan: Causes, Consequences and Political Challenges".

under the NATO banner was not on the agenda. The Alliance is working on defining resilience standards for its members' strategic infrastructures, such as ports and cyber facilities. It is also adjusting or planning to adjust its policies in areas such as space and cyberspace, hybrid tactics, disinformation and artificial intelligence to address Chinese activities. NATO also encourages its members to ensure that Chinese investments do not prevent the Alliance from using any other vital infrastructure in the event of a crisis. In addition, NATO is closely monitoring Sino-Russian military cooperation. Finally, NATO and EU officials are debating the challenge that China poses, but the two organisations have yet to properly coordinate their respective policies toward Beijing.

### C. INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGIES AND ACTIVITIES OF DIFFERENT ALLIED COUNTRIES IN THE REGION

34. Of all the allies, the **United States** is by far the country with the largest presence in the Indo-Pacific region; as a fully-fledged Indo-Pacific nation, the US has built up trade and cultural links with the rest of the region for over two centuries. Their presence stretches from the West Coast across the Pacific Ocean, encompassing military bases on the island of Guam and troop barracks in the DRC and Japan, totalling over 80,000 troops in those two countries alone (Hussein and Haddad, 2021). President Donald J. Trump gave an additional impetus to his predecessor's "Asia Pivot" policy when, in a 2017 speech, he raised the idea of a JTFFP, based on a similar concept formulated by Japanese Prime Minister Abe. Another seminal element was the December 2017 "National Security Strategy", which described China as a "revisionist power", and was further complemented in June 2019 by a "Strategy Report" in which the Department of Defense stated: "The PRC seeks to reorder the region to its advantage." While tensions were expected to ease after the signature of Phase One of the United States-China trade deal, the outbreak of COVID-19, human rights violations in both Xinjiang and Hong Kong, and Beijing's aggressive behaviour towards its neighbours have given the US Congress, Democrats and Republicans alike, a strong incentive to block China's authoritarian manifestations (Paskal et al., 2021).

35. In 2021, President Biden hosted his first multilateral meeting with the Quad leaders, reiterating a long-standing interest in the Indo-Pacific region and, simultaneously, working with other allied countries and their partners. He continued to redirect defence assets to the region, but the new administration also expressed interest in disentangling political and security issues in order to encourage cooperation with Beijing on such issues as climate change. Indeed, in its 2022 Indo-Pacific strategy, the White House specifically states that China is the greatest threat to the region's prosperity, but that it is also a rival that Washington has to handle responsibly (The White House, 2022). The last two US administrations have actively built coalitions to counterbalance China, although the re-engagement and encouragement of other actors – such as India – may lead to a decline in the relative influence of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region (Thakker, 2021). In addition to the reinvigoration of the Quad, the American decision to share nuclear propulsion technology and possibly other such critical technologies with Australia for the first time since 1958 illustrates this policy once again.

36. The **United Kingdom** has demonstrated its willingness to play a more prominent role in the Indo-Pacific, notably by pursuing Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOP). In 2021, a British naval battle group (BAT) based around the aircraft carrier *HMS Queen Elizabeth* led a Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) through the South China Sea, prompting Beijing to put its navy on red alert (BBC, 2021). British naval forces are also conducting exercises in the region along with France, Japan, Singapore, and the US. London only has a minimal permanent presence in the Indo-Pacific region, reflecting its commitment to the concept of *Global Britain*, rather than to the protection of national territory, as Britain's only overseas territory is Pitcairn. Britain's interest in the

Indo-Pacific region also transpires in its facilitation of the AUKUS pact, from which it is hoping to reap economic and political dividends. Moreover, in 2021, the United Kingdom hosted a G7 meeting and invited the DRC, Australia, and India; this was the first meeting in the “Democracy-10” format<sup>6</sup>. The United Kingdom also exploited its historical ties with its former colonies in the region, most notably by offering political asylum to over 65,000 Hong Kongers when a controversial national security law was enacted in China (TV5 Monde, 2021).

