

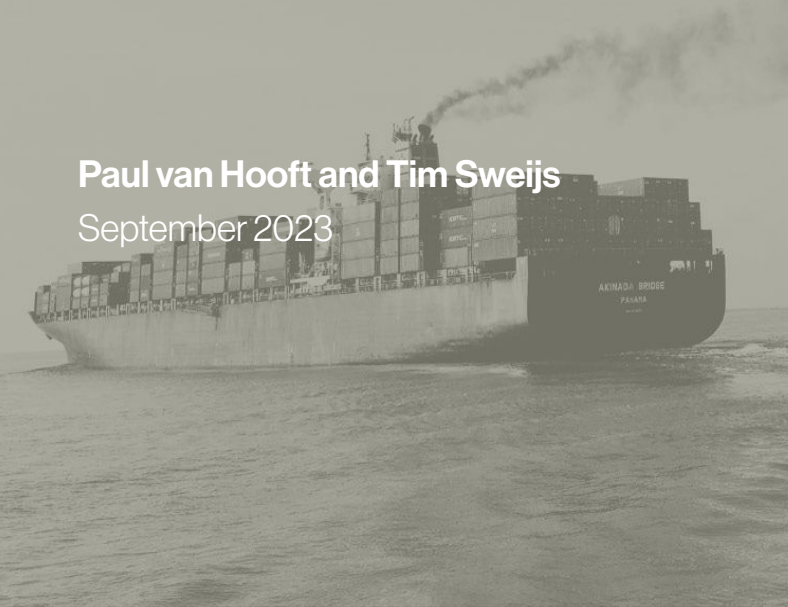


Why should Europe guard the Indo-Pacific maritime commons

Order, Access, or US hegemony?

Paul van Hooft and Tim Sweijs

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Europeans face difficult choices in the Indo-Pacific as the Sino-American competition intensifies and the multilateral order that protects the freedom of the seas is under threat. In this brief we argue that Europeans need to more clearly formulate their objectives and develop policies based on a realistic view of their capabilities before embarking on a long-term commitment. We identify three ideal-typical objectives: (1) uphold the maritime order; (2) ensure that Europe maintains access to key Asian economies; and (3) support US hegemony. Europeans cannot pursue all three successfully; nor should they. While the policies that follow these objectives may partly overlap in practice, they do require clear choices on (a) whether to engage in the Indo-Pacific alongside or separate from the United States; (b) whether to prioritise or engage equally with the different subregions such as Northeast Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia; and (c) which naval assets are needed. We argue that Europeans should prioritise the provision of order with Indo-Pacific partners based on a detailed breakdown of European naval assets offered in this paper. This includes increasing their naval presence but emphasises other means of statecraft. Close maritime collaboration within a coalition of small and middle powers can help dampen escalation pressures while upholding freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, it allows Europe to develop long neglected naval assets within the resource constraints that are likely to not entirely disappear, despite European investments in defence after Russia's invasion of Ukraine – or at least, where naval capabilities are not likely to be the first priority. These naval assets are necessary to take on a larger share in the defence of the Euro-Atlantic Area should a war between the United States and China break out.

European countries increased their engagement with the Indo-Pacific since 2018, most overtly through their growing naval presence. The most publicised example of the new-found European interest was the 2021 British-led multinational carrier group that sailed in varying compositions from the North Sea through the Black Sea, Red Sea, and Indian Ocean, into the Western Pacific, and which included Dutch and American vessels.¹ More or less simultaneously, a French-led carrier group, with Greek and Belgian ships, sailed through the Red Sea and Indian Ocean,² while Germany sent a frigate through to the Pacific to make port calls.³ The increased European presence builds on European maritime missions such as European-led Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASOH) in the Strait of Hormuz and ATALANTA (the first EU naval mission) off the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean. Not only Europe's key maritime powers, the UK and France, have articulated their interest in the region,⁴ but also Germany and the Netherlands,⁵ as well as the EU itself.⁶ Europe's growing interest in the Indo-Pacific is not a one-way street. Key regional middle

1 [Naval presence sends a signal of state interests.] Ian Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 2nd ed. (Second edition. | Abingdon, Oxon ; N.Y., NY : Routledge, [2019]: Routledge, 2018), 83. Colin S. Gray, *The Leverage of Sea Power: The Strategic Advantage of Navies in War* (Free Press, 1992), 2; Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 25. Kevin Rowlands, *Naval Diplomacy in the 21st Century: A Model for the Post-Cold War Global Order* (Routledge, 2018). Christian Le Mièrè, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century: Drivers and Challenges* (Routledge, 2014).

