

Upholding a Rules-Based Order: Reinforcing a Free and Open Indo-Pacific

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Cover: Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida attends a news conference following the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) leaders meeting at the prime minister's official residence in Tokyo on May 24, 2022. (Photo by Kiyoshi Ota / POOL / AFP via Getty Images)

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This study is focused on regional order in the Indo-Pacific, as set out in the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific, and on the policies that the United States, Japan, Australia, India, and European allies have adopted to support this rules-based order in the face of multifaceted challenges posed by the rise of a powerful and assertive China.

This study considers the evolution of the foundational elements of a free and open Indo-Pacific, the conceptual origins as set out in Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe's first government by Foreign Minister Taro Aso, the increasing alliance-based cooperation between and among alliance partners, the development of alliance-based strategic partnerships across the region, the evolving multilateralism as reflected in the emergence of the Quad (the United States, Japan, Australia, and India), and the increasing engagement of European allies.

The free and open Indo-Pacific—as advanced by Foreign Minister Aso and Prime Minister Abe, and later adopted by the US—set out a framework for regional governance and order based on democracy, freedom, human rights, the rule of law, the market economy, the peaceful resolution of disputes, and opposition to force or coercion to change the status quo.

To support this vision, alliance ties have strengthened across the Indo-Pacific. Today, the US-Japan alliance is at a historic high point, having moved toward the strategic alignment of its respective policy documents. Meanwhile, the US and Australia have made the Indo-Pacific the focal point of the alliance, and Japan-Australia security ties have deepened, as underscored by the 2022 Reciprocal Access Agreement. At the same time, the Quad has engaged on wide-ranging economic and security issues relating to the region in support of a rules-based free and open Indo-Pacific.

And European engagement in the Indo-Pacific has continued to grow, as underscored by the United Kingdom's "tilt" toward

the region and participation in the AUKUS arrangement. Europe's expanding engagement is well outlined in the Indo-Pacific strategy documents of France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the European Union—all reflecting the recognition of Europe's growing economic, political, and security interests in the Indo-Pacific.

This study also considers the implication of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the response of Western powers for international order in Europe and the Indo-Pacific. Against a background of contemporary doubts about the staying power of the international order, the response of Western democracies, in both Europe and Asia, has been striking in their support of the rules-based international order.

In Europe, NATO's support for Ukraine has been constant. At the same time, Indo-Pacific allies, concerned about the implications of Ukraine for regional security, have joined in sanctions against Russia. Quad leaders meeting to discuss Ukraine also reaffirmed their support for a free and open Indo-Pacific, with Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida asserting that challenges to the international order, such as Russia's invasion of Ukraine, "should not be allowed in the Indo-Pacific."

The pursuit of a free and open Indo-Pacific order and reaffirmation of a rules-based order in both Asia and Europe now increasingly overlap. Then Foreign Secretary Liz Truss underscored to the Atlantic Council the importance of sustaining Western unity in the face of challenges to the international order—in Europe and in Asia. In her words, "Conflict anywhere threatens security everywhere. The Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific are indivisible."

The challenges going forward will be to sustain Western unity to support an international rules-based order—in Asia, this means reinforcing the free and open Indo-Pacific.

UPHOLDING A RULES-BASED ORDER IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Preface

I began this research project in the winter of 2021. The study is focused on a concept of regional order, a free and open Indo-Pacific, and on policies that the United States, Japan, Australia, India, and European allies adopted to support this rules-based order in the face of multifaceted challenges posed principally by the rise of an increasingly assertive China.¹

While country strategies and policies reflect respective national interests, policy documents reviewed in this study collectively point to a convergence with respect to (1) the values of democracy, transparency, and the rule of law, and (2) the interests of freedom of navigation, connectivity, and opposition to coercion or the use of force to effect changes in the status quo. These values and interests appear repeatedly in policy documents and statements in support of a rules-based free and open Indo-Pacific. Implementing actions have followed.

This study considers the evolution of foundational elements of a free and open Indo-Pacific—increasing alliance-based cooperation between and among alliance partners, the development of alliance-based strategic partnerships across the region, evolving multilateralism as reflected in the reemergence of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), and a growing European interest and engagement in the Indo-Pacific region.

As I was finishing this manuscript, Russia invaded Ukraine, a dramatic challenge to the Post–Cold War international order. Against a background of contemporary doubts about the staying power of the existing international order, the unified response of Western democracies has been striking in the rapid evolution of a sanctions-regime against Russia and in support of the rules-based international order.

Looking ahead, this unified Western response will hold implications for the future of order in the Indo-Pacific. This will be considered along with recommendations in the final section, “Concluding Thoughts.”

While European allies will, for the immediate future, be focused on the security challenge posed by Vladimir Putin’s Russia, over the long term, as their respective policy documents make clear, their economic, political, and security interests will be increasingly engaged in the Indo-Pacific. None will have a dominant security posture, but their presence and interests, as well as their opposition to the use of force or coercion to change the status quo, can have a significant normative value in support of a rules-based free and open Indo-Pacific.

At the same time, Indo-Pacific allies, concerned about the implications of Ukraine for stability and security in the region, have also joined in sanctions against Russia. On March 5, Quad leaders—the United States, Japan, Australia, and India—met via video teleconference. While the leaders discussed the humanitarian crisis in Ukraine, they also issued a joint statement that reaffirmed “their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, in which sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states is respected and countries are free from military, economic, and political coercion.”² Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida elaborated, “We’ve agreed that unilateral changes to the status quo with force like this should not be allowed in the Indo-Pacific region.”³

The May 24 Quad leaders’ meeting represents the latest effort to support a rules-based, free, and open Indo-Pacific order, the subject of this study.

A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Conceptual Origins

The conceptual origins of a free and open Indo-Pacific can be traced back to Japan and the first Shinzo Abe government (2006–07). Then Foreign Minister Taro Aso, in remarks to the Japan Institute of International Affairs, “The Arc of Freedom and Prosperity: Expanding Japan’s Diplomatic Horizons,” set out concepts of governance “based on universal values, such as democracy, freedom, human rights, rule of law and the market economy” to structure an emerging Asia-Pacific Community.

Aso's Arc of Freedom and Prosperity ran from Northeast Asia through Central Asia to the Middle East. The foreign minister challenged his diplomats to work toward its realization.⁴

The following year, Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in his remarks to the Parliament of India, "The Confluence of the Two Seas," expanded the Arc of Freedom and Prosperity to include Australia and the United States, an Indo-Pacific expanse to be governed by "shared fundamental values, such as freedom, democracy and the respect for human rights as well as strategic interests."⁵ Nine years later, after returning to office, Abe, in his address to the Opening Session of the Sixth Tokyo International Conference on African Development, returned to the Confluence of the Two Seas, pledging that Japan would bear the responsibility of "fostering a confluence of the Pacific and Indian Oceans and of Asia and Africa into a place that values freedom, rule of law and the market economy, free from force or coercion."⁶

Subsequently, a free and open Indo-Pacific became Japanese government policy. The United States under Presidents Donald Trump and Joe Biden adopted a similar version that emphasized freedom of navigation, transparency, rule of law, opposition to the use of force or coercion, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. Australia, India, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the United Kingdom, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the European Union have done the same.

