



The Marathon Initiative

Two Fronts, One Goal: Euro-Atlantic Security in the Indo-Pacific Age

This paper outlines how Europe can contribute to alleviating the “two-front” predicament in U.S. global strategy. It shows how Europeans can help free up the United States’ strategic bandwidth in Europe so as to enable a proper U.S. prioritization of China without weakening Europe’s deterrence architecture. The paper also shows how Europeans can contribute to U.S.-led efforts to uphold deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In this paper, we outline how Europe can contribute to alleviating the so-called “two-front” predicament in U.S. strategy. This predicament pertains to the need to uphold deterrence in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions simultaneously or, should deterrence fail, to fight two wars on concurrent or roughly concurrent timelines. Specifically, we have zoomed in on two, interrelated, questions: 1) how can Europeans help free up the United States’ strategic bandwidth in Europe so as to enable proper U.S. prioritization of China without weakening Europe’s deterrence architecture?; and 2) in what ways, if at all, can Europeans contribute to U.S.-led efforts to uphold deterrence in the Indo-Pacific?

When it comes to Europe, we have identified two sets of military-strategic functions that are critical to the sound functioning of deterrence. We think about transatlantic burden-sharing in the context of those two functions: 1) the provision of strategic enablers and the enhancement of deterrence (i.e., through nuclear deterrence, command and control (C2), intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR), ballistic missile defense (BMD), cyber and electronic defense, etc.); and 2) a direct contribution to conventional deterrence through stand-in forces, especially in and around the eastern European “front-line.”

While we expect the United States to continue to play a leading role in the provision of strategic enablers and enhanced deterrence, we argue that Europeans should step up their efforts in this regard. Britain and France would stand out as far as the nuclear level is concerned, but Germany and others can also step up their roles in areas like integrated air and missile defense, ISR or C2. At any rate, greater European responsibility for strategic enablers and enhanced deterrence should not undermine the principle of U.S. leadership, which remains critical for any rebalancing at this level to be strategically credible and politically feasible.

When it comes to providing a direct contribution to conventional deterrence in and around the front-line, we see more potential for a rebalancing in terms of burden-sharing, and for Europeans to take the lead. However, we argue that it is important for the United States to maintain some sort of conventional military role and presence in Europe, for assurance purposes but also to manage escalation dynamics. A European-led effort in conventional deterrence would need to revolve around a Polish-German core within the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), augmented by other allied countries, and around which Swedish-Finnish, Baltic and Romanian nodes will gravitate in northern, eastern and south-eastern Europe, respectively. Secondly, any credible European-led effort in conventional deterrence presupposes a substantial shift in the

way that Europe invests in skills, capabilities and technologies. It also calls for more focus on the EU-NATO relationship, with a need for NATO to continue to focus on the defense planning and operational aspects of deterrence and the European Union (EU) to concentrate on the industrial and technological aspects of deterrence.

Last but not least, and contrary to conventional wisdom, we argue that Europeans can play a strategically meaningful military contribution in the Indo-Pacific, both in peacetime and wartime. The subsurface domain would be particularly critical in any Indo-Pacific contingency, and the combined UK and French subsurface nuclear (SSN) force would constitute around 15-20 percent of the U.S. one, and far above anything U.S. regional allies may be in a position to bring to bear within the next decade at least. Beyond that, Europeans can contribute by securing the sea lanes of communications in the Indian Ocean, which would be important in an Indo-Pacific contingency, but also in other important areas like space and ammunition, as well as investing in a common pool of inter-theater capabilities.

We argue against the notion of a neat division of labor, whereby the United States would leave almost no forces in Europe, and Europeans would refrain from any military role in the Pacific. We recognize that the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific regions are separate theaters with different needs, but our vision requires paying greater attention to cross-theater awareness and coordination in key areas like defense, capability and operational planning as well as industrial and technological collaboration.

Our recommendations range from the broad to the specific. We recognize that there can be no credible European contribution to the “two-front” predicament without resources such as substantially increased defense expenditure and investment in military forces and capabilities. While we do not provide a “price tag” for how much more Europeans should spend on defense, we believe they should move beyond the 2 percent of GDP target set in NATO. Relatedly, NATO Europe and the European Union need to take on more responsibility for developing ISR, outer space, cyber defense and electronic warfare capabilities and develop a defense industrial base to produce these technologies. This requires much closer defense planning and industrial cooperation between NATO and the EU to ensure that investments are tailored around concrete operational needs and are being sufficiently and appropriately channeled toward critical defense capabilities. Finally, we also provide specific details on how to operationalize both the German-Polish land and British-French naval cores. To this end, we also call for closer operational and intelligence ties between European nations and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command.