2 George Allison, "British Carrier Strike Group to Sail through South China Sea," UKDJ, April 28, 2021; Frank Gardner, "China Warns UK as Carrier Strike Group Approaches," *BBC News*, July 29, 2021, sec. Asia.; Xavier Vavasseur, "French Carrier Strike Group Begins 2021 Deployment," *USNI News*, February 23, 2021.

3 Blake Herzinger, "Germany Nervously Tests the Indo-Pacific Waters," *Foreign Policy*, January 3, 2022.

4 France and Security in the Indo Pacific," May 2019, 6. "France's Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific" (Paris: Ministère des Armées, 2019), 16. Though the British statement is not a dedicated policy document, it discusses the tilt to the region extensively. "Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy" (HM Government, March 2021), 67.

5 Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific," August 2020, 23–26. "Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia" (Government of the Netherlands, November 2020).

6 "Council Conclusions on an EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" (Council of the European Union, April 16, 2021). The EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific" (European Commission, September 16, 2021), 2.

We identify three ideal-typical objectives: (1) uphold the maritime order; (2) ensure that Europe maintains access to key Asian economies; and (3) support US hegemony.

powers including Japan, South Korea, Australia, Indonesia, as well as India, have welcomed greater European engagement with the region, especially in the maritime domain.⁷

Against this background, Europeans must clarify what the objectives of their engagement are. They must do so because the intensification of the Sino-American competition, the growing demand on European military power following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and their vastly limited naval capacity since the end of the Cold War, require real choices about Europe's role in the Indo-Pacific.⁸

To understand these choices, we discuss: first, the distinction between order and hegemony; second, the implications for European strategic options; third, the limitations Europeans must work under; and fourth and finally, their options for ameliorating those limits.

Order, Hegemony and the Sino-American competition

In their engagement with the Indo-Pacific, European officials should consider the distinction between the building blocks of hegemonic order, namely hegemony on the one hand, and international order on the other, and prioritise between them. International order can be defined as a body of political, legal, and economic norms, rules, and decision-making procedures generally adhered to by the major powers.⁹ The strength of an international order is a function not just of its legitimacy but also of the underlying distribution of power, which is the key guarantor of 'a relatively stable pattern of relationships and behaviours.'¹⁰ International order is therefore rooted in legitimacy and power.¹¹

In international relations, one strand of thought argues that the dominance of one leading power, the hegemon, provides the international order with stability. The hegemon sets the rules across different domains of state interaction. It can enforce compliance in case of transgression, but typically does not need to, as states voluntarily adhere to the rules.¹² For Robert Gilpin and John Ikenberry, for instance, a hegemonic order not only preserves the security and economic interests of the leader, but also provides stability and predictability within the system that facilitates cooperation among its members.¹³ The legitimacy of the hegemonic power lies in the provision of these public goods to other states. Consequently, changes to

7 Satoshi Sugiyama, "As Europe's Interest in the Indo-Pacific Grows, Is Japan Ready to Lead the Way?," *The Japan Times*, May 18, 2021. Alexandra Brzozowski, "Ambassador: EU and South Korea Born to Be Best like-Minded Partners," *Euractiv*, May 5, 2021. Garima Mohan, "Where Does Europe Fit in India's Indo-Pacific Policy?," *Sasakawa USA*, March 21, 2022. "Jaishankar: Distance No Insulation, Challenges in Indo-Pacific Could Extend to Europe: Jaishankar - The Economic Times," *Economic Times India Times*, February 22, 2022. Rory Medcalf, "Antipodean Entente: Optimising Australia and Europe's Indo-Pacific Partnership," in *Europe's Indo-Pacific Embrace: Global Partnerships for Regional Resilience* (Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung, 2021). Susannah Patton, "Australia's Views of Europe in Indo-Pacific: Potential for Balance," *Sasakawa USA*, February 25, 2022. Kiki Verico, "How Indonesia Sees the Indo-Pacific Economic Architecture," *The National Bureau of Asian Research (NBR)* (blog), November 6, 2021.

