

# In the Same Boat: Security Challenges in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific

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In terms of security, the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions are becoming increasingly interdependent. Germany's and Europe's stability are heavily impacted by the security situation in the Indo-Pacific, especially in view of China's and North Korea's support for Russia in its war against Ukraine. European states such as France, the UK, and Poland view developments in the Indo-Pacific increasingly as a threat to European security. At the same time, the war against Ukraine is influencing the security situation in the Indo-Pacific. A Russian victory in Ukraine could encourage China to attack Taiwan, or North Korea to attack South Korea. Germany and Europe should increase their aid to Ukraine, reduce their dependence on China, and prepare economic and political responses to a possible military escalation in Asia.

## THE INDO-PACIFIC: A KEY REGION FOR EUROPEAN SECURITY AND STABILITY<sup>1</sup>

The security and stability of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions are closely connected.<sup>2</sup>

For the foreseeable future, Germany will continue to be primarily concerned by Russia's war against Ukraine and the military threat that Moscow poses to NATO. Yet it would be severely affected by the economic and security consequences of a conflict in the Indo-Pacific. That region currently accounts for nearly 40 percent of Germany's non-EU trade. Worldwide, the economic damage that

could be caused by a war in Taiwan is estimated at ten percent of global GDP.

The fact that China and North Korea support Russia's war against Ukraine underscores the increasingly close security and defense ties between both regions. North Korea sends troops and supplies munitions; China assists Russia technologically and economically. Among other things, Beijing supplies components for military equipment for direct use in the war against Ukraine. Russia also maintains a military program in China for the serial production of long-range attack drones. This has serious implications for security in Europe.

## EUROPE VIEWS DEVELOPMENTS IN THE INDO-PACIFIC WITH GROWING CONCERN

From a European perspective, Russia currently represents the greatest security threat. In terms of security policy, China is viewed primarily through the lens of its cooperation with Russia and its support for the war against Ukraine. Yet it is also increasingly perceived as a systemic rival.

European states such as France, the UK, and Poland, as well as Germany, regard Russia's and China's close coordination primarily as a security issue.

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<sup>2</sup> This memo is based in part on interviews conducted between March and August 2025 with experts from France, the UK, Japan, the Philippines, Poland, and South Korea, as well as on an extensive analysis of strategy documents from these same countries.

Its impact on Europe is perceived as harmful. For example, France's new Indo-Pacific strategy portrays China as a destabilizing factor, not only in the Indo-Pacific but also in the Euro-Atlantic region. British strategy documents show similar assessments. Poland also views the growing ties between China, North Korea and Russia with concern, especially in views of its [military equipment purchases from South Korea](#) for which it depends on stability on the Korean peninsula. In return, [South Korea benefits from European arms purchases](#), as these strengthen its domestic industry and thus contribute to Seoul's defense capabilities (against North Korea).

The concern expressed by these three European states regarding developments in the Indo-Pacific is particularly directed at the threat of a conflict over Taiwan, which would have a severe impact on Europe's economies and defense industries. In addition, a Chinese attack on Taiwan could trigger a chain reaction if Russia were to use it as an opportunity for further aggression on the European continent, for example against countries on NATO's eastern flank. It is also conceivable that China and Russia would coordinate and act in parallel to prepare an aggression.

Other aspects of the Sino-Russian rapprochement critically observed by London, Paris and Warsaw concern the increasingly frequent use of hybrid and "grey zone" tactics, including cyberattacks, election interference, the spread of disinformation, and sabotage of critical infrastructure.

However, while France, UK, and Poland agree in principle in their assessment of developments in the Indo-Pacific, their views differ on one important point: the role of the United States in the region. While France is willing to coordinate its security policy in the Indo-Pacific with Washington in principle, it also aims for strategic autonomy in the region. This fits with the fact that the new French Indo-Pacific strategy holds both

China **and** the United States accountable for the increasing rivalry between both superpowers. In contrast, the UK and Poland attribute greater responsibility for the strategic and systemic rivalry between the superpowers to China than to the United States. Even though they are concerned about the inconsistency of US policy, they continue to rely on close cooperation with the United States, both within NATO and in the Indo-Pacific.

## THE INDO-PACIFIC PERSPECTIVE

Countries in the Indo-Pacific, such as Japan, the Philippines, and South Korea also view the rivalry between the United States and China in the region as a destabilizing factor and a long-term threat to their security. This assessment should be interpreted in light of the worsening security situation in their own region, which is due to a multitude of territorial conflicts, hybrid threats, and the military build-up in the region. All three states have unresolved conflicts with neighboring states, some of which have superior armed forces. This applies to Japan in relation to China and Russia, to the Philippines in relation to China, and to South Korea in relation to North Korea.

