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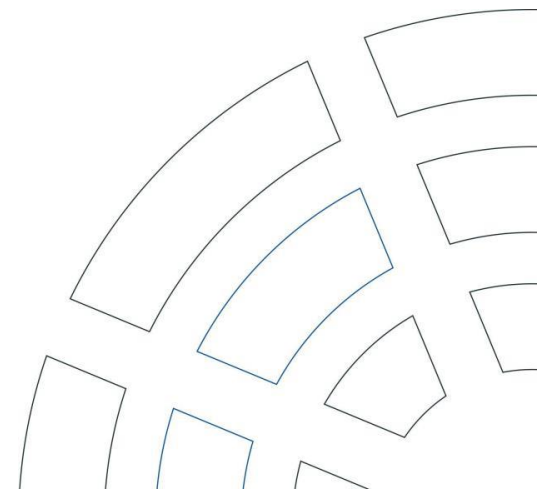
DRAFT GENERAL REPORT

NATO AND THE INDO-PACIFIC REGION

Draft General 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.



NATO's new Strategic Concept has highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific for Allied security and endorsed the growing collaboration with like-minded partners in the region. This partnership is becoming increasingly important today as the world's geopolitical centre of gravity is shifting towards the Indo-Pacific region.

The draft report explores the geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific, marked by rising tensions and increased tendency to create competing blocs. The growing assertiveness of the People's Republic of China and its challenge to the rules-based global order is arguably a major source of concern for Allies and their like-minded partners in the region. The report therefore suggests that the key priority area for co-operation with these partners is on global norm-setting, to ensure 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 political dialogue and practical co-operation with Indo-Pacific partners, not least in order to benefit from their unique insights and expertise on regional matters. The Rapporteur argues that, in the medium term, NATO as an organisation is unlikely to be involved in major maritime missions to project stability in the Indo-Pacific. However, Allies with substantial maritime capabilities – particularly the United States, France and the United Kingdom – have a role to play in advancing the concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, in a coordinated and inclusive manner.

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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 new Strategic Concept adopted at the Madrid summit. Focus on collective defence is imperative, especially in the context of Russia's illegal and barbaric invasion of Ukraine. That said, NATO, since the end of the Cold War, redefined 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. The new Strategic Concept reaffirms this approach.

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). The new Strategic Concept acknowledges the link between the Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic security. This draft 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 first-, 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 Indo-Pacific.

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 emerges stemming from China's rise, growing assertiveness and increasingly competitive relationship with the United States. Given its immense potential, the Indo-Pacific region is

consequently facing an increasingly complex regional security environment that poses major risks for the region and, by extension, for the rest of the world.

7. In recent years, NATO has been increasingly turning its attention to the Indo-Pacific region. 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 new Strategic Concept contains extensive references to China and implies that it is a strategic competitor. At the same time, NATO has considerably expanded co-operation with the Asia-Pacific partners (the so-called AP4: Australia, Japan, the Republic of Korea, and New Zealand) in the areas such as cyber, technology, resilience, arms control, maritime security and climate change. Relevant AP4 ministers are regularly invited to NATO ministerial meetings since 2020. The remarkable intensification of political dialogue with AP4 culminated in their participation in the 2022 Madrid Summit at the head of state and government level. In the new Strategic Concept, Allies recognised that “the Indo-Pacific is important for NATO” and that “developments in that region can directly affect Euro-Atlantic security”. Allies also pledged to strengthen cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners, including potentially with new ones, “to tackle cross-regional challenges and shared security interests”. The unmistakable rapprochement between NATO and the AP4 is driven not only by the Alliance’s growing recognition of the global importance of the Indo-Pacific region, but also by the fact that the AP4 are also alarmed by Russia’s aggression against Ukraine as undermining the rules-based international order. The AP4 countries have introduced sanctions on Russia and provide practical support to Ukraine. While the serious threats currently facing the Alliance’s immediate environment motivate Allies to focus on their own backyard, NATO, reflecting the growing convergence of interests with AP4 countries, continues to work on a shared understanding of the Indo-Pacific region and to upgrade engagement with like-minded partners there.