8 Jeremy Stöhs, *The Decline of European Naval Forces* (Naval Institute Press, 2018).

9 Stephen D. Krasner, "Structural Causes and Regime Consequences: Regimes as Intervening Variables," *International Organization* 36, no. 2 (1982): 185–205.

10 Andrew Heywood, *Political Theory: An Introduction* (Macmillan, 2015), 339.

11 See also Henry Kissinger, *World Order*, 2014.

12 Robert Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), 145. G. John Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan: The Origins, Crisis, and Transformation of the American World Order* (Princeton University Press, 2012), 36.; Ikenberry, *After Victory: Institutions, Strategic Restraint, and the Rebuilding of Order after Major Wars*, Princeton Press, New Edition, 2019.; Bobbitt, P. (2003). *The Shield of Achilles: War, Peace, and the Course of History*, Gardners Books.

13 Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*; Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, 3–23.

The intensification of the Sino-American competition, the growing demand on European military power following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and their vastly limited naval capacity since the end of the Cold War, require real choices about Europe's role in the Indo-Pacific.

that order are seen to spell conflict,¹⁴ a view that is particularly emphasised in hegemonic stability and power transition scholarship.¹⁵ Hegemony is often associated with maritime orders. During the 19th and 20th century, the conventional narrative goes, Great Britain and the US created and enforced liberal international economic orders and within these orders provided security, an open trade and finances regime and freedom of navigation.¹⁶

In the 21st century, the US maintenance of the free and open maritime commons is thus a prime legitimisation of its position both in US and European strategic debates. China's rise presents a challenge to both American hegemony in East Asia and to the order that has been built up around that order. Even if China is not attempting to intercept and deny the access of the maritime lines of communication in general because it depends on them as much as the others, China is looking to ensure it could deny access if it wanted to, and certainly prevent access being denied to it. It is thereby attempting to push out the US from its proximate seas, ensure it has parallel means of control over key points in own trade routes, and further expand its own global footprint and influence through its ambitious Belt and Road Initiative.¹⁷

Yet, as noted, hegemony and order are not the same, nor are maritime powers inherently liberal. Hegemonic orders can also aim at exclusion rather than inclusion and thereby invite contestation from rising powers.¹⁸ Kyle Lascurettes refers to the exclusionary properties of hegemonic orders, which generates inherent tensions that are at odds with the so-called conflict-suppressing quality of hegemonic orders.¹⁹ The British, for instance, were mercantilist at the height of their naval hegemony post-1815.²⁰ In contrast, their predecessors, the Dutch Republic, strongly supported "freedom of the seas".²¹ Yet, the Dutch defence of the principle owed much to their military shortcomings.²² Hegemonic powers look to secure their own interests when they establish and defend orders, which is also true for the US. For

China's rise presents a challenge to both American hegemony in East Asia and to the order that has been built up around that order.

14 Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 145. Joshua R. Itzkowitz Shifrinson, *Rising Titans, Falling Giants: How Great Powers Exploit Power Shifts* (Cornell University Press, 2018); Paul K. MacDonald and Joseph M. Parent, *Twilight of the Titans: Great Power Decline and Retrenchment* (Cornell University Press, 2018).

The seminal work focusing on the history is Paul Kennedy, *The Rise and Fall of the Great Powers: Economic Change and Military Conflict 1500-2000*, 1st ed. (New York: Random House, 1989)

15 Robert Organski, *World Politics*, 1958, Knopf; A.F.K. Organski and Jacek Kugler, *The War Ledger* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1981); ; Henk Houweling and Jan G. Siccama, "Power Transitions as a Cause of War," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 32, no. 1 (1988): 87-102, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022002788032001004>; Doran, Charles. (2003). Economics, Philosophy of History, and the "Single Dynamic" of Power Cycle Theory: Expectations, Competition, and Statecraft. *International Political Science Review - INT POLIT SCI REV.* 24. 13-49. [10.1177/0192512103024001002](https://doi.org/10.1177/0192512103024001002).