Order under Stress

The various efforts to define the rules and values of governance in the Indo-Pacific have evolved against the background of a rising China. China's dynamic economy, joined by a 44-fold increase in military spending over the past three decades, brought Beijing new instruments of influence and power—which it has not hesitated to employ as both punishment and reward.⁷

Punitive measures, a demonstrated willingness to use its economic leverage to express political displeasure, marked Chinese diplomacy against Japan during the 2010 Senkaku fishing boat incident;

in 2017 against South Korea in response to its decision to deploy the THAAD anti-ballistic missile defense system; in 2020 against Australia in response to its criticisms of China's management of the COVID-19 crisis and suppression of freedoms in Hong Kong and Xinjiang; and in 2021 against Taiwan for perceived moves by Taipei toward independence. Also in 2021, China adopted a wide-ranging Anti-Foreign Sanctions Law, which Beijing has used to impose sanctions on Raytheon Technologies and Lockheed Martin for arms sales to Taiwan and on other foreign companies in retaliation for Western sanctions on Chinese businesses.

In addition, President Xi Jinping turned China's surging economy outward. In 2014, China established the Silk Road Fund, capitalized at \$40 billion, to address infrastructure needs in the Asia-Pacific region. A year later, Beijing launched the Asian Infrastructure Development Bank. And in 2017, the National People's Congress adopted President Xi's Belt and Road Initiative as government policy. Economists have estimated the total value of BRI infrastructure projects at nearly \$4 trillion, expanding Chinese economic and political influence across the Indo-Pacific to Africa, the Middle East, and Europe.

At the same time, China moved assertively to advance territorial claims and contest maritime resources with Japan, the Philippines, Malaysia, Indonesia, and Vietnam and on its land frontier with India.

In 2012, China denied Philippine fishing boats access to Scarborough Shoal, which is located within the Philippines exclusive economic zone. This led Manila to bring the dispute to the International Court of Arbitration at the Hague. In 2014, China, while denying the court's jurisdiction in the Philippine case, began the construction of artificial islands in the South China Sea. Subsequently, China moved to deploy military assets to the structures, contravening an understanding between President Xi and President Barack Obama that China would not fortify the structures. At the same time, the China National Offshore Oil Company began exploration in disputed waters south of the Paracel Islands,

in an area claimed by Vietnam as within its exclusive economic zone. To support its claims, Hanoi deployed patrol boats to the area, which China's Coast Guard engaged and rammed.

In 2016, the Hague Tribunal ruled largely in support of the Philippine case, rejecting China's nine-dash line claims to historic rights in the South China Sea. Beijing dismissed the ruling as “nothing but a piece of paper” and has continued, in defiance of the court's judgment, to assert sovereignty claims in the South China Sea.

Continuing China's challenge to the rules-based international order, the Standing Committee of the National People's Congress, in 2021, adopted legislation that allowed the Chinese Coast Guard to use “all necessary means,” including “weapons,” to defend China's “national sovereignty, security, and maritime rights and interests” in China's “jurisdictional waters,” a concept not recognized in international law.⁸ At the end of December 2021, Beijing announced new regulations that would allow the Chinese Coast Guard to fine foreign fishing boats operating in its “jurisdictional waters.” In Japan and Southeast Asia, the law was widely viewed as an attempt to legitimize Chinese actions in the East China Sea and South China Sea.

Watching China's growing assertiveness and influence, the Australian government in its 2017 Foreign Policy White Paper assessed that the Indo-Pacific was undergoing a “strategic transition” as significant as the region's earlier economic transformation. It also concluded that China's surging economy was “accelerating shifts in relative economic and strategic weight,” giving Beijing “power and influence to match, and, in some cases, exceed that of the United States” in parts of the region. The white paper judged that the United States' “long dominance of the international order [was] being challenged by other powers,” bringing to a close “a post-Cold War lull in major power rivalry.” The future would be defined by intensifying competition “over both power and principles and values on which the regional order should be based.”⁹

Commenting on his government's 2020 Defence Strategic Update, Prime Minister Scott Morrison observed that Australia had never faced a “less benign” environment since the implosion of the global and regional orders in the 1930s and 1940s. US-China strategic competition, challenges to the rules-based order, accelerating military modernization, and the growing use of coercion combined to yield what he called a “conflation of global, economic, and strategic uncertainty.”¹⁰

Similarly, New Zealand, in its 2018 Strategic Defense Policy Statement, assessed that the country had not faced “a more challenging and complex strategic environment—one in which the international rules-based order . . . is coming under increasing pressure . . . of a scope and magnitude not previously seen in our neighborhood.”¹¹

Japan, in its 2019 Diplomatic Bluebook, indicted China for “unilateral actions and attempts to change the status quo by force or coercion in the sea and the air space in the East China Sea and the South China Sea based on its own assertions which are incompatible with the existing order of international law of the sea.” Further, the Bluebook found Beijing's rejection of the Hague ruling as confirming “the lawlessness of China's land reclamation and other actions.”¹² The 2020 Bluebook found China's actions are “incompatible with the law of the sea” and in the South China Sea represent “unilateral actions to change the status quo that run counter to the rule of law and openness and attempt to make the results of these actions a fait accompli.”¹³

On February 4, 2022, China and Russia, in a joint statement issued after a meeting between President Xi and President Vladimir Putin, announced their challenge to the US-led Asia-Pacific alliance structure.

The statement, reiterating China's long-standing opposition to alliances and military blocs, announced that “the sides stand against the formation of closed bloc structures and opposing camps in the Asia-Pacific region and remain vigilant about the negative impact

of the United States' Indo-Pacific strategy on peace and stability in the region.” It expressed serious concern about “the trilateral security partnership between Australia, the United States and the United Kingdom” in provisioning nuclear-powered submarines to Australia as “contrary to the objectives of security and sustainable development of the Asia-Pacific region.” Of similar concern was the deployment of intermediate and short-range missiles, which could only increase “tension and distrust.”¹⁴

Twenty days later, on February 24, 2022, Russia invaded Ukraine, vitiating the joint statement’s claim to respect the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity and making the new era look strikingly similar to the nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century eras. Russia’s aggression has also raised security concerns across the Indo-Pacific, causing regional governments to consider its implications for the future of a free and open Indo-Pacific regional order.

Reinforcing a Free and Open Pacific

President Trump, in remarks to the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) CEO meeting in Danang, Vietnam, in November 2017, set out his vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific. The president’s focus was on trade and a rules-based commercial order with the private sector playing the leading role in US engagement with the region.