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 the Republic of Korea, 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 464¹ 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 Concept², NATO PA called for an agreed policy towards China based on engagement, 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 recommended 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, Korean and Japanese delegations regularly attend NATO PA sessions.

¹ Resolution 464 “[A transatlantic strategy on China](#)”, presented by Gerald E. Connolly (United States) and adopted by the NATO PA on 23 November 2020.

² NATO PA’s contribution to NATO’s New Strategic Concept 2022, unanimously adopted by the Assembly’s Standing Committee on 22 February 2022.

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 and growing assertiveness of the **People's Republic of China** (PRC) which in turn is driving a number of its neighbours, and countries along the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), to rethink their national security strategies in an attempt to counterbalance its growth, or, conversely, to follow suit.

10. The external perception of the PRC has fundamentally changed between the Summer and Winter Olympics held in Beijing. Seen as striving towards being open and embracing the rules-based world order in 2008, in 2022 the PRC is widely feared and criticised for increasingly authoritarian domestic policies. The oppression inflicted on the Muslim Uighur minority has drawn international condemnation. The PRC 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, the PRC has abandoned Deng Xiaoping's famous dictum "Hide your strength, bide your time." According to the estimates of the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the PRC's defence spending has increased by 76% between 2011–2020 (SIPRI, 2021), and, in 2021, the PRC was firmly the world's second largest military spender with \$293 billion, far surpassing Russia but still behind the United States (with \$801 billion in 2021) (SIPRI, 2022). The PRC 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 the PRC'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 the PRC "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 in the summer of 2020 (Regaud, 2021). Using a series of incremental actions, none of which constitute a *casus belli*, China the PRC 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.

13. Another key centre of tensions is the complex relationship between the PRC and the island of Taiwan: in recent years and months, particularly after China's crackdown on Hong Kong's bid for autonomy in 2019 and 2020, tension across the Taiwan Strait has been building up, manifesting in escalatory statements by PRC's senior military officials and increasing incursions into Taiwan's air defence identification zone raise the risk of incidents and escalation (Regaud, 2021). Tensions escalated to a dangerous level in the summer of 2022, when following the visit of the Speaker of the US House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi to Taipei, the PRC announced extensive live-fire drills around the island of Taiwan, including reportedly firing missiles over the island (France24, 2022). The decades-long status quo over Taiwan is now arguably more fragile. The Biden administration has made clear that its policy regarding the status quo has not changed. While Beijing's muscle-flexing and brinkmanship is the primary source of renewed tensions, the PRC, the US and the authorities in Taipei continue to calibrate their activities in the region to avoid an open war. China is also undoubtedly watching the united and resolute reaction to Russia's aggression against Ukraine closely.

14. The third regional “hot spot” is linked to the dispute between the PRC and Japan regarding the Senkaku Islands in the East China Sea. In 10 years since Japan acquired these islands from a private owner in 2012, Tokyo has registered 332 cases of Chinese vessels entering waters around the islands, including 19 cases this year (as of September) (Japan Times, 2022).

15. 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).

16. Economically, since 2013, the PRC 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 the PRC’s partners benefit from the BRI³, it is becoming increasingly regarded as an instrument for the PRC to advance its geopolitical interests, collect intelligence, stifle criticism of the 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 USD1 billion in loans (*Le Monde*, 2018).