16 Gilpin, *War and Change in World Politics*, 145. Ikenberry, *Liberal Leviathan*, 73-75. Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 19. Paul Van Hooft, "All-in or All-out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes," *Security Studies*, 2020. Writing around the turn of the seventeenth century, the English explorer and statesman Sir Walter Raleigh observed, "Whosoever commands the sea commands the trade; whosoever commands the trade of the world commands the riches of the world, and consequently the world itself." *The Works of Sir Walter Raleigh VIII*, 325.

17 Andrea Ghiselli, *Protecting China's Interests Overseas: Securitization and Foreign Policy* (Oxford University Press, 2021).

18 Jack S. Levy and William R. Thompson, "Balancing on Land and at Sea: Do States Ally against the Leading Global Power?," *International Security* 35, no. 1 (2010): 7-43; Karen A. Rasler and William R. Thompson, *War and State Making: The Shaping of the Global Powers*, vol. 2 (Routledge, 1989).

19 Kyle M. Lascurettes, *Orders of Exclusion: Great Powers and the Strategic Sources of Foundational Rules in International Relations* (Oxford University Press, 2020).

20 Patrick K. O'Brien and Geoffrey Allen Pigman, "Free Trade, British Hegemony and the International Economic Order in the Nineteenth Century," *Review of International Studies* 18, no. 2 (1992): 95-99.

21 *Mare liberum* was championed by Hugo Grotius, a lawyer for the Dutch East Indies Company. Note that Hugo Grotius wrote this in the context of Dutch maritime access to trade what was then referred to as the 'Far East'. Hugo Grotius, *Mare Liberum*, vol. 3 (Oxford University Press, 1916).

22 Alan Cafruny, "Class, State, and World Systems: The Transformation of International Maritime Relations," *Review of International Political Economy* 2, no. 2 (1995): 291.

an extra-regional power like the US, access is crucial for the exercise of its hegemony.²³ The US thus has its own vested interest in a broad interpretation of freedom of the seas within the order because its hegemony relies on military access to and unimpeded movement across the global maritime commons to move its forces quickly over vast distances. The US Navy underlines the need for free and open access to the global maritime commons,²⁴ while the Department of Defense (DoD) notes that territorial claims over the commons would restrict US naval activity in over a third of the world's oceans.²⁵

The Sino-American competition thus revolves around the dual Chinese challenge to the fundamentals of the US hegemonic order. Both challenges centre on the maritime access that the US relies on to maintain its hegemony. The first challenge is to the normative-legal institutions of the US-led order that legitimate access. The second challenge is to the military conditions of US hegemony that enforce access. The normative-legal challenge is captured in the struggle over what constitutes freedom of the seas, territorial waters, and the legitimacy of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Seas (UNCLOS), despite the fact that the US Congress never ratifying the agreement.²⁶ The Chinese investments in so-called Anti-Access Area Denial (A2/AD) capabilities represent the challenge to the US command of the maritime commons, because US command is the linchpin of US hegemony.²⁷ Through raising costs, China looks to undermine credibility of US reassurance and deterrence in the eyes of its allies.²⁸

The dual Chinese challenge to the fundamentals of the US hegemonic order is crucial, because the support of small and middle powers for the order has always been indispensable to the stability of hegemonic order.²⁹ When these states withdraw their support, cease their compliance, or actively undermine the order, the order unravels. In turn, US credibility to protect smaller and middle powers depends on unimpeded US power projection. As such, the United States and China are set on a collision course in the maritime domain. One possible way out of this pernicious situation is for a coalition of small and middle powers to take up a more active and stronger role in upholding the rules of the order, without adding fuel to the fire of Sino-American contest over regional hegemony.

Whether small and middle powers can effectively collaborate to uphold international order more broadly and prevent an incumbent and a contender from sliding into war, is a question that deserves greater scholarly scrutiny. In the maritime context, however, there are historical cases in which small and middle powers have worked together to dampen tensions and

23 Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for US Grand Strategy* (Cornell University Press, 2014); Simon Reich and Peter Dombrowski, *The End of Grand Strategy: US Maritime Operations in the Twenty-First Century* (Cornell University Press, 2018), 9. Van Hooft, "All-in or All-out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes."