37. **France** is an Indo-Pacific power in its own right. The autonomous island of New-Caledonia and its overseas territories in the region is home to over 1.6 million French citizens. These territories cover huge maritime areas (9 million km<sup>2</sup>). There are 7,000 military staff on a permanent basis, backed up by more than 20 naval vessels and some 40 military aircrafts, as well as a nuclear-powered aircraft carrier and its escort of Mistral-class amphibious assault helicopters that regularly call there. As one of the longest-standing military presences in both oceans, France has pursued similar objectives to those of the United States for the past decade. Accordingly, the 2019 version of its defence strategy for the Indo-Pacific region comprises the preservation of a “rule-based international order” and the protection of maritime routes, which are essential for world trade (Ministry of the Armed Forces of the French Republic, 2019). France actively maintains strategic, political and economic partnerships in the region. Hence, the partnership signed in January 2012 with Australia, instituting close cooperation between the two countries in all areas, especially in terms of security and defence, took on a new dimension when the Australian government chose the French company *Naval Group* in 2016 to build twelve Attack class conventionally powered submarines. This contract was designed to build Australia’s sovereign capacity to partially design, build, operate and maintain the future submarine fleet. The astounding announcement of the creation of the AUKUS – a secret that had been carefully guarded by its three participants, despite the fact that they were allies and partners of France respectively – in September 2021, invalidated this Franco-Australian strategic partnership. Indonesia, which is another key ASEAN partner, recently signed a contract for the sale of 42 Rafale aircraft, as well as other agreements on submarines and ammunition (*France24*, 2022). Other partnerships have been concluded with India, Japan and the ASEAN.

38. French President Emmanuel Macron considers China as the greatest challenge of the Indo-Pacific region – a stance that is not unlike Washington’s – and has been more vocal than his counterparts in Berlin or Brussels in criticising China’s nefarious activities (*France24*, 2020). The regular presence of the French Navy in the South China Sea can also be seen as a contribution to a broader allied effort to undermine Chinese unilateralism. In 2021, the deployment of the French SSN *Emerald* and the amphibious exercises conducted with the United States, Japan and Australia were tangible actions entirely consistent with the US priorities and approach. At the same time, President Macron is opposed to the idea of a “league” of NATO members against Beijing and is advocating an Indo-Pacific strategy tackling all global issues – economy, environment, climate, connectivity, health, etc. – in which the EU would play a pivotal role given its competences (Europe 1, 2021). This kind of strategy fulfils the expectations of many countries that, although allied with the United States, are concerned by the risk of escalation that the AUKUS could bring. The absence of preliminary consultations, the public opinion impression and lack of discernment in the timing of the announcement – which took place on the same day as the EU’s Indo-Pacific strategy – also provoked an outcry in Paris and Brussels and a brief period of diplomatic tension between allied countries. Franco-American relations resumed once Washington conceded that the Allies concerned had not been adequately consulted on the AUKUS negotiations and recognised the importance of the European presence in the Indo-Pacific region.

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<sup>6</sup> On this concept, see “From de G7 to a D10: Strengthening Democratic Cooperation for Today’s Challenges”, Ash Jain and Matthew Kroenig (United States) with Tobias Bunde (Germany), Sophia Gaston (United-Kingdom) and Yuichi Hosoya (Japan), Atlantic Council, 2021.

39. **Germany** is also turning its attention to the Indo-Pacific region. In September 2020, the German government released its “Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific region,” in which the country officially endorsed for the first time the concept of the “Indo-Pacific” (Government of the Federal Republic of Germany, 2020). The publication signalled a change in the country’s approach to the issue and attracted significant international attention. While the report does not openly criticise Beijing, the policy guidelines reflect the negative evolution of China-Germany relations and the growing discontent vis-à-vis China throughout Europe over its management of the Covid-19 pandemic, as well as the growing dependency on China for supplies of critical goods (Internationale Politik Quarterly, 2020). In line with the strategy, Germany used its chairmanship of the EU to upgrade EU-ASEAN relations to the level of a strategic partnership in December 2020. Berlin also expanded bilateral relations with Australia and held security and foreign policy consultations with Australia and Japan. Moreover, the German frigate *Bayern* was sent on a patrol and training mission in the Indo-Pacific region (German Federal Government, 2021).

40. Following France and Germany, **the Netherlands** was the third EU country to adopt a strategy for the Indo-Pacific region. In November 2020, the government of the Netherlands took a decisive step towards a more active Dutch and European Union (EU) posture in the Indo-Pacific to defend and promote Dutch economic and political interests. The Hague advocates for a more assertive EU approach to balance and restrain China and to speak out “more often and more forcefully” about the breaches of international law in the Indo-Pacific. To back up its rhetoric, the Dutch government decided to send, in May 2021, the frigate HNLMS *Evertsen* to accompany the UK Carrier Strike Group on its mission to the Pacific (Okano-Heijmans, 2021).