Shortly afterward, the administration released its National Security Strategy (NSS) and National Defense Strategy (NDS) documents. Both set US interests in the Indo-Pacific within a larger context, redefining the US-China relationship from engagement to strategic competition. The National Security Strategy defined the Indo-Pacific as a region in which “geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place.”¹⁵ The following National Defense Strategy asserted that China’s objective in modernizing the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) was aimed at “regional hegemony in the near term” and at “global preeminence in the future,” with the ultimate objective of displacing the United States.¹⁶

The Biden administration’s Interim National Security Guidance projected China “as the only competitor potentially capable . . . to mount a sustained challenge to a stable and open international system.”¹⁷

Both the Trump and Biden security policy documents emphasized the importance of strengthening alliances to meet the challenges posed by China to the regional and international orders.

The Biden administration moved early to strengthen the US-Japan alliance and to address the mounting challenges to regional order and the free and open Indo-Pacific. The joint statements of the Security Consultative Committee (SCC) meeting on March 16, 2021, and the Biden-Suga summit on April 16, 2021, reflect the administration’s alliance-based approach to foreign policy and national security issues. Of note is a reference in both documents to “the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait”—the first ever to appear in a joint US-Japan policy document, reflecting the growing concerns in both Washington and Tokyo about the implications of a Taiwan contingency to US and Japanese security interests. President Biden and Japanese Prime Minister Yoshihide Suga reaffirmed a commitment to “coordinate and implement our policies toward realization of a free and open Indo-Pacific.”¹⁸

In January 2022, the SCC reaffirmed the critical role of the alliance as “the cornerstone of regional, peace, security and prosperity” and a commitment “to constantly modernize the Alliance . . . by fully aligning strategies and prioritizing goals together to address evolving security challenges in an ever more integrated manner.” The allies reaffirmed a commitment “to the rules-based international order as well as fundamental values and principles” and expressed “concerns that the ongoing efforts by China to undermine the rules-based order present political, economic, military, and technological challenges to the region and the world.”

The joint statement from the meeting expressed opposition to China’s actions in the East China Sea—“any unilateral action

that seeks to change the status quo or to undermine Japan's administration of the Senkaku Islands"; to China's "unlawful maritime claims, militarization and coercive activities in the South China Sea" in disregard of the "final and legally binding" ruling of the Hague Tribunal in the Philippine-China dispute; and to China's treatment of human rights in Xinjiang and Hong Kong. The document again underscored "the importance of peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait" and called for a peaceful resolution of outstanding issues.

The allies also reaffirmed a commitment to work with Quad partners to "promote the free, open, rules-based order"; supported their respective evolving security and defense ties with Australia–Japan's Reciprocal Access Agreement and the AUKUS partnership; welcomed the expanding engagement of the EU, the UK, France, Germany, and the Netherlands in the Indo-Pacific; and expressed "support for their expanded multilateral exercises and deployments."¹⁹

Two weeks later, during a January 21 virtual summit, President Biden and Prime Minister Kishida reaffirmed their governments' commitment to a "shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific region" and a "shared purpose to sustain and enhance our commitment to the region." They resolved "to push back against the People's Republic of China (PRC)'s attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea and South China Sea," and "underscored the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait." The two leaders also affirmed their commitment to "working closely with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond," specifically with ASEAN and the Quad.²⁰

Cornerstone Alliances in Support of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Australia and Japan

The Defense Department's Indo-Pacific Strategy Report of June 2019 acknowledged that multifaceted challenges emerging in the region "are beyond what any single country can address alone." For the United States, "allies and partners" represent "a force multiplier for peace."²¹

Australia

The US-Australia alliance has moved to focus increasingly on the Indo-Pacific region. A joint statement, issued at the 2019 Australia-US Ministerial Consultations (AUSMIN), committed the alliance partners to advancing a "secure and prosperous" Indo-Pacific region and to cooperating in support of freedom of navigation and overflight, in capacity-building with maritime states of the region, and in strengthening maritime security and governance. The allies also pledged to work to "further deepen trilateral cooperation with Japan and enhance engagement with India, including through the Quad."²²

The joint statement of the 2020 AUSMIN made the Indo-Pacific "the focus of the Alliance" and committed the alliance partners to strengthening "our networked structure of alliances and partnerships to maintain a region that is secure, prosperous, inclusive and rules-based." The allies found China's maritime claims in the South China Sea "not valid under international law" and rejected Beijing's assertion of maritime rights based on the nine-dash line, historic rights, and claims to entire island groups as "incompatible with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea." AUSMIN also produced a classified document, a statement of principles on alliance defense cooperation and force posture priorities, and set up a force posture working group to enhance "cooperation in the Indo-Pacific to promote a secure and stable region, and deter coercive acts and use of force."²³

On July 1, 2020, Australia's Department of Defence released its Defence Strategic Update. The document set out "three new strategic objectives for defence planning . . . to shape Australia's strategic environment; to deter actions against Australia's interests; and to respond with credible military force when required." Defense planning would focus on "Australia's immediate region, ranging from the north-eastern Indian Ocean, through maritime and mainland South East Asia to Papua New Guinea and the South West Pacific."²⁴

AUKUS

On September 15, 2021, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States announced a new and historic strategic tie-up in the Indo-Pacific: the AUKUS partnership. The AUKUS agreement represents the continuing evolution of strategic policy across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. AUKUS joins the United States Indo-Pacific Strategy, Australia's Defence Strategic Update 2020, and the UK's "tilt" to the Indo-Pacific, shaping the regional order toward a free and open Indo-Pacific and enhancing deterrence in response to an increasingly assertive China.²⁵

Under the partnership, the United States and the United Kingdom agreed to cooperate to allow Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines. Of equal and long-term strategic significance, the strategic partners committed to advancing "deeper integration of security and defense-related science, technology, industrial bases, and supply chain" and "significantly deepen cooperation on a range of security and defense capabilities."²⁶ The deepening of security cooperation is reflected in the April 5, 2022, AUKUS decision to cooperate in the development of hypersonic missiles and electronic warfare.²⁷

Commenting on AUKUS, Australian Ambassador to the United States Arthur Sinodinos observed that, in addition to the submarine deal, the arrangement was also "very much about other capabilities . . . artificial intelligence, machine learning, cyber, undersea warfare capabilities." The ambassador put AUKUS in the context of Australia's Defence Strategic Update 2020, emphasizing Canberra's commitment "to be more proactive in shaping the environment in our region." He said that Australia's strategic challenge was to avoid being "the passive recipient of whatever may be happening, but seeking to shape events, to deter potential adversarial actions and respond in a way that is effective, and which is calibrated to complement what we can do with other partners."