24 Joint Staff Headquarters, "The Joint Operational Access Concept (JOAC)," *Version 1* (2012): 2.

25 US Department of Defense, "Asia-Pacific Maritime Security Strategy" (Washington D.C.: US Department of Defense, 2015), 23–24.

26 Anisa Heritage and Pak K. Lee, "The Sino-American Confrontation in the South China Sea: Insights from an International Order Perspective," *Cambridge Review of International Affairs* 33, no. 1 (January 2, 2020): 136, 142, 149, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09557571.2019.1639622>. Ken Booth, *Law, Force and Diplomacy at Sea (Routledge Revivals)* (Routledge, 2014). See also Anand 1982, and Sanger 1987. Teh-Kuang Chang, "China's Claim of Sovereignty over Spratly and Paracel Islands: A Historical and Legal Perspective," *Case W. Res. J. Int'l L.* 23 (1991): 399.1

27 Sam Tangredi, *Anti-Access Warfare: Countering Anti-Access and Area-Denial Strategies* (Naval Institute Press, 2013); Evan Braden Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of US Power Projection," *International Security* 38, no. 4 (2014): 115–49; Stephen Biddle and Ivan Oelrich, "Future Warfare in the Western Pacific: Chinese Antiaccess/Area Denial, U.S. AirSea Battle, and Command of the Commons in East Asia," *International Security* 41, no. 1 (July 2016): 7–48, https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00249.

28 Van Hooft, "All-in or All-out: Why Insularity Pushes and Pulls American Grand Strategy to Extremes."

29 David A. Lake, *Hierarchy in International Relations* (Cornell University Press, 2011). P. Schroeder, *Systems, Stability, and Statecraft: Essays on the International History of Modern Europe*, 2004th edition (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004). Kristen P. Williams, Steven E. Lobell, Neal G. Jesse, Beyond Great Powers and Hegemons: Why Secondary States Support, Follow, or Challenge Account., *The Leader Can't Lead When the Followers Won't Follow*, p. 9.

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Europeans need to understand the implication of the choice between support for the order, the pursuits of the benefits of order such as access, and support for the hegemonic power that upholds the order for their positioning in the Indo-Pacific.

provide for the freedom of the seas. For example, the young American Republic, far from its latter great power status, participated in actions with Sweden and Sicily against Barbary pirates.³⁰ During the Iraq-Iran War in the 1980s, the Western European Union (WEU) declared European interest in FON in the Gulf,³¹ and European naval forces cleared 2000 mines from the northern Gulf and the Shatt al-Arab after the ceasefire.³² More recently, the European-led Maritime Awareness/Surveillance Mission in the Strait of Hormuz & Gulf of Oman (EMASOH) showed how a grouping of Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, and Portugal, hosted by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) dealt with instability and insecurity for trade and energy supplies in the Gulf and Strait of Hormuz.³³

Implications for Europe

The discussion above is not abstract: Europeans need to understand the implication of the choice between support for the order, the pursuits of the benefits of order such as access, and support for the hegemonic power that upholds the order for their positioning in the Indo-Pacific. In terms of maritime security policies moving forward, Europeans can: (1) uphold maritime order alongside small and middle powers in the region; (2) ensure Europe maintain access to key Asian economies by focusing on specific sealines of communication (SLOC) and chokepoints that connect Europe to Asia; and (3) support US hegemony, which implies taking part in its military competition with China, in order to strengthen the transatlantic relationship. Each of these objectives suggests different tasks for European navies and consequently different naval capabilities. In the sections below, we discuss the rationale and the implications for each.

Support the multilateral order

By supporting the multilateral maritime order, Europeans would look to collaborate with small and middle powers in Asia to solidify the rules of the existing order – particularly those pertaining to open seas and legal dispute settlement. By strengthening the formal and informal institutions, there is an opportunity to dampen the chances for escalation. Importantly, the approach does so by emphasising the shared interests of small and middle powers in Europe and Asia, rather than underlining a “democracies versus autocracies” frame or underlining the Chinese challenge to US hegemony. After all, many Indo-Pacific states have little ideological affinity with Europe³⁴ or the United States, and emphasising these differences undermines what could be achieved. Moreover, underlining the shared interests could also go far in negating accusations of neo-colonialism derived from the region’s past experiences with Europe. To signal the conflict-dampening intentions of their objective, Europeans would operate through national or European Union frameworks, rather than alongside the United States. In terms of regional partners, Europeans would work with key states like Japan, South Korea, Australia, but balance this with ASEAN states and India. Given the complex desired end state for the region, this approach would require consistent and subtle intra-European and European-regional coordination.