I. INTRODUCTION

Russia's invasion of Ukraine – and the Biden administration's significant effort to assist in Kyiv's defense – has triggered an intense debate in the United States about how to reconcile the immediate demand to help Ukraine defend itself with the need to focus on the China threat in the Indo-Pacific. This feeds into broader strategic discussions about how the United States ought to navigate its so-called “two-front” predicament and uphold deterrence in Europe and Asia or, should deterrence fail, fight two wars on concurrent or roughly concurrent timelines.¹ U.S. partners and allies have a direct stake in debates about the “two-front” predicament. Europeans, in particular, are faced with the responsibility of ramping up their defense to respond to Russia's aggression and manage Moscow's longer-term evolution. At the same time, Asia's economic weight, America's decision to prioritize the China threat in that region, and growing ties between China and Russia point to the increasing strategic relevance of Indo-Pacific developments for Euro-Atlantic security. All in all, Europeans are faced with two prevailing strategic rationales for the management of the two-front predicament.

On the one hand, the United States has consistently asserted that China poses a far more formidable, long-term challenge to the United States than Russia does. In this context, the question of how the war in Ukraine affects America's overall relative position vis-à-vis China becomes a critical one. For some, the Biden administration's strong support for Ukraine strains U.S. diplomatic, military and industrial resources, and stands in the way of a much-needed prioritization of the China challenge in the Indo-Pacific.² The fact that Washington's support of Ukraine has not been matched by either an equivalent investment of defense resources to Asia or a significant rise of the overall U.S. defense

¹ A. Wess Mitchell, “A Strategy for Avoiding Two-Front War”, *The National Interest*, August 21, 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/strategy-avoiding-two-front-war-192137>; Thomas G. Mahnken, “Could America Win a New World War? What It Would Take to Defeat Both China and Russia”, *Foreign Affairs*, October 27, 2022, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/could-america-win-new-world-war>; Luis Simón and Zack Cooper, “Rethinking Tradeoffs Between Europe and the Indo-Pacific”, *War on the Rocks*, May 9, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/05/rethinking-tradeoffs-between-europe-and-the-indo-pacific/>.

² Elbridge Colby and Oriana Skylar Mastro, “Ukraine Is a Distraction From Taiwan”, *Wall Street Journal*, February 13, 2022, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/ukraine-is-a-distraction-from-taiwan-russia-china-nato-global-powers-military-invasion-jinping-biden-putin-europe-11644781247>; Elbridge A. Colby and Alex Velez-Green, “To avert war with China, the U.S. must prioritize Taiwan over Ukraine”, *Washington Post*, May 18, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/05/18/taiwan-ukraine-support-russia-china/>.

budget is particularly problematic.³ From this vantage point, Europe can be viewed as a drag on U.S. resources.

On the other hand, others – including senior ranking officials in the Biden administration⁴ – argue that degrading Russian military power today can temper the threat to Europe in the coming years and thus create the necessary space for the United States to decisively rebalance its strategic focus towards deterring China in the Indo-Pacific.⁵ Relatedly, the war in Ukraine can help revive U.S. and allied defense industrial capacity, generate important operational lessons, and revitalize the U.S.-led alliance infrastructure (both transatlantic and transpacific). In this sense, U.S. investment in Europe generates broader strategic payoffs. Yet, while the erosion of Russian military power in the short-term (especially in the land domain) could give Europeans the breathing space they need to develop military capabilities and strengthen their defense industrial base,⁶ the risk that Europeans dampen efforts in defense due to a momentary and relative weakening of Russia is real.

Either way, Europeans cannot afford to think of the two-front predicament as a uniquely American problem. Even though certain interpretations of European strategic autonomy may lend credence to the notion that Europe may take a pass on the logic of power blocs,⁷ Europe's security and geopolitical architecture is still inextricably linked to U.S. military power. Today, the main threat to the United States' "command of the commons" – and to U.S. global military power more broadly – comes from the Indo-Pacific, not Europe. Indeed, should Washington fail to meet the China challenge in the Indo-Pacific, the entire architecture built around U.S. military power would collapse. This means that America's prioritization of China is in the European interest. And this is why the question of how Europeans can contribute to better management of the two-front predicament is likely to be so central to European strategy and transatlantic

³ Ashley Townshend and James Crabtree, "U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy, Alliances and Security Partnerships" in Tim Huxley and Lynn Kuok (eds.), *Asia-Pacific Regional Security Assessment 2022* (London: The International Institute for Strategic Studies-IISS, 2022), https://www.iiss.org/globalassets/media-library---content--migration/files/publications/rsa-2022/aprsa-2022_lr.pdf.

⁴ Sophia Ankel, "Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin says the US aim is to make Russia so weak it can't invade another country again", *Business Insider*, April 25, 2022, <https://www.businessinsider.com/us-defense-secretary-says-goal-see-russia-weakened-2022-4?r=US&IR=T>.

⁵ Luis Simón, "America's Indo-Pacific Strategy Runs Through Ukraine", *War on the Rocks*, December 16, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/12/americas-indo-pacific-strategy-runs-through-ukraine/>.