The ambassador put the enhanced capabilities of nuclear-powered submarines, as "part of a defense philosophy that . . .

in this deteriorating strategic circumstances [sic], to be able to project our power further up rather than taking an approach that all our defense has to be defense of the mainland." He added, "We believe acting together, we can change the calculus for countries in the region that may think that simply becoming a great power, you can throw your weight around, you don't have to follow any rules."²⁸

It is interesting to note that the Defence Strategic Update 2020 calls for the development of "capabilities to hold adversary forces and infrastructure at risk farther from Australia, such as long-range strike weapons, cyber capabilities and area denial systems."²⁹

A day after the AUKUS announcement, AUSMIN convened. The joint statement of September 16, 2021, reiterated the alliance's commitment to "an open, inclusive and resilient Indo-Pacific region" and reaffirmed commitments to the Quad, ASEAN centrality, and freedom of navigation and overflight in the South China Sea "consistent with the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea." The allies found that "China's excessive maritime claim in the South China Sea . . . without legal basis" and that "the 2016 Arbitral Award is final and legally binding on all parties." They also committed "to strengthen ties to Taiwan," reiterating support for a "peaceful resolution of Cross-Strait issues without resorting to force or coercion."

With respect to bilateral defense and security cooperation, the ministers committed to "advancing common defense and security capacities." They welcomed the AUKUS announcement and adopted the recommendations of the bilateral force posture working group created at AUSMIN 2020 for enhanced air, maritime, land, and logistics cooperation. They also signed a classified statement of intent on strategic capabilities, cooperation, and implementation.³⁰

Japan

Facing a "security environment . . . ever more severe," Japan, under the Abe government, moved to embrace a proactive role

in support of peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.³¹ The foreign and security policies of the Abe government, as well as those of the subsequent Suga and Kishida governments, have advanced along three interrelated lines of effort: the strengthening of Japan's own defense capabilities, the reinforcement of the Japan-US alliance, and advancement of the prospect of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Under the Abe government, defense spending increased at an annual rate of 1.1 percent. During the 2021 Lower House election campaign, the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) and Prime Minister Kishida called for a 2 percent increase in the defense budget. In December 2021, the Kishida government approved a record-high 5.4 trillion-yen defense budget for fiscal year 2022.³² The 2022 defense budget marks a decade of consecutive increases in defense spending.

To strengthen the Japan-US alliance, the Abe government reinterpreted Japan's constitution to allow the limited exercise of collective self-defense and adopted the 2015 Defense Guidelines, which expanded areas of functional defense engagement with the United States and, at the same time, opened the door to Japanese defense cooperation with third countries. The 2019 Japan-US Security Consultative Committee marked the alignment of the two countries' strategic policy documents and the articulation of a "shared concern that geopolitical competition and coercive attempts to undermine international rules, norms, and institutions present challenges to the Alliance and to the shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific."³³

To advance a free and open Indo-Pacific, Japan has ordered its diplomacy, committed its financial resources, and moved to develop more active security relationships with allies and strategic partners. The effort has featured both bilateral and multilateral initiatives.

To address the region's growing connectivity needs, Japan, in 2015, committed \$6.7 billion to infrastructure development in the Mekong subregion and, with the Asian Development Bank,

announced a five-year, \$110 billion commitment to support region-wide infrastructure projects. In 2016, at the G7 summit, Japan announced a five-year, \$200 billion commitment to high-quality infrastructure. With Mekong partners Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, Thailand, and Myanmar, Japan focused the 2018 Tokyo Strategy on connectivity: industrial infrastructure, roads and ports, telecommunications, and cyber infrastructure.

For fiscal year 2020, the Abe government committed 70 percent of its \$7 billion Official Development Assistance budget to high-quality infrastructure projects in Southeast Asia, the Middle East, and Africa, providing alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative. At the same time, Japan joined with the United States and Australia to set up the Blue Diamond Network "to promote transparently-financed, high quality infrastructure through private sector-led development around the world."³⁴

Japan has also stepped up defense engagement with the region. In 2015, Japan joined the India-US Malabar exercise and, in 2019, the Australia-US Talisman Sabre exercise. Underscoring increasing defense cooperation with Australia, on January 6, 2022, Prime Ministers Kishida and Morrison signed the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement to provide for closer defense and security cooperation. Prime Minister Morrison hailed the initial announcement of the agreement as "a landmark defense treaty" enhancing a "special strategic partnership."³⁵ Japan has also expanded defense engagement with Vietnam and Indonesia, in 2021 signing agreements to provide for the transfer of defense equipment and technology.

Japan's defense diplomacy also moved to enhance ties with ASEAN, in 2018 adopting the Vientiane Vision for comprehensive defense cooperation. The vision was updated in 2019 to align it with the concept of a free and open Indo-Pacific. The updated document provides for the exchange of defense personnel, the transfer of defense equipment and technology, joint training and exercises, human resource development, and academic exchanges.

At the same time, Tokyo has regularized Japan Maritime Self-Defense Force (JMSDF) training exercises in the region. In 2019, the country deployed the helicopter carrier *Kaga* and escort ships throughout the Indo-Pacific region to conduct port calls and naval training exercises with Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and India. In 2020, the JMSDF exercised with the US carrier strike groups *Carl Vinson* and *Ronald Reagan* in the South China Sea in July; with the Indian Navy in the JIMEX exercise in September; and with the US and French navies in December. In 2021, the JMSDF exercised with the US and French navies in February; with the French and Belgian navies in March; with the French, US, Indian, and Australian navies in the La Perouse exercise in the Indian Ocean in April; and with the US, Australian, and French navies in May. In October, the helicopter carrier *Huuga* and the destroyer *Ise* joined the UK's *Queen Elizabeth* carrier strike group, the USS *Carl Vinson*, and the USS *Ronald Reagan* for exercises in the Philippine and South China Seas; ships from Canada, New Zealand, and the Netherlands also participated.

In 2021, in March and again in August, Tokyo deployed a JMSDF destroyer to the South China Sea. The destroyer operated within China's contiguous zone but outside China's territorial waters.

Japan's diplomacy has also moved to broaden support for a free and open Indo-Pacific beyond borders of the region. Building on Europe's growing interest in the Indo-Pacific and its concern about the challenges China poses to the international and regional rules-based order, Japan has regularized two-plus-two meetings with France since 2014, with the UK since 2015, with India in 2019, and with Germany in 2021. In 2022, Japan and the Philippines held their first two-plus-two meeting. Collectively, the meetings have reaffirmed commitments to the normative values of a free and open Indo-Pacific and allowed the parties to explore avenues for closer security and defense cooperation.

The Quad

Originating in response to the 2004 tsunami in Southeast Asia, Prime Minister Abe first advanced the Quad, as a strategic con-

cept, in his 2007 "Asia's Democratic Security Diamond." Abe's initiative, however, fell victim to political and diplomatic atrophy in Canberra, New Delhi, Tokyo, and Washington—and to opposition in Beijing. A decade later, at the 2017 East Asian Summit, representatives of the United States, Japan, Australia, and India agreed to resurrect the Quad. In 2019, the Quad was elevated to a ministerial-level dialogue.