30 “Milestones: 1801–1829 - Office of the Historian - Barbary Wars.”

31 Walker, *The Tanker War, 1980–88*, 65.

32 Walker, 73.

33 “European-Led Maritime Awareness in the Strait Of Hormuz (EMASOH) – MICA Center – Maritime Information Cooperation & Awareness Center.” “EMASOH - Joint Communiqué on the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz.”

34 Paul van Hoof, Benedetta Girardi, and Tim Sweijs, *Guarding the Maritime Commons: What Role for Europe in the Indo-Pacific* (The Hague Centre for Strategic Studies, 2022).

When supporting the multilateral maritime order, Europeans would not rely on naval power to directly enforce security, but instead they would maintain a naval presence that signalled intent to reinforce existing formal and informal institutions. Capacity-building with local partners, humanitarian missions, and law enforcement (with constabulary and counterterrorism) in the Indian Ocean would be central. The naval presence would primarily serve to underline the importance that Europeans attach to the region. The naval presence in the Indian Ocean would need to be strengthened, particularly to carry out maritime law enforcement tasks in the Red Sea and Persian Gulf where European capability is likelier to achieve real effects. To accomplish these tasks, European navies would primarily require capabilities such as ocean-going patrol ships for joint law enforcement and constabulary tasks. For the protection of maritime communications in the Persian Gulf, but also some humanitarian missions, these capabilities would be rounded off with frigates, destroyers, and limited logistics ships.

Maintain access

To maintain access to the Indo-Pacific and safe passage for ships carrying goods between Europe and Asia, Europeans would look to safeguard their economic interests while avoiding becoming trapped in the Sino-American competition. In a sense, the political ambition level for this objective is the lowest of the three and limited to the protection of key maritime lines of communications near chokepoints. It requires less careful balancing and signalling to regional states, China, and the United States. Europeans would avoid the large frameworks such as NATO or the QUAD, and instead work on a minilateral basis or through the EU, and bilaterally with key economies such as Japan, South Korea, Australia, and India. Europe's primary focus would be in the Euro-Atlantic area to deter Russia. However, the military ambition level would be higher as Europeans would need to quickly expand their naval capabilities to provide security across the entire route from Europe to Asia, spanning the Mediterranean, Red Sea, Persian Gulf, and West Indian Ocean, towards the Strait of Malacca and further into the Western Pacific. This objective is contradictory to some extent; China will not quickly block access to European ships because this would damage its own economy, while during a large-scale conflict trade will suffer in any case. Yet, in times of war, Europeans would have the capability to selectively protect convoys and choke points. Such an approach thus relies on China being sufficiently deterred by the costs of a confrontation, where European ships function to give Europe "skin in the game" as it were, as European military capabilities would be insufficient to maintain any sustained effort against China.

Europeans would need the ability to conduct deterrence, compellence and warfighting tasks across the entire string of chokepoints from Europe to East Asia. Consequently, humanitarian, law enforcement and constabulary tasks would be deprioritised. European navies would focus on building n more warships with offensive capabilities like destroyers, frigates, and attack submarines, as well as expanding their logistics capabilities through both support ships and support bases. Other capabilities, such as patrol vessels, would be deemphasized.

Support the United States

When supporting the United States in the Indo-Pacific, Europeans would look to first and foremost strengthen U.S. hegemony, and then to strengthen the order. By engaging in the Indo-Pacific, Europeans hope to maintain transatlantic relations and to keep the United States engaged in European security. Such engagement would have a much more limited appeal in Southeast Asia and increase the risks for Europeans of entanglement in direct conflict with China, but go far in reassuring core Indo-Pacific states with which Europe shares affinity, such

as Australia and Japan. Consequently, Europeans would emphasis working with the United States and the QUAD Plus.