17. Finally, Beijing continues to nurture close political, economic and military ‘no-limits’ partnership with the aggressor state Russia. It is worth noting that Putin gave the order to invade Ukraine weeks after issuing a joint statement with Xi Jinping and three days after the end of Beijing Olympics. The PRC refused to condemn Moscow’s behaviour and the Chinese media is broadcasting the Russian version of events. In August 2022, the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) also participated in Russia’s massive *Vostok* military drills. However, Beijing did abstain – rather than veto – during the UN vote on the resolution condemning Russia. The PRC and Russia are not completely aligned. At the summit of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) in Samarkand in September, Putin publicly acknowledged Beijing’s ‘concerns’ about the war in Ukraine, and the PRC’s reaction to Putin’s announcement of mobilisation was to call on “all relevant parties” to negotiate a ceasefire (Gan, 2022). The PRC could gain a political advantage from the crisis by presenting itself as the more reasonable component of the Moscow-Beijing axis. It could also benefit economically since the isolated Russia has 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. The PRC 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 the PRC 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, the PRC 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.

18. 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

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

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 issues 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 Chinese 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 long-standing constitutional and capacity limitations placed on its military apparatus for historical reasons somewhat limit Tokyo's 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 increased tensions between Washington, Beijing, and Moscow could render this compartmentalised approach more difficult over time.

19. Due to its vulnerable geopolitical situation, the Republic of Korea (ROK) has been avoiding open confrontations with Beijing. Former ROK's Prime Minister Moon Jae-In's "New South Policy" (NSP) has sought to re-prioritise 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, the ROK 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 the PRC 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. The new President Yoon Suk-yeol, who assumed office in May 2022, seeks to further expand the strategic ties with the US and develop closer partnership with Japan.⁴ In August 2022, the United States and ROK held their largest joint military exercise in years and in September the US dispatched an aircraft carrier for the first time since 2018 for joint military drills with the ROK (AlJazeera, 2022). Seoul also distanced itself from the PRC in the areas of technologies and innovation, moving these to the top of the joint US-Korea agenda. Along with Taiwan and Japan, the ROK is one of Asia's leaders in the field of semiconductors (through the Samsung and SK Hynix Inc. companies). The US under both Trump and Biden administrations have sought stronger cooperation with ROK in this area in order to mitigate supply chain dependency on PRC (Péron-Doise, 22 July 2021).

20. 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 (Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United Kingdom and the United States), Japan, Indonesia, India and the ROK (Australian Government, 2017). Concluded in 2021, the AUKUS (Australia, the United Kingdom and the United

⁴ ROK-Japan relations have not been without tensions in the past over issues of historical memory as well as over ownership of a group of islets in the Sea of Japan.

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.

21. 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. According to New Zealand’s Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern, New Zealand did not expect to be invited to join AUKUS. New Zealand’s long-standing nuclear-free principles make it unlikely for the country to apply for AUKUS membership. Nevertheless, New Zealand welcomed the increased engagement of the US and the UK in the region, and recently signed an agreement with the US to step up co-operation on space technologies (Miller, 2022).

22. **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, which claimed several lives. Confronted – even more than Australia – by a direct threat from the PRC, India is also trying to consolidate its partnerships, particularly with Japan, but also within the Quad. Nevertheless, India has been averse to entering into a direct alliance with the Western powers, due to its tradition of non-alignment, its historically close relations with Russia and its reluctance to unnecessarily escalate regional tensions.

23. 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, view 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.

24. The strategic importance of the Pacific islands has also been increasing. China sees these islands as an important component of the BRI and has significantly intensified its investments and diplomatic contacts with many of the island nations over the last decade, becoming the second largest donor after Australia. China’s direct investments in these islands grew from \$900 million in 2013 to \$4.5 billion in 2018 (Liu, 2022). China is now beginning to convert its economic clout into security influence, as manifested in the signing of a defence agreement with the Solomon Islands in April 2022. The Solomon Islands occupy a strategic location in the vicinity of Australia and New Zealand. Australia and the United States are also intensifying their economic and diplomatic

outreach to Pacific islands. The Biden administration seeks to triple funding for economic development in the region and is developing its first Pacific Island strategy, focusing on issues such as climate change, sustainable management of the ocean and combatting illegal fishing (Michael Miller, 2022).

