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### Conference Paper

## THE MARITIME WHOLE OF GOVERNMENT APPROACH AND THE INDO-PACIFIC'S MAJOR PLAYERS GEOPOLITICS

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### Abstract.

This paper examines the European Union's evolving position in the Indo-Pacific through the lens of maritime security, international law, and strategic cooperation. As one of the region's key investors and trade partners, the EU has a vested interest in ensuring peace, stability, and freedom of navigation, particularly in critical sea lanes for example the South China Sea. Drawing on theoretical frameworks of regionalism and comprehensive security, the study analyzes the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy and the operational implementation through initiatives like Crimario, Operation Atlanta, and Operation Aspides. Empirical evidence reveals that several EU member states have adopted complementary national strategies, reinforcing a coordinated approach to regional engagement. Through qualitative content analysis of policy documents, legal frameworks, and institutional reports, the research identifies a shift from normative rhetoric to tangible strategic presence. Findings underscore the EU's commitment to multilateralism, maritime rule of law, and inclusive cooperation, with particular emphasis on the partnership with ASEAN and participation in regional forums. The study concludes that the EU's proactive and rules-based engagement significantly contributes to Indo-Pacific security architecture, economic resilience, and global governance.

**Keywords:** Indo-Pacific strategy, freedom of navigation, maritime security; regional cooperation.

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## Introduction

The European Union holds significant geopolitical and economic stakes in maintaining peace, stability, and security in the Indo-Pacific region (1). As one of the region's largest investors, major development partners, and key trading actors, the EU views the Indo-Pacific as a critical hub for global trade, particularly as nearly one-third of the foreign trade transits through the South China Sea (2,3). The EU's enduring commitment to peace and stability draws from EU's own historical experience in promoting reconciliation, democracy, and human rights, which earned the Nobel Peace Prize in 2012 (3).



Figure 1. Indo-Pacific for EU's Economic Growth

Source: Mechaty (2024)

Recent developments reveal intensifying geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific, highlighting the region's growing strategic importance (4). Instability here risks triggering wide-ranging economic and political consequences for Europe. A conflict in the Indo-Pacific would not only disrupt global trade flows but also directly impact European security, which is increasingly interdependent with regional dynamics (1). At the same time, any external interference in European security carries implications for the evolving relationship between the EU and Indo-Pacific partners.

## Literature Review

### Theoretical Studies

EU and Indo-Pacific cooperation reflects a multidimensional strategic framework that prioritizes sustainable and inclusive prosperity, green transitions, ocean governance, digital transformation, connectivity, security and defence, and human security (2,5–7). These priority areas align with broader theoretical constructs of regionalism, interdependence, and comprehensive security. The cooperation model emphasizes mutually beneficial

engagement through sustainable trade agreements, adaptation strategies for climate change, and adherence to international maritime law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). This legal foundation reinforces the rules-based international order, providing a normative anchor for ocean governance and maritime security. Digital governance and infrastructure development function as instruments of soft power and normative influence, promoting interoperability and shared standards across regions. Security cooperation, through structured dialogues, joint exercises, and coordinated responses to non-traditional threats for example pandemics and natural disasters, illustrates the application of comprehensive security theory. This approach expands the definition of security beyond military concerns to encompass human security, resilience, and institutional collaboration.

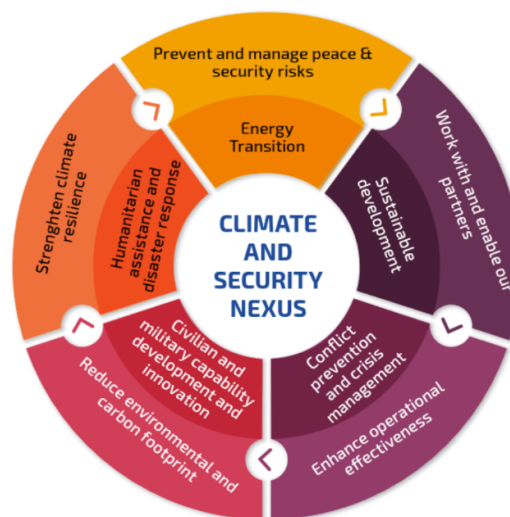


Figure 2. EU and Indo-Pacific Cooperation Framework

Source: Mechaty (2024)