To maintain active engagement with the United States, Europeans would need to prepare for deterrence and warfighting in the Western Pacific, which would include power projection and denial and control tasks, or, conversely, focus on backfilling for the United States in the Indian Ocean and the Persian Gulf, for which Europeans would need more basic sea denial and control tasks. These tasks require large surface vessels with offensive capabilities, like frigates and destroyers, and potentially sea-based air power from a British and/or French carrier.

European limitations

Summarising the above, the second and third objectives of maintaining access and supporting the United States suggest a set of military tasks,³⁵ which include serious deterrence, denial and control, warfighting capabilities, and power projection tasks.³⁶ As already noted, these tasks outpace existing and imminent European capabilities. European navies have drastically shrunk in size since the end of the Cold War,³⁷ and their capacity for naval deployments is thus extremely limited. Table 1 underlines this for a selection of key European states, and is apparent even for the United Kingdom and France, which are the two European states with the most capable navies.³⁸ Deployments are further limited because approximately four ships are required to deploy due to constant maintenance, repair, training, and rest and recuperation requirements.³⁹ To wit, if France and the UK would decide to deploy naval resources to the Indo-Pacific for an extended period of time, at any given moment, they would only have fractions of the necessary capabilities available to them. Of course, in practice this means that a constant rotation of British and French carrier groups would be needed. Europeans are thus limited in terms of their defensive and offensive capabilities.⁴⁰ Active enforcement of the multilateral order without the United States would remain out of reach; with the United States, European capabilities would still remain too limited to survive a confrontation with China in an age of maritime denial.⁴¹

35 Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 169. Geoffrey Till suggests a variety of tasks for a navy from policing duties like fishery protection to conducting expeditionary operations in a high-intensity environment. Geoffrey Till, *Seapower: A Guide for the Twenty-First Century* (Routledge, 2018), 149.

36 Till, *Seapower*, 149. Ken Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy* (Abington, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 15. Jonathan Masters, "Sea Power: The U.S. Navy and Foreign Policy," *Council on Foreign Relations*, August 19, 2019, <https://www.cfr.org/background/sea-power-us-navy-and-foreign-policy>. Peter Trevor Haydon, *Sea Power and Maritime Strategy in the 21st Century: A "Medium" Power Perspective* (Centre for Foreign Policy Studies, 2000). Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 115. Jeremy Stöhs, *How High? The Future of European Naval Power and the High-End Challenge* (Kobenhavn: Djof Publishing ; in cooperation with Centre for Military Studies, 2021), 61. Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 20–21.

37 Stöhs, *The Decline of European Naval Forces*.

38 Jeremy Stöhs, "How High? The Future of European Naval Power and the High-End Challenge" (Djof Publishing, 2021), 39, https://cms.polsci.ku.dk/publikationer/hvor-hoejt-fremtiden-for-europaeisk-maritim-militaermagt-og-udfordringen-fra-stigende-kapacitetstaerskler/CMS_Report__2021_1_-_How_High_-_The_Future_of_European_Naval_Power__updated_15_FEB_2021_.pdf.

39 The number of ships available for deployments depends on: (1) where the ships are homeported; (2) the transit speeds from the homeport to the region of interest; (3) the capacity for maintenance and repairs; (4) the need for personnel training and rotation; and (5) on the access to fuels and resources. Till, *Seapower*, 282. Honorable Robert O. Work, "A Slavish Devotion to Forward Presence Has Nearly Broken the U.S. Navy," U.S. Naval Institute, December 1, 2021, 6, <https://www.usni.org/magazines/proceedings/2021/december/slavish-devotion-forward-presence-has-nearly-broken-us-navy>. Bryan Clark and Jesse Sloman, "Deploying beyond Their Means: America's Navy and Marine Corps at a Tipping Point" (CSBA, November 18, 2015), 3, [https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA6174_\(Deploying_Beyond_Their_Means\)Final2-web.pdf](https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/CSBA6174_(Deploying_Beyond_Their_Means)Final2-web.pdf).