In March 2021, President Biden hosted the first Quad leaders' meeting. The joint statement issued after the meeting announced that the leaders "are united in a shared vision for the free and open Indo-Pacific" and in a commitment to "a region that is free, open, inclusive, healthy, anchored by democratic values, and unconstrained by coercion."

The statement continued, "Together, we commit to promoting a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law. . . . We support the rule of law, freedom of navigation and overflight, peaceful resolution of disputes, democratic values, and territorial integrity. . . . Full of potential, the Quad looks forward to the future; it seeks to uphold peace and prosperity and strengthen democratic resilience, based on universal values." The Quad nations agree to "continue to prioritize the role of international law in the maritime domain . . . and facilitate collaboration, including in maritime security, to meet challenges to the rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas."³⁶

On March 3, 2022, the Quad leaders met via video teleconference to discuss the international crisis brought about by Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The leaders also addressed the potential spillover effects of the European crisis on Indo-Pacific stability and security. In their joint statement, the leaders reaffirmed "their commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific, in which the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all states is respected and countries are free from military, economic and political coercion." The leaders also reaffirmed their commitment to the Quad "as a mechanism to promote regional stability and prosperity."³⁷

Prime Minister Kishida, in a press conference following the Quad meeting, expanded on the joint statement, telling reporters that “we’ve agreed that unilateral changes in the status quo like this [Russia’s invasion of Ukraine] should not be allowed in the Indo-Pacific region. . . . We’ve also agreed this development makes it even more important to work toward realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific.”³⁸

Quad members Australia, India, and Japan have also moved to strengthen their respective bilateral political and security relationships in support of a free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific. The fourteenth India-Japan summit took place in mid-March 2022, followed the next week by an India-Australia summit. Defense ties have also continued to expand as reflected by the Australia-India AUSINDEX exercise, the Japan-India JIMEX exercise, and the Australia-Japan Nichi-Guo Trident exercise as well as by the Japan-Australia Reciprocal Access Agreement—collectively speaking to an emerging strategic triangle among democracies of the Indo-Pacific region.

Europe Looks at the Indo-Pacific

The appearance of senior European defense officials at the Singapore-based Shangri-La Dialogue has underscored Europe’s increasing focus on the Indo-Pacific and attention to the challenges posed to European economic, political, and security interests by developments in the region. Since 2018, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the European Union have published Indo-Pacific strategies.

At the 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue, French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian emphasized that for France, with 85 percent of its exclusive economic zone in the Indo-Pacific, stability in the region is “not a theoretical issue.” Of critical importance to France was the UNCLOS, the rules-based maritime order. Le Drian observed, “If the Law of the Sea is not respected in the China Seas, it will be threatened tomorrow elsewhere.” Given the stakes involved for French as well as European prosperity and a shared commitment to a rules-based order, Le Drian pro-

posed that European navies coordinate to ensure a “presence that is as regular and as visible as possible in the maritime areas of Asia.” The minister committed France to a continuing presence in the region in support of freedom of navigation.³⁹

At the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, Le Drian’s successor, Florence Parly, while addressing China’s ongoing island construction in the South China Sea and its dismissal of the Hague Tribunal’s judgment, declared that “the fait accompli is not a fait accepté.”⁴⁰ Meanwhile, President Macron, during his 2018 visit to Australia, positioned France, as an Indo-Pacific power, for greater engagement with the region. Macron proposed a France-Australia-India strategic “axis”—not to contain China but to maintain “balances” within the region and support a rules-based order.⁴¹ Speaking at an Australian navy base, Macron emphasized, “We’re not naive: if we want to be seen and respected by China as an equal partner, we must organize ourselves.”⁴²

The above statements reflect policy directions set out in France’s Indo-Pacific Strategy by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, in France and Security in the Indo-Pacific by the Ministry of Armies, and in France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific Strategy of 2018 defined the Indo-Pacific as a region undergoing “profound strategic change” marked by an increasingly powerful and assertive China and growing tensions in the China-US relationship, along the China-India frontier, and on the Korean Peninsula—developments that are “changing regional balances of power, and making strategic calculations more complex.” In this environment, with boundary disputes in the South China Sea and East China Sea as the source of interstate tension, the strategy makes clear France’s opposition “to any attempted fait accompli, unilateral change in existing systems, or challenges to international law through the use of force.” Concerned that a power-based, self-interested pursuit of national goals could “contribute to the breakdown of the international order,” France would work in conjunction with India,

Australia, Japan, and ASEAN “for a multilateral international order that is based on the rule of law.”

The strategy set out five main objectives for the region: defending French sovereignty, territories, citizens, and EEZ; promoting military and security cooperation; preserving, with regional partners, access to the global commons; supporting “strategic stability and military balances of power through international action based on multilateralism”; and anticipating “security risks” resulting from climate change.⁴³

In 2019, the Ministry of the Armed Forces published France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific and a new edition of the ministry’s 2016 France and Security in the Indo-Pacific.

In a foreword to France and Security in the Indo-Pacific, Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly set out five main security challenges facing France and the Indo-Pacific region: (1) North Korea’s nuclear ambitions; (2) “a growing military assertiveness within the region challenging multilateralism and increasing ‘instability and unpredictability’”; (3) terrorism; (4) “the challenging behavior of some states in the maritime domain with regard to the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea,” referring to large-scale land reclamation projects in the South China Sea that “have changed the status quo and increased tensions”; and (5) climate change. In this strategic environment, stability required challenges to be addressed “within the framework of an international order based on dialogue and multilaterally set rules.”⁴⁴

France’s Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific followed. The strategy recognized China as a “major diplomatic and military player” with global impact. In the Indo-Pacific, China’s growing influence was “shifting the balance of power in Northeast Asia and Southeast Asia, as well as the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific.” The strategy judged that “the scale of China’s action and ambitions redefines a whole set of balances and military relations across the Indo-Pacific.”

Within the region, France would act to protect its territories and citizens; preserve strategic balances; support, with allies and partners, freedom of navigation and overflight; and uphold international law and a rules-based maritime order, rejecting “any interpretation of the law that would not be compliant with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).” At the same time, the strategy encouraged European partners “to get more involved in this region where they have interests,” warning that “the tougher strategic competition in the Indo-Pacific could have a direct impact on European security.”⁴⁵ France played a significant role in moving the European Union to issue its own Indo-Pacific Strategy in 2021.