### Empirical Studies

Empirical developments show that several EU member states, for example Germany, France, the Netherlands, the Czech Republic, and Lithuania, have adopted their own Indo-Pacific strategies (3,8). These national strategies align with and reinforce the broader EU framework, creating a layered and coordinated presence in the region. Through diplomatic missions, joint statements, and multilateral forums, the EU and the member states have institutionalized cooperation with Indo-Pacific actors. The implementation of these strategies demonstrates a measurable shift in the EU's foreign policy posture, reflecting a transition from normative commitments to tangible regional engagement.

## Methods

The study use a qualitative content analysis approach to systematically examine policy documents, institutional reports, and peer-reviewed literature related to maritime security, international law, and the evolving dynamics of EU engagement in the Indo-Pacific (9,10). The method enables the identification of patterns, meanings, and implications within texts, particularly concerning the intersection of security and governance issues in maritime domain. The data sources comprise of international legal instruments, regional maritime frameworks, operational reports (e.g., Crimario, Operation Atlanta, and Operation Aspides), and publications released within the last ten years. Selection criteria prioritize relevance to maritime security, freedom of navigation, digital infrastructure protection, and non-traditional security threats in the Indo-Pacific region. The unit of analysis centres on the application of IHL and maritime governance in the EU policy implementation and regional cooperation. The study incorporates developments comprising of the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy, ministerial forums, joint exercises, and strategic partnerships with regional actors. Data credibility was ensured through triangulation across legal documents, institutional sources, and academic analyses, with cross-verification of key events and initiatives contributing to the reliability of findings.

## Results and Discussion

The EU has demonstrated consistent commitment to upholding international law and freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific (3). With over 80% of global trade transported by sea and essential resources like oil and gas depending on secure maritime routes, safeguarding sea lanes and submarine cables has become a strategic priority (3,11). The EU's maritime security framework mitigates these challenges by providing mechanisms for rapid response to emerging threats, comprising of cyberattacks and piracy.

Evidence shows an expanded EU security presence in the region, which has attracted collaborative interest from partners for example Japan and South Korea (12). The expansion of the Crimario initiative has strengthened maritime domain awareness and interoperability among regional actors. Naval operations under Operation Atlanta, alongside the launch of Operation Aspides in the Red Sea, illustrate the operationalization of EU maritime strategy and a clear commitment to ensuring stability in critical waterways (3,13).

In early 2024, the EU convened the Third Indo-Pacific Ministerial Forum, drawing participation from over 70 delegations (14). This forum enabled the exchange of views on pressing regional security concerns and reaffirmed ASEAN centrality as a

guiding principle for inclusive cooperation. In parallel, active participation in India's Indo-Pacific Ocean Initiative and other multilateral platforms underscored a comprehensive and collaborative EU approach to tackling interconnected security, governance, and development challenges in the Indo-Pacific (3). These findings indicate not only increased strategic presence but also deepening institutional engagement that aligns security objectives with broader regional priorities.

## Conclusion

The EU's strategic engagement in the Indo-Pacific reflects a deliberate shift from normative aspirations to concrete actions across security, governance, and sustainable development. By prioritizing maritime security, upholding international law, and deepening partnerships through initiatives like Crimario and joint naval operations, the EU has reinforced the position as a reliable and proactive regional actor. The alignment of national strategies among EU member states with the broader Indo-Pacific Strategy further strengthens collective influence and coherence. High-level forums and participation in multilateral initiatives demonstrate a holistic and inclusive approach, recognizing the interdependence between security, economic resilience, and rules-based regional order. Overall, the EU's evolving presence in the Indo-Pacific marks a significant contribution to regional stability, multilateralism, and global connectivity.

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