25. 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. Several years ago, the DPRK made some attempts to introduce a restricted version of a free internal market and to ease tensions with its southern neighbour and the United States. During the 2018 Winter Olympics in Pyeongchang, the DPRK and ROK teams marched together in the opening ceremony in a symbolic gesture of reconciliation that had not been seen for more than a decade. In 2018–2019, Kim Jong-un also met with the ROK president, Moon Jae-in, as well as with President Trump. However, these initiatives did not lead to a breakthrough: even though the COVID-19 pandemic has devastated the North Korean economy, Kim Jong-Un continues the nuclear blackmailing strategy to obtain sanctions relief. In 2019, it resumed ballistic missile tests. These tests have become increasingly frequent in 2021-2022, included reported launches of longer range and submarine-launched ballistic missiles, cruise missiles and even hypersonic missiles. In September 2022, ROK officials have been warning that the DPRK plans to conduct its first nuclear weapon test since 2017 (six nuclear tests were conducted between 2006 and 2017) (Lee, 2022). The DPRK also adopted a law declaring itself to be a nuclear weapons state (BBC, 2022). Pyongyang's increased missile testing has led to a rise in voices in the ROK and Japan calling for some form of nuclear weapons capability on their soil, either through a nuclear-sharing arrangement with the United States or even (in the ROK's case) contemplating the acquisition of nuclear weapons. 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 the DPRK (Revere, 2021). This gambit is unlikely to succeed. A potentially promising avenue to engage with the 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).

26. 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 that could trigger major environmental crises with dire humanitarian and security consequences.

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

A. NATO'S GLOBAL PARTNERSHIPS

27. NATO's initial approach to the Indo-Pacific did not include a PRC angle. Future AP4 partners sporadically participated in NATO workshops and other projects from the 1990s, then a more structured dialogue with these countries was established in the following decades, mainly in the context of operational co-operation in Afghanistan. NATO's increased interest in these partnerships was reflected in the 2010 Strategic Concept and the revision – in 2011 – of NATO partnership policy.

A further boost to global partnerships occurred in 2014, when the Russian invasion in Ukraine prompted countries such as Australia – concerned with the impact on the rules-based international order – to seek active engagement with NATO. Since around 2018, when the issue of a rising China began to gain traction in NATO circles, contacts with like-minded “Partners across the Globe” have been further upgraded. AP4 have been regularly holding meetings at the ambassadorial level in the North Atlantic Council (NAC)’s “NAC+4” format. Since December 2020, Australia, Japan, New Zealand and the ROK have participated in several NATO Ministerials, where the implications of the rise of the PRC were discussed. In recent years, topics addressed in the NAC+4 meetings have also included the security situation on the Korean Peninsula and maritime security. In June 2022, AP4 attended the Madrid Summit at the level of heads of state and government. All AP4 nations imposed sanctions on Russia, following its invasion in Ukraine in 2022.

28. 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 contributors 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 2022 and provided AUD 388 million in military assistance to Ukraine as well as AUD 65 million in humanitarian assistance since the Russian invasion on 24 February (DFAT Australia, 2022).

29. **Japan** also has an ambitious co-operation agenda with NATO. The organisation’s contacts with Japan (joint seminars and high-level consultations) predate the Partnership for Peace program. During the operation in Afghanistan, Japan did not deploy troops, but provided financial assistance by contributing to the NATO-led trust fund projects, and played a leading role in the disarmament, demobilisation 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 late 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. Recent examples of NATO-Japan co-operation include holding joint naval exercises in the Mediterranean and Baltic Seas as well as the official visit of Admiral Rob Bauer, Chair of the NATO Military Committee, to Japan (NATO, 2022).