In addition, and similar to France, the UK, and Poland, these three Indo-Pacific countries are highly affected by hybrid attacks. The disinformation and propaganda campaigns emanating from China are viewed as a significant security threat, particularly in Manila. Added to this are North Korea's vastly increased cyber capabilities, which have also repeatedly been directed [against Europe](#).

The increasing military buildup of China and North Korea, including in the nuclear field, pose a security threat that has repercussions far beyond the Indo-Pacific and [could also affect Europe](#). The ever-closer military and technological cooperation between Russia and North Korea is another cause for concern. The

transfer of advanced military technology and knowledge of modern warfare from Russia to North Korea strengthens Pyongyang's military capabilities. At the same time, it represents a political boost for North Korea as it increases the country's diplomatic influence and [reduces its political and economic dependence on China](#).

It fits into this picture that [there is speculation](#) about North Korea joining the Russian-led Collective Security Treaty Organization and the country participating in joint military exercises with other member states such as Belarus and Kazakhstan. South Korea, in particular, is concerned that this could encourage its northern neighbor [to adopt a more confrontational stance](#).

While Japan and the Philippines view a possible military escalation on the Korean Peninsula with concern, both countries see China as a significantly greater and more immediate threat to their own security as well – not least due to their geographical proximity to Taiwan and the presence of US troops in both countries. If China were to invade Taiwan, and the United States were to intervene in the conflict, Washington would likely employ troops already stationed in the region. In that event, Japan would likely provide logistical support; the same applies to [the Philippines and the American troops based there](#). US troops stationed in South Korea could also be mobilized for Taiwan. This possibility is of great concern to Seoul, as it fears that even a partial redeployment of US troops from South Korea to Taiwan could tempt North Korea to launch a military strike against the South.

Against this backdrop, [Japan in particular follows the war against Ukraine very closely](#), as it fears that China could learn lessons not only from the war itself but also from the West's reaction to Russia's aggression. In the event of a Russian success, Beijing could feel emboldened to launch an attack on Taiwan. For this reason alone, China is likely to

be determined to continue its support for Russia. With its assistance for Russia, China could also aim to tie down US resources on the European continent in order to increase its own freedom of action in the Indo-Pacific region. For South Korea, it is just as important to prevent a Russian victory in Ukraine as it is for Japan, but the rationale is different: A Russian success would also [make Russia's ally North Korea the victor](#), which would mark an important diplomatic and political step up for the North Korean leadership.

## CONCLUSION: IMPLICATIONS FOR GERMANY AND ITS EUROPEAN PARTNERS

Although the security challenges in Europe and the Indo-Pacific originate with different states, there are similarities regarding structure, character, and persistence: both regions are confronted with states that pose a systemic and long-lasting threat. In Europe, Russia is identified as the primary source of danger; from the perspective of the Indo-Pacific states, it is a combination of several actors, which include Russia as well as China and North Korea, that puts their security at risks. In both regions, the threat situation is exacerbated by the increasingly close cooperation between Moscow, Beijing, and Pyongyang.

Given these parallels, Germany and its European partners, especially France, the UK, and Poland, must be aware of the consequences should Western support for Ukraine crumble and the pressure of sanctions on Russia ease. A Russian victory could lead Beijing to conclude that it can intervene in Taiwan unhindered and with impunity.

To prevent such a scenario, Europeans need to take action at various levels:

- Support for Ukraine, including military support, must be stepped up to

prevent a Russian victory. At the same time, Europeans should press ahead with planning, for instance within the framework of the “Coalition of the Willing”, for Ukraine’s protection after a possible ceasefire – ideally in cooperation with the United States. Germany should be prepared to contribute soldiers to a deterrent force. Furthermore, the pressure of sanctions on Russia must not ease.

- The Europeans, together with Washington, must accelerate their efforts to strengthen NATO’s deterrence and defense capabilities, particularly along the Alliance’s eastern flank. Germany has a prominent role to play in this context.
- China should be seen as a security problem not only for the Indo-Pacific but also for Europe. It is only because of Beijing’s technological and economic support that Russia is able to wage its war against Ukraine. Therefore, Europeans should understand that Russia is progressively turning into an instrument of Chinese power projection.
- It follows from this analysis that Europe needs to reduce its dependence on China concerning critical goods and materials. This applies particularly to rare earths, which are needed for the defense industry. At the same time, Europeans should do more to protect themselves from Chinese attempts to acquire stakes in critical infrastructure in Europe.
- Finally, Germany should, in close coordination with its European partners, prepare sanction measures in case China dares to challenge the status of the Taiwan Strait by military means. Berlin should clearly communicate to Chinese government representatives via various channels that an attack on Taiwan would have serious economic and diplomatic consequences. A certain degree of ambivalence in conveying this message is appropriate, but the Chinese leadership must not have

the impression that Germany and its European partners would remain inactive in such a situation.



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