France’s navy has been actively engaged in the region. Exercising “freedom of movement” as allowed under UNCLOS, since 2014 it has deployed ships in the Indo-Pacific—through the South China Sea at least twice a year and transiting the Taiwan Strait in 2016, 2017, and 2019. France deployed the amphibious group *Jeanne d’Arc* to the region in 2018 for exercises with Japan and again in 2021 for exercises with Australia, Japan, and the United States. In 2019 the aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* was deployed to the Indo-Pacific for exercises with the United Kingdom, Australia, Italy, Denmark, and Portugal in the Bay of Bengal, and later with Japan, Australia, and the United States in the La Perouse exercise. In 2021, the French nuclear-powered attack submarine *SNA Emeraude*, accompanied by the support ship *Seine*, conducted a patrol in the South China Sea. In announcing the deployment, Minister of Defense Florence Parly cast the “extraordinary patrol” as “striking proof of our French Navy’s capacity to deploy far away and for a long time together with our Australian, American and Japanese strategic partners.”⁴⁶

Jean-Vincent Brisset, research director at the Institute of International and Strategic Relations, welcomed the patrol as showing “that we are still present there militarily”; it was, he explained, “an old promise made by Jean-Yves Le Drian when he was still defence minister.”⁴⁷

On the diplomatic front, France has engaged in two-plus-two meetings with Japan since 2014, holding the sixth in January 2022; engaged with Australia beginning in 2021; and engaged in a trilateral ministerial with India and Australia, also in 2021. The joint statements of these ministerial meetings have reaffirmed the respective countries' commitments to an inclusive, rules-based, free, and open Indo-Pacific. In February 2022, France, as president of the European Council, hosted the first European inter-ministerial meeting on the Indo-Pacific; close to sixty foreign ministers from the Indo-Pacific and the EU participated.

Germany

In September 2020, Germany published its Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific. The guidelines recognize that “the political and economic balance is increasingly shifting toward the Indo-Pacific region” and that the region itself is experiencing “significant shifts in the balance of power.” Understanding that the region will play a central role in “shaping the international order of the 21st century,” the guidelines defined Germany’s interest as “participating in Asia’s growth dynamics and in being involved in shaping the Indo-Pacific region, as well as upholding global norms in regional structures.”

The guidelines set out a long list of objectives and initiatives, just over six pages in length. Among them are working to “protect and safeguard the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region, such as safeguarding the principles of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea”; monitoring UN sanctions against North Korea; and enhancing “security and defense cooperation in the region with its partners.”⁴⁸ From August 2021 to February 2022, Germany deployed the frigate *Bayern* to the Indo-Pacific.

At the same time, Berlin moved to enhance Germany’s diplomatic engagement with the region, conducting its first two-plus-two meeting with Japan in April 2021. At the meeting, German officials briefed Japan on Germany’s Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific and expressed support for a free

and open Indo-Pacific. Berlin and Tokyo also signed a security of information agreement promoting bilateral security cooperation.⁴⁹ In July, the second Germany and Australia Two-Plus-Two Security Policy Consultations elevated the Germany-Australia bilateral partnership to an enhanced strategic level, advancing both bilateral and multilateral engagement in the region. Australia welcomed Germany’s adoption of its Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific and the deployment of Germany’s frigate *Bayern* to the region as reflecting a commitment to intensified cooperation in support of an inclusive and resilient region.⁵⁰ Both countries agreed on the critical importance freedom and overflight in the South China Sea based on respect for UNCLOS.⁵¹

The visit of the *Bayern* marked the first German naval deployment to the region in two decades. The *Bayern* participated in exercises with Japan, Canada, Australia, and the United States in the Philippine Sea on November 21–30, 2021. The German Foreign Ministry observed that “Germany’s presence in the South China Sea underscores its continued commitment to freedom of navigation and the preservation of a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific, which is coming under pressure in the South China Sea.” Commenting on China, German Navy Chief Vice Admiral Kay Achim Schonbach questioned whether it “fit into the international rules-based order.”⁵²

Netherlands

In November 2020, the Dutch government published the Indo-Pacific Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia. The document recognized the Netherlands’ and the EU’s growing economic stakes in a region in which developments in the South China Sea “will have consequences for European (and thus Dutch) prosperity and security.” In the South China Sea, the guidelines noted that China “in particular uses the full range of its governmental instruments in a hybrid manner to pursue its strategic aims. Economic, political, military, cyber, security and intelligence activities are interwoven in the centralized Chinese system.”

The Dutch guidelines described the Indo-Pacific as a region marked by “a power struggle between the two great powers” and called on the EU to support countries of the region in their efforts to “hold their own in the power struggle between the two great powers” and to prevent the region from becoming “a pawn in that struggle.” The EU had “a role to play in helping to preserve the balance of power and—where necessary—in providing a counterweight to the strategic economic and military influence of one or more great powers.”

The Dutch document called on the EU to sustain the rules-based maritime order; to advance “democratic values and norms”; “to strengthen multilateral cooperation and the international legal system . . . crucial for maintaining peace and security”; and to develop defense and security cooperation with Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. In May 2021, the Netherlands deployed the frigate HNLMS *Evertsen* to accompany the UK’s *Queen Elizabeth* carrier strike group to the Indo-Pacific.

For its part the Netherlands would work “with like-minded partners” to “promote safe passage and maritime security by helping with capacity building in the area of the international law of the sea.” Diplomacy would work to regularize annual consultations on issues of common interest to develop “sustainable trade and investment relations in the Indo-Pacific”; “promote effective multilateralism and the international legal order”; focus on digital connectivity “from cybersecurity and internet regulation to innovation, artificial intelligence, e-commerce, cross-border data transfer, privacy, and national digital sovereignty”; and collaborate on climate change.⁵³

The European Union

The European Union released its EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific on September 16, 2021. Recognizing that the region’s growing economic and political weight make it a “key player in shaping the rules-based international order and in addressing global challenges,” the EU aimed to “contribute

to the region’s stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development, in line with the principles of democracy, rule of law, human rights and international law.” Faced with challenges to its values, prosperity, and security interests, the EU committed to expanding its engagement.⁵⁴

The EU’s approach to the region would be broad-based and inclusive. Its approach to China would seek cooperation, not confrontation, in a multifaceted engagement along the lines of the framework set out in 2019 in EU-China—A Strategic Outlook, which identified China as a “cooperation partner,” “economic competitor,” and a “systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance.”⁵⁵

Economics and trade define the EU’s principal interest in the Indo-Pacific—40 percent of the EU’s foreign trade passes through the South China Sea. Of concern to the EU is an “intensifying” geopolitical competition in the region that has produced “increasing tensions on trade and supply chains as well as in technological, political and security areas.” In this environment, the EU aims are fundamentally normative: to “foster a rules-based international order, a level playing field, as well as an open and fair environment for trade and investment, tackling climate change and supporting connectivity with the EU.” The EU’s engagement would focus on seven priority areas: sustainable and inclusive prosperity; green transition; ocean governance; digital governance and partnerships; connectivity, security, and defense; and human security. To support regional security, the EU would “explore ways to ensure enhanced naval deployments by EU Member States” to “protect the sea lines of communication and freedom of navigation . . . while building Indo-Pacific partners’ capacity to ensure maritime security.”⁵⁶

On February 22, 2022, the Council of the European Union, acting under the French presidency, hosted the Ministerial Forum for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The meeting, attended by the foreign ministers of twenty-seven EU countries joined by

foreign ministers from Indo-Pacific countries, aimed at advancing concrete implementation of the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy.