30. 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, the 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 the DPRK in their Summit communiqués, while the ROK is now participating regularly at NATO's Conference on Weapons of Mass Destruction, Arms Control, Disarmament and Non-Proliferation. Its increased level of practical co-operation with the Alliance is indicative of Seoul's growing concern over the durability of the post-WWII regional security order, which brought extraordinary prosperity to the country, but which is now being seen as in need of revision by a new generation of Northeast Asian leaders.

31. 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 *Resolute Support* missions 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).

32. Aside from the aforementioned countries, a notable NATO Global Partner in the region is **Mongolia**. Like the ROK, 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 the PRC 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 personnel 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 NATO's Defence Education Enhancement Programme (DEEP) (NATO, 2021). Being sandwiched between two autocracies, Mongolia's efforts to consolidate its democracy also benefit from participation in NATO's Building Integrity initiative. Young democracies like Mongolia could potentially benefit from co-operation with the Centre for Democratic Resilience in NATO, should one be established, as this Assembly is strongly suggesting, to serve as a resource and a clearinghouse of best practices and cross-fertilisation on democratic benchmarks available to member, partner and aspirant states, upon request.

33. 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 the PRC and more recently, with Russia. Islamabad's proposal to host naval units from 45 countries (including the United States, the PRC and Russia) for a joint exercise in the Northern Arabian Sea is emblematic of Pakistan's multi-pronged tactics (Gul, 2021). It is also notable that NATO's disaster relief co-ordination mechanisms were not activated

during the catastrophic flooding in Pakistan in 2022. 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 not again become a safe haven for international terrorists.

34. 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 for two decades. Over time, the mandate of this mission had 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 had 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 were 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 dented the legacy of a two-decades-long mission and affected the reputation of the Alliance. NATO and several Allies have launched lessons learned processes.⁵ The increasingly oppressive and non-inclusive Taliban regime has dramatically curbed the rights of women and forbidden girls from returning to secondary school, causing a global outcry. While the subsequent global events have overtaken the international attention away from the developments in Afghanistan, the looming humanitarian and economic implosion of the country as well as the presence of extremist groups on its territory present a challenge that Euro-Atlantic policymakers cannot afford to ignore.

B. NATO AND THE PEOPLE'S REPUBLIC OF CHINA

35. The PRC did not enter NATO's radar screen until the late 2010s – not only because the PRC did not directly threaten Allied security interests, but also due to the lack of converging views among the Allies on the PRC's rise. There was not a single reference to the PRC in the 2010 Strategic Concept. However, in recent years, and especially during the pandemic, NATO made huge strides in thinking about the PRC and reaching a common understanding of the challenge posed by it to the Alliance specifically. As expressed by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg, this happened not because NATO developed an appetite for presence in the Indo-Pacific, but because the PRC came closer to NATO – both in the physical (military and economic) domain and in cyber space. NATO is concerned about the PRC's non-transparent investments in European infrastructure, its development of long-range nuclear capability, its malign cyber and disinformation activities as well as its attempts to set international norms and standards on emerging technologies that are not compatible with NATO's values. The 2021 NATO Summit communiqué identified the PRC as a destabilising force that presents "systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security". The new Strategic Concept builds on this position, noting that the PRC's "stated ambitions and coercive policies challenge our interests, security and values". More specifically, the Strategic Concept refers to the PRC's military build-up, malicious hybrid operations, confrontational rhetoric, economic policies aimed at creating strategic dependencies, as well as Beijing-Moscow collaboration in subverting the rules-based global order. In the Strategic Concept, Allies committed to working together to address these challenges, including in the area of freedom of navigation. The PRC's view of NATO has also evolved over years: while Beijing sees the Alliance as a vehicle to promote the US interest, in the February joint Putin-Xi statement, the PRC for the first

⁵ 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 Lessons Learned](#)".

time has explicitly criticised NATO's enlargement and supported the Russian narrative on the "long-term legally binding security guarantees in Europe".