41. **The EU strategy**, unveiled on 16 September 2021, is officially titled the “Strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific”, which already gives an indication of its non-belligerent nature. The document underlines the intense geopolitical competition in the region, but, at the same time, calls for maintaining a free and open Indo-Pacific for all, while building strong and lasting partnerships. More concretely, it seeks to enhance cooperation with Indo-Pacific nations as well as ASEAN in specific working areas such as the fight against climate change, cyber governance, digital sovereignty, competitiveness, markets access and investments. It highlights that the overall strategy does not seek to compete with Beijing but instead calls for cooperation. However, it does consider human rights as well as sanctions and other economic tools as leverage for restrictions against malign actors (EU Commission Press, 2021).

42. Overall, the EU-wide umbrella strategy is a major development not by the strength of its proposals, but as an acknowledgement of the evolving geopolitical realities. Indeed, seen in the light of the Union’s common foreign and security policy (CFSP) the document explicitly outlines a wide spectrum of potential engagement with countries in the Indo-Pacific, with a move away from an exclusive focus on trade and investment-based partnerships (Luthra, 2021). This illustrates the efforts made by the EU to adapt to a changing world strategic landscape. However, according to a study by the European Council on Foreign Relations (ECFR), Member States are still divided as to which angle (strategic or economic) to take (ECFR, 2021). For instance, only a few Member States would be willing to undertake maritime security missions. But in a deteriorating strategic environment with a return to war in Europe, the EU has decided to take a new step in its defence and security policy to address inter-power competition, and ongoing crises in its neighbourhood and to act where needed.

43. Indeed, the EU is developing its Strategic Compass, a document that bears some similarities to NATO’s Strategic Concept, and which should be adopted on 25 March 2022. This “compass” is intended to bring further guidance on the shared analysis of threats and vulnerabilities facing Europeans, including those in the Indo-Pacific region, as well as on the materialisation of Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP). The CMP is a flexible instrument that allows the EU Member States present in areas of maritime interest to share awareness, analysis, and information. It was first applied in 2021 in the Gulf of Guinea to support efforts by the coastal states



to tackle security challenges such as armed piracy and kidnapping for ransom. In February 2022, the EU Council concluded that the CMP concept in the Gulf of Guinea “has proven to be an effective and useful instrument, contributing to maritime security”, and decided to extend the implementation of the CMP concept in the North-Western Indian Ocean, which is a gateway to the Pacific (Council of Europe, 2022).

#### **IV- PRELIMINARY CONCLUSIONS: INTENSIFYING THE DIALOGUE AND STRENGTHENING PRACTICAL COOPERATION WITH PARTNER COUNTRIES**

44. Russia’s unprovoked assault on Ukraine on 24 February 2022 is a global game-changer and will have a major impact on how the Euro-Atlantic community prioritises its security interests, at least in the short- to medium-term. Relationships with China will now depend greatly on Beijing’s position vis-à-vis Russia. Should China choose to continue to assume a relatively neutral stance and abstain from extensively supporting and bailing out the Russian regime, it would be prudent for the Allies to pursue a balanced and compartmentalised China policy, along the lines of the prevailing European approach – that China is altogether a systemic rival, a competitor and a partner.

45. The Allies must reduce their strategic dependency on China: while NATO or the EU cannot prevent their member states from receiving Chinese investments, legislation and contracts should be coordinated in order to ensure that NATO would have access to critical infrastructure in case of a major crisis. Such precautions were mandatory during the Cold War, and they need to be fully applicable today. Close cooperation with the EU is critical in this regard, especially when it comes to ensuring military mobility. According to General Jörg Vollmer, Commander of the NATO Allied Joint Forces Command Brunssum, the Chinese investments in Europe already pose a risk to “the control of the flow of freight to various degrees.” The EU brings an invaluable contribution in mapping the inventory of Chinese investments, whether public or private, in transport infrastructure and telecommunications throughout Europe (Lagneau, 2021). In the longer term, NATO could play a specific and complementary role in the assessment of third-country investments in critical infrastructures and in providing advice to the Allies concerned. NATO and the EU members should also address the urgent issue of excessive supply chain dependency on China<sup>7</sup>. And finally, the Allies should show unwavering solidarity with those Allies, such as Lithuania, that are being subjected to intimidation and severe sanctions by China. This solidarity should also extend in an appropriate form to the partners.