In the statement released following the meeting, ministerial participants reaffirmed their “commitment to a rules-based international order, democratic values and principles as well as to the strengthening of multilateralism and the rule of law, respect for international law, and freedom of navigation, in accordance with the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea.” The EU ministers reiterated the importance of the Indo-Pacific to Europe and expressed their support for an enhanced, long-term engagement. Engagement would include enhanced cooperation in capacity-building, cybersecurity, and the promotion of quality infrastructure, sustainable connectivity, and a secure digital economy. With respect to security and defense cooperation, the EU announced “the extension of . . . a coordinated maritime presence in the Northwest Indian Ocean” and its “determination to enhance its engagement in security and defense with partners in the region.”⁵⁷

Earlier, at the end of 2021, senior officials from the EU and the United States met in Washington for the first US-EU consultations on the Indo-Pacific. The discussion focused on the respective EU and US Indo-Pacific strategies and engagement with the region. The officials reaffirmed support for “a free and open Indo-Pacific that is inclusive, based on the rule of law and democratic values”; for “security, stability, and predictability in the region, including freedom of navigation and overflight in accordance with . . . the 1982 Law of the Sea Convention”; and for “stability and the status quo in the Taiwan Strait.” The joint statement set out wide-ranging fields for cooperation, among them climate change, global health security, freedom of navigation and maritime security, human rights, labor standards, and high-quality infrastructure.⁵⁸

United Kingdom

In the mid-2010s, the United Kingdom was also beginning to refocus on the Indo-Pacific.

At the 2016 Shangri-La Dialogue, UK Secretary of Defence Michael Fallon addressed China's ongoing island construction in the South China Sea and made clear his government's concern about “the scale and speed of current land reclamation activities and the risks these actions may pose to maritime freedom of navigation and to the stability of the South China Sea.”⁵⁹ Fallon emphasized the importance of an UNCLOS-based maritime order. Earlier, in January 2015, the UK conducted its first two-plus-two ministerial with Japan.

At the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue, UK Secretary of Defence Penny Mordaunt reiterated the UK's support for “fundamental global rules . . . and respect for the rules-based international order.” In support of British interests and values, Mordaunt committed the UK to a “persistent presence” in the region, one marked by a renewed engagement with its Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA) partners—Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand—and previewed the 2021 deployment of the *Queen Elizabeth* carrier strike group to the region.⁶⁰

On March 16, 2021, the Johnson government published *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*. Facing an environment “of intensifying competition between states over interests, norms and values,” the review committed the United Kingdom to greater activism in support of the international order, judging that “a defence of the status quo is no longer sufficient for the decade ahead.” The review calls for a “sharper and more dynamic focus in order to . . . reinforce parts of the international architecture that are under threat; and shape the international order of the future.”

The government judged that “by 2030, it is likely that the world will have moved further towards multipolarity, with the geopolitical and economic centre of gravity moving eastward towards the Indo-Pacific.” There, “China's military modernisation and growing international assertiveness within the Indo-Pacific and beyond will pose an increasing risk to UK interests.” According-

ly, the government, while aiming to advance commercial and investment ties, will invest in “China-facing capabilities” and improve “the UK’s ability to respond to challenges it poses to our security, prosperity and values—and those of our allies and partners.”

The review, while maintaining the UK’s security focus on the Euro-Atlantic, with Russia as the UK’s “most acute threat,” calls for a deeper engagement with the Indo-Pacific—an Indo-Pacific “tilt.” Recognizing the importance of the region to the UK’s prosperity and as “a focal point for the negotiation of international laws, rules and norms,” the government aims to establish in the Indo-Pacific “a greater and more persistent presence than any European country,” with the Royal Navy playing an active role in support of “maritime security and competition linked to laws, rules and norms.”⁶¹

The subsequent deployment of the HMS *Queen Elizabeth* carrier strike group to the Indo-Pacific represents “the UK’s most ambitious global deployment for two decades,” reflecting a commitment to enhancing diplomatic and defense cooperation with allies and multilateral institutions across the region, the FPDA, ASEAN, and the Pacific Islands Forum.⁶² During its Indo-Pacific deployment, on October 3, 2021, the *Queen Elizabeth* strike group exercised with the carriers USS *Carl Vinson* and USS *Ronald Reagan*, together with ships from Canada, New Zealand, and the Netherlands, for a combined exercise in the Philippine Sea. The UK also regularized two-plus-two ministerial meetings with Japan beginning in 2015 and resumed these meetings post-COVID-19 with Australia in 2022.

Commenting on the tilt, Philip Shelter-Jones of the British think tank Council on Geostrategy cast it as “significant for our allies,” assuring them that “they do not have to face aggression alone” and encouraging “their own efforts to reject an order where the strong simply do what they will and the weak suffer what they must.” Richard Niblett, Chatham House’s chief executive, said the UK’s increased presence in the region was a “signal” to Chi-

na that the US and its allies “are going to be coherent in standing up to any acts that China may feel it has to, or wants to do, in the future,” serving to “influence the calculus (in Beijing).”⁶³

AUKUS followed in September 2021. And, in support of reestablishing a “persistent presence,” London also announced the intention to send the patrol vessels HMS *Spey* and HMS *Tamar* to the region for an extended five-year deployment, which the Australian government, at the January 21, 2022, Australia-UK ministerial meeting, committed to support. Also at the meeting, the ministers committed to “practical cooperation to support Pacific resilience, security and sovereignty” and “to strengthen existing support for regional countries to respond to maritime challenges” and “maritime domain awareness activities.”

The ministers reaffirmed support for an “open, inclusive and resilient Indo-Pacific region” governed by “rules and norms . . . free from coercion, and where disputes are settled peacefully and in accordance with international law.” The joint statement spoke to the importance of freedom of navigation and overflight and “strong opposition to actions that raise tensions, including the militarization of disputed features, the dangerous use of coast guard and maritime militia efforts to disrupt other countries’ utilization of offshore resources” and the importance of “peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait.”⁶⁴

Going Forward

In February 2022, the Biden administration released its Indo-Pacific Strategy.

The strategic objective is defined as “a free and open Indo-Pacific that is more connected, prosperous, secure, and resilient” and is governed by a “regional rules-based order.” The strategy acknowledges, however, that its vision is now facing “mounting challenges,” particularly from a China that is using its “economic, diplomatic, military, and technological might” to pursue “a sphere of influence in the Indo-Pacific and to become the world’s most influential power.”