36. At the same time, NATO leaders continue to call for a constructive dialogue with the PRC where possible, in areas such as addressing climate change and increasing military transparency. At irregular intervals, high-level political dialogues are held between NATO and Chinese officials: 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. The PRC 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 the PRC 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 the PRC keeps on portraying itself as a developing country that cannot assume obligations under 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 was the situation in Afghanistan.

37. That said, while the Strategic Concept stops short of identifying the PRC as a threat, it clearly puts an emphasis on boosting shared awareness and enhancing resilience in order to "protect against the PRC's coercive tactics and efforts to divide the Alliance." NATO has made considerable efforts to raise Allied awareness of the issue of the PRC and an analysis of Chinese activities is now embedded in a range of policy documents. One of the biggest and most complex strands of work for NATO in the implementation of the new Strat Concept is going to be to detail the principles laid out in it, relating to the PRC, into actionable policies and priorities. NATO is currently more concerned with what to do about the PRC than with the PRC. Mr Stoltenberg explicitly stated that the opportunity to engage in missions in the Indo-Pacific region 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. The Chinese challenge is an important part of the context in which NATO-AP4 co-operation takes place. Finally, NATO and EU officials are debating the challenge that the PRC poses and the new Strategic Concept identifies the coordination of strategies vis-à-vis the PRC as one of the areas of co-operation between the two organisations.

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

38. 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 ROK and Japan, totalling over 80,000 troops in those two countries alone (Hussein and Haddad, 2021). President Trump gave a boost to his predecessor's "Pivot to Asia" policy, when in his speech in November 2017 talked about a vision for a FOIP – which built on Japan's late Prime Minister Abe's similar FOIP formulation. A second foundational document was the December 2017 National Security Strategy, which called China a 'revisionist power,' and then doubled down on June 2019 with a Department of Defense Strategy Report describing that 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 developed bipartisan urgency in Washington to push back on China's assertiveness (Paskal et al., 2021).

39. 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 the PRC 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 the PRC, including the reinvigoration of the Quad and the AUKUS deal. The Biden administration seeks to upgrade partnerships with ASEAN countries, including hosting a major US-ASEAN Summit in May 2022 where plans for co-operation in areas such as digital development, climate change, and maritime domain were introduced (Kurlantzick, 2022).

40. In May 2022, the Biden administration also introduced the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), thus offering a new format for economic engagement with the region following the previous administration's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) in 2017. Unlike TTP, which was envisaged as a more traditional free trade agreement, IPEF focuses on promoting fair trade, labour standards, supply chain resilience, decarbonisation and digitalisation. IPEF's 14 members do not include China. In the context of the Sino-American competition, it is notable that Beijing made a strategic move and applied for membership in TPP's successor, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). However, it is questionable that China would meet membership standards, given Beijing's China's track record in observing the WTO's principles of non-discrimination and transparency (Ding & Zhao, 2022).

41. 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 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 islands. 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*" format⁶. The United Kingdom also leveraged 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 the PRC (TV5 Monde, 2021).

42. **France** is an Indo-Pacific power in its own right. The autonomous island of New-Caledonia and its other overseas territories in the region are home to over 1.6 million French citizens. These territories cover huge maritime areas (9 million km²). 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

⁶ 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.

of the Armed Forces of the French Republic, 2019). France actively maintains strategic, political and economic partnerships in the region, including recently signing a contract for the sale of 42 Rafale aircraft, as well as other agreements on submarines and ammunition with Indonesia. (*France24*, 2022). Other partnerships have been concluded with India, Japan and the ASEAN.

43. 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 push back against Chinese unilateralism. In 2021, the deployment of the French SSN *Émeraude* 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 other regional countries that are concerned by the risk of escalation of tensions in the region.