46. At the same time, dialogue with China needs to proceed in a number of areas. NATO must continue insisting that China, as a mature global power, should start engaging in arms control arrangements. The dialogue should also lead to more tangible results in areas such as the denuclearisation of the Korean peninsula, measures to prevent Afghanistan from becoming a terrorist haven, or the climate agenda. Finally, given that China is a major contributor to UN peacekeeping operations and that NATO has extensive experience in the training of troops for such missions, exchanges between the Chinese authorities and NATO on the standards and rules applicable to such operations can only benefit both parties and the beneficiaries of such operations.

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<sup>7</sup> For more details, refer to the preliminary draft report of the Economics and Security Committee (ESC) entitled “Strategic Trade Challenges: Securing Essential Industries and Supply Chains”.

47. Various experts have suggested formalising the relationship between China and NATO and even creating a NATO-China Council (Pavel and Brzezinski, 2019). At this stage, this approach is unlikely to occur, not least because Beijing is reluctant to deal with the Alliance *per se* and favours bilateral relations with individual Allies. Moreover, the recent example of the NATO-Russia Council proves that this kind of structure is not necessarily productive and does not necessarily yield constructive results. Given Beijing's openness to informal dialogue, the Allies should focus on the contents rather than formats of this dialogue.

48. In the medium term, NATO as an organisation is highly unlikely to be involved in FOIP-type of mission as an organisation. In the wake of the Russian aggression, NATO's resources will need to be concentrated on defence and deterrence in Europe. However, Allies with substantial maritime capabilities – particularly the United States, France and the United Kingdom – have their role to play in advancing this concept. There should be better coordination and exchange of information between them in a more inclusive approach, in order to avoid the sort of friction that arose over the proposed sale of submarines to Australia. NATO's approach to the Indo-Pacific region will remain focused on enhancing partnerships with like-minded countries in the region.

49. The key priority area for these partnerships is cooperation on global norm-setting. The authoritarian powers, Russia and China, are methodically building a network of African, Asian, and Latin American nations that would support their vision of international order. NATO should collaborate with its primary institutional partner, the European Union, and like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific region to make sure that the rules and standards governing digital and other emerging technologies are compatible with the values of the Euro-Atlantic community. NATO should continue reinforcing its information exchange and intelligence sharing with Indo-Pacific partners, not least in order to benefit from their unique insights and expertise on regional matters. NATO and Indo-Pacific partners should also support each other in promoting the green transition to zero-carbon economies. As the current Russian-Ukrainian conflict demonstrates, this is not just an environmental matter but a matter of national security.

50. NATO should also be exploring the opportunities to expand partnerships with other Indo-Pacific nations, particularly with India. As noted, New Delhi is diversifying its foreign policy and assuming a more assertive stance towards China. It is playing an important part in the Quad. The dialogue with India must be carefully calibrated, considering India's historic sensitivities and building upon India's growing cooperation with individual allies, especially with France. Cooperation with ASEAN countries on confidence and security-building measures in the maritime environment, where NATO has extensive expertise, must also be increased. However, in light of the limited resources of the Organisation's International Secretariat in terms of both staff and equipment, an increased engagement with Indo-Pacific countries should be matched by greater resources for the Political Affairs and Security Policy Division, while bearing in mind the needs for sustainability, affordability and accountability rightly reiterated by the Allied Heads of State and Government on 14 June 2021. In its 2020 Declaration 460 "NATO 2030: A More United and Stronger Alliance on the Global Stage", the NATO PA also suggested that Allies explore the possibility of creating a NATO-accredited Centre of Excellence in the Indo-Pacific region.

51. Despite the magnitude of the current crisis in Europe, Allied policymakers should not lose sight of the fact that, in the long term, the global strategic pivot to the Indo-Pacific remains the most significant tectonic shift of the 21<sup>st</sup> century to which NATO will need to adapt. Expanding and deepening NATO partnerships in the region is a crucial element of this adaptation.

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