40 Stöhs, "How High? The Future of European Naval Power and the High-End Challenge," 39.

41 Michael Beckley, "The Emerging Military Balance in East Asia: How China's Neighbors Can Check Chinese Naval Expansion," *International Security* 42, no. 2 (2017): 78–119; Jonathan D. Caverley and Peter Dombrowski, "Cruising for a Bruising: Maritime Competition in an Anti-Access Age," *Security Studies* 29, no. 4 (2020): 671–700; Paul Van Hooft, "Don't Knock Yourself Out: How America Can Turn the Tables on China by Giving up the Fight for Command of the Seas," *War on the Rocks*, February 23, 2021.

Table 1. Overview of ships from key European navies⁴²

	Aircraft carrier	Attack submarine	Destroyer	Frigate	Corvette	Offshore patrol vessel	Minehunter	Landing platform	Oiler	Support
France	1 (fixed wing)	10 (nuclear powered)	3	17		14	10	3	2	4
UK	2 (fixed wing)	11 (nuclear powered)	6	12		8	11	6	6	1
Germany		6 (diesel powered)	3	9	5		12		5	6
Netherlands		4 (diesel powered)		6		4	6		1	1
Italy	2 (helicopter)	8 (diesel powered)	4	11		15	10	4	4	
Spain	1	1 (diesel powered)		10		6	6	2	2	
Denmark				9		3				
Belgium				2			5			
Greece		11 (diesel powered)		13			3		4	3
Norway		6 (diesel powered)		4		10	6		1	
Portugal		2 (diesel powered)		5	2	4				

In contrast, a European focus on supporting the multilateral maritime order would require *law enforcement and constabulary tasks* that focus on piracy, narcotics and human trafficking illegal, unreported and unregulated (IUU) fishing, environmental damage and terrorist attacks, humanitarian assistance, and other tasks.⁴³ A presence in the Indo-Pacific would be part of European *naval diplomacy* to underline the importance Europeans attach to the region to bolster relations, build coalitions, and build partner capabilities.⁴⁴ Such a presence is more in line with existing European capabilities and could still make a real contribution to international maritime order and stability, while not adding fuel to the fire of Sino-American competition, nor excessively divert resources from NATO tasks in the Euro-Atlantic area to deter against Russian aggression. It would be necessary to clearly convey to the Americans that Europe will further strengthen its naval capabilities to take on a larger share in the provision of security in the Euro-Atlantic area should a Sino-American war break out.

⁴² The overview excludes the French and British ballistic missile submarines used for their strategic deterrent.

⁴³ Masters, "Sea Power: The U.S. Navy and Foreign Policy." Haydon, *Sea Power and Maritime Strategy in the 21st Century*. Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 17; Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 174–76, 185; Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century*, 2014, 7.

⁴⁴ Speller, *Understanding Naval Warfare*, 175–76; Booth, *Navies and Foreign Policy*, 15, 18–19; Christian Le Mière, *Maritime Diplomacy in the 21st Century*, Cass Series: Naval Policy and History (Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2014), 7.

European options

Finally, we offer a number of solutions with which Europeans can compensate for their lack of naval capabilities. In essence, European states more effectively share and pool infrastructure in the region and rotate their forces in and out. First, sharing arrangements can be expanded. Most of the bases and infrastructures of the European states are concentrated in the Persian Gulf and Djibouti, ensuring that the Western Indian Ocean is the most feasible starting point for a European naval presence. Not coincidentally, these European points of access to the region are close to key maritime chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Bab El-Mandeb. Second, the EU's Coordinated Maritime Presence concept, already in use in the Gulf of Guinea and the Northwest of the Indian Ocean, can also be expanded further across the Indian Ocean towards the Strait of Malacca. This would entail coordinated rotational deployments of European vessels to ensure a consistent presence.⁴⁵ Third, this coordination mechanism can be leveraged to create, strengthen and deepen a series of bilateral, trilateral, and larger groupings of European and regional Indo-Pacific states, built on the actual demands from these regional states.

45 "The EU Launches Its Coordinated Maritime Presences Concept in the Gulf of Guinea," Text, EEAS - European External Action Service - European Commission, accessed January 5, 2022, https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/91970/eu-launches-its-coordinated-maritime-presences-concept-gulf-guinea_en.



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