44. NATO Allies the U.S., the U.K. and France have not always been able to co-ordinate their Indo-Pacific policies. In January 2012, France signed a partnership agreement with Australia, instituting close cooperation between the two countries in all areas, especially in terms of security and defence. This partnership 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 Australia–United Kingdom–United States (AUKUS) bloc in September 2021 – a secret that had been carefully guarded by its three participants, despite the fact that they were allies and partners of France, invalidated this Franco-Australian strategic partnership. 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 – provoked an outcry in Paris and Brussels and a brief period of diplomatic tension between allied countries. Franco-American relations resumed following Washington’s recognition that the Allies concerned had not been adequately consulted and reaffirmation of the strategic importance of French and European engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. In July 2022, newly elected Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese visited Paris, where he issued a joint statement with President Macron committing to “building a closer and stronger bilateral relationship” and developing a “new agenda for cooperation” in the areas of defence and security, climate change, and education and culture (Edel, 2022). AUKUS primarily focuses on providing Australia with nuclear propulsion technology for its next generation submarines. The co-operation within the AUKUS framework also includes training for Australian submariners on UK and US boats. The deal is expected to significantly increase Australia’s defence and deterrence capacity and thus change security calculations in the region. It is, however, possible that Australia will face a period of capability gap as its existing naval fleet is aging and the new submarines are expected to be delivered in the 2030s or even 2040s. It must be noted that AUKUS extends beyond submarines to include deepened collaboration on a range of military capabilities, including hypersonics, artificial intelligence, electronic warfare and innovation more generally (Shepherd, 2022).

45. **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” (Grare, 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 PRC-Germany relations and the growing discontent vis-à-vis the PRC throughout Europe over its management of the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as the growing dependency on the

PRC 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).

46. 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 the PRC 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).

47. **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).

48. Overall, the EU-wide umbrella strategy is a major development not because of 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.

49. In the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February, which Beijing failed to condemn, the EU has taken a more resolute stance: it has introduced measures designed to reduce Europe’s economic dependency on the PRC, agreed with Tokyo to deepen “exchanges on China, notably with regard to ... security dynamics”, and decided to upgrade trade dialogue with Taiwan (Ardissino & Freymann, 2022). In March 2022, the EU adopted its Strategic Compass, a document that bears some similarities to NATO’s Strategic Concept. The Compass acknowledges the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific and recognises both the necessity to engage with China and the need to push back against its assertive behaviour. According to the Compass, the EU’s engagement with the region will focus on tailored partnerships, co-operation with ASEAN as well as on the materialisation of Coordinated Maritime Presences (CMP) (EU, 2022). 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- CONCLUSIONS: INTENSIFYING THE DIALOGUE AND STRENGTHENING PRACTICAL COOPERATION WITH PARTNER COUNTRIES

50. 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. It is encouraging that the convergence of views on China among all Allies continues to grow, which is also reflected in the language of NATO’s new Strategic Concept and the EU’s Strategic Compass. Both align on China being a systemic rival, a competitor and on the need to also keep engaging with China. The adoption of the Strategic Concept and Strategic Compass should help close past disagreements and serve as a basis for moving forward in a coordinated manner.

51. 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 China⁷. 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.

52. 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.

53. 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 automatically yield

⁷ For more details, refer to the draft report of the Economics and Security Committee (ESC) entitled “[Strategic Trade Challenges: Securing Essential Industries and Supply Chains](#)”.

constructive results. Given Beijing's openness to informal dialogue, the Allies should focus on the contents rather than formats of this dialogue.

54. In the medium term, NATO as an organisation is highly unlikely to be involved in a FOIP-type mission as an organisation. In the wake of 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. In the spirit of Allied solidarity, some European maritime presence in the Indo-Pacific alongside the US has both symbolic and practical value. The EU can play a role in expanding the European maritime footprint in the Indo-Pacific by supporting the expansion of European port infrastructure in the region (HCSS, 2022).

55. NATO's approach to the Indo-Pacific region will remain focused on enhancing partnerships with like-minded countries in the region. The key priority area for these partnerships is cooperation on global norm-setting. The authoritarian powers, Russia and the PRC, 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.

56. 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 the PRC. 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 NATO'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.

57. 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 21st 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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