The strategy charged China with “coercion and aggression” that “spans the globe but is most acute in the Indo-Pacific,” where it has been felt by Australia, India, and Taiwan and in the East and South China Seas. The strategy further states that China is “undermining human rights and international law, including freedom of navigation, as well as other principles that have brought stability and prosperity to the Indo-Pacific.” It defines the strategic challenge ahead as whether China will succeed “in transforming the rules and norms that have benefited the Indo-Pacific and the world.”

The strategy outlines the means to realizing its strategic ends, among them strengthening alliances and working with like-minded partners—including the Quad, ASEAN, and the EU—to address issues relating to the denuclearization of North Korea, health care, climate change, energy, transportation, emerging technologies, the internet and cyberspace, connectivity, and physical and digital infrastructure.

The Biden administration’s approach to China “is not to change the PRC but to shape the strategic environment in which it operates, building a balance of influence . . . that is maximally favorable to the United States, our allies and partners, and the interests and values we share.”⁶⁵

Concluding Thoughts: Order in Europe and the Indo-Pacific Post-February 24, 2022

As noted in the preface, this study began with a focus on regional order in the Indo-Pacific, defined by the values and interests of a free and open Indo-Pacific, which is now facing multiple and complex challenges posed by the rise of China.

In February, Russia’s invasion of Ukraine raised larger questions of international order—whether Russia’s aggression marked the end of the post-Cold War international order and whether the international community was now entering a new and yet to be defined international order. That debate will undoubtedly con-

tinue long after this manuscript goes to press. But it would be remiss not to consider such questions and their implications for the Indo-Pacific.

While Russia’s aggression has raised questions about the future of the contemporary international order, the Western-alliance-based response, led by the United States, NATO, and the European Union, speaks to the enduring strength of that order and its fundamental values: democracy, sovereignty, opposition to force or coercion to change the status quo, and the peaceful resolution of disputes. It is a response that the Kremlin clearly did not anticipate.

The strong support extended by Asian allies and strategic partners underscores the universality of the international order. That support also reflects concerns that similar challenges could affect the regional order in the Indo-Pacific. Prime Minister Kishida’s remarks after the March 3 Quad meeting that “unilateral changes in the status quo like this [Russia’s invasion of Ukraine] should not be allowed in the Indo-Pacific region” speak to that concern.

A growing resolve to support a free and open Indo-Pacific order is now manifest. In the joint statement following the Biden-Kishida summit of January 31, the two leaders announced a shared resolve “to push back against the People’s Republic of China (PRC)’s attempts to change the status quo in the East China Sea and South China Sea.”

Recent European strategic policy documents also express strong support for a free and open Indo-Pacific, in particular for the maintenance of the UNCLOS rules-based maritime order. The Netherlands’ Indo-Pacific Guidelines linked Europe’s prosperity and security to the Indo-Pacific. Foreign Secretary Liz Truss, in her March 10 Makins lecture at the Atlantic Council, argued that “conflict anywhere threatens security everywhere. The Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific are indivisible.” Standing together, the UK, the US, the G7, the EU, Canada, and Japan

will “face down aggression around the world—from the South China Sea to Eastern Europe.”⁶⁶

Although the various visions of a free and open Indo-Pacific are not identical in either geographic scope or individual country interests, they are, both in the Indo-Pacific and in Europe, congruent in fundamental values and interests.

For the immediate future, Russia and Ukraine will keep European allies focused on the continent. However, there is a clear recognition in European capitals, as reflected in long-term planning documents, that the world’s geostrategic center is shifting to the Indo-Pacific and that Europe has a significant economic, political, and security stake in sustaining the rules-based order there. While a hard European security presence will not be significant—though European naval deployments to the region have grown—the normative value of Europe’s engagement cannot be underestimated.

Today the Indo-Pacific order is no longer defined by the historical bilateral hub-and-spokes alliance structure emanating from Washington. While the alliance structure remains foundational, it is now reinforced by complex sets of interlocking and overlapping bilateral and multilateral relationships within the region and beyond, extending to European allies and yielding a complex, lattice-like structure. This evolution has served to augment and strengthen the Indo-Pacific regional order and to enhance prospects for stability and security. This structure reflects not only the shared values of democracy and the rule of law but also the hard security interests of freedom of navigation and opposition to the use of force or coercion to change the status quo. The evolution of this order owes much to the strategic foresight of the late Shinzo Abe, former prime minister of Japan.

Is this unity sustainable?

Liz Truss’s remarks at the Atlantic Council make clear the importance of sustaining Western unity in the face of challeng-

es to the international order—in Europe and in Asia. The quiet coming together of shared values and interests among allies and strategic partners in support of a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific points affirmatively in the direction of sustainability. The task will not be easy; sacrifices will be required. Significant challenges are likely ahead—in the maritime domain, across the Taiwan Strait, and on the Korean Peninsula—and must be planned for now.

Critical to sustaining the rules-based order is strengthening deterrence. This starts with strengthening key alliances in the Indo-Pacific and effecting an integrated deterrence structure to complicate China’s strategic calculations. As outlined in the above study, this has been and is an ongoing process in Washington, Tokyo, and Canberra.

At the same time, diplomacy, by expanding the number of interested parties with shared strategic interests and values, can further enhance deterrence. The AUKUS agreement is a case in point, and the recent announcement of cooperation in the development of hypersonic missiles and electronic warfare offers potential for expanding that cooperation to Japan and the Republic of Korea, allies with similar interests, development programs, and advanced technologies. This could serve to rationalize defense research, development, and the manufacture of high-tech weaponry. Japanese and Korean participation could be walled off from the AUKUS nuclear submarine program. Beyond the UK, European allies, particularly France and the EU, should be engaged in ongoing diplomatic and security dialogues in support of a free and open Indo-Pacific.

Also, the Quad could extend an invitation to European states to participate in Quad working groups on climate change, health care, and supply-chain management. Opening the Quad to include a European caucus dialogue could add extra regional weight to the deterrence picture. Likewise, Indo-Pacific countries such as the Republic of Korea and New Zealand could be invited to participate in similar Quad working groups and projects.

Nevertheless, the United States and its Asian allies need to be prepared to address the consequences of a failure of deterrence should China, like Russia, move to change the status quo in the Taiwan Strait. Reflecting growing concerns in Japan about such an event, former Prime Minister Abe recently argued that a Taiwan contingency is a Japan contingency, involving the defense of both Japan and the Japan-US alliance. Similarly, Prime Minister Morrison thought it “inconceivable” that Australia would not join the United States should China attempt to invade democratic Taiwan. Given the challenge presented by a failure of deterrence, it is now critical that in-

tegrated defense planning takes place to address a Taiwan contingency.

Going forward, long-term success will require the constant diplomatic gardening advocated by Secretary of State George Shultz. The Biden administration’s early focus on alliance management has paid dividends in the current crisis. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine once again only underscores the importance of Western unity in Europe and in Asia. The challenge for the United States, its allies, and its strategic partners will be to continue to cooperate to reinforce the evolving rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

ENDNOTES

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