⁶ Lisa Aronsson and John R. Deni, "Agile and Adaptable: U.S. and NATO Approaches to Russia's Short-Term Military Potential", CSIS Report, July, 2023.

⁷ See, e.g., Josep Borrell, "The Sinatra Doctrine: How the EU Should Deal with the U.S.-China Competition," *Italian Institute for International Affairs* (IAI), September 4, 2020, <https://www.iai.it/en/pubblicazioni/sinatra-doctrine-how-eu-should-deal-us-china-competition>; Jamil Anderlini and Clea Caulcutt, "Europe must resist pressure to become 'America's followers,' says Macron", *Politico Europe*, April 9, 2023, <https://www.politico.eu/article/emmanuel-macron-china-america-pressure-interview/>.

relations in the coming years. We recognize that deterrence can encapsulate a much broader meaning,⁸ and that Europe's contribution to better management of the two-front predicament transcends the military domain. However, we focus here on the military dimension – not least given the salience of Russia's military threat to European security⁹ and China's dedication of substantial resources to its conventional and nuclear forces.¹⁰

Engaging directly with the two-front predicament and focusing specifically on the military domain, this paper revolves around the following questions:

- 1) How can Europeans help free up the United States' strategic bandwidth in Europe so as to enable a proper U.S. prioritization of China without weakening Europe's deterrence architecture?
- 2) In what ways, if at all, can Europeans contribute to U.S.-led efforts to uphold deterrence in the Indo-Pacific?

Answering these questions, this paper shows how Europeans can contribute to better management of the two-front predicament. We argue that they can do so by taking up the lion's share of the conventional deterrence burden in Europe and providing a small but strategically meaningful contribution to deterrence in the Indo-Pacific. These two arguments are, of course, based on the assumption that European nations will increasingly invest in capabilities and forces. Without substantial European financial commitments to defense, it will be difficult for Europe to contribute to the two-front predicament.¹¹ We end with some recommendations and conclusions on the challenges ahead.

⁸ For an essential reading of the concept of deterrence see Michael J. Mazarr, "Understanding Deterrence", RAND Corporation, 2018, <https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PE295.html>.

⁹ Lisa Aronsson and John R. Deni, "Agile and Adaptable: U.S. and NATO Approaches to Russia's Short-Term Military Potential", CSIS Report, July, 2023, p. 8.

¹⁰ Roger Cliff, *China's Future Military Capabilities*, U.S. Army War College Press, April 26, 2023, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/960/>.

¹¹ See, e.g., Monaghan rightly points out that increased defense spending is required but, even with additional financial resources, it will still take time to develop deployable forces in Europe. Sean Monaghan, "The Sword, the Shield, and the Hedgehog: Strengthening Deterrence in NATO's New Strategic Concept", War on the Rocks, August 23, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/08/the-sword-the-shield-and-the-hedgehog-strengthening-deterrence-in-natos-new-strategic-concept/>. See also: Max Bergmann and Otto Svendsen, "Transforming European Defense: A New Focus on Integration", CSIS Reports, June 15, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/transforming-european-defense-new-focus-integration>.

II. REBALANCING EUROPE?

The question of what Europeans can do to alleviate U.S. military pressure in Europe is inevitably tied to debates about U.S. force posture and defense strategy. To be sure, the imperative of rebalancing to Asia has dominated debates about U.S. force structure and posture for the past decade,¹² and this has created structural pressure on U.S. military presence in Europe.¹³ However, the withdrawal from Iraq and Afghanistan, and an uptick in Russian revisionism – beginning in 2014 with the annexation of Crimea and reinforced by Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022 – have actually led to an increase in the U.S. military presence in Europe. Indeed, the U.S. military presence in Europe went up from around 65,000 personnel in 2014 to some 80,000 in 2022, but this number has crept up to 100,000 personnel in the wake of Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.^{14, 15} Although this increase should be viewed in comparison to the United States’ overall global military footprint,¹⁶ it has been made possible by extending rotational forces beyond their usual deployment schedule, as well as surging new forces from the continental United States. Much of these additional forces have gone to NATO’s Eastern Flank – it is estimated that there are currently around 10,000 U.S. troops in Poland and around 3,000 in Romania.¹⁷ These troop increases have proceeded alongside a significant strengthening of U.S. C2 infrastructure in the east, with the standing up of a forward Corps Headquarters (HQ), an air defense artillery brigade HQ, an engineer brigade HQ, and a combat sustainment support HQ.¹⁸

¹² See, e.g., Michèle Flournoy and Janine Davidson, “Obama’s New Global Posture. The Logic of U.S. Foreign Deployments”, *Foreign Affairs*, July/August 2012, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2012-06-14/obamas-new-global-posture>.

¹³ See, e.g. Luis Simón, “Understanding U.S. Retrenchment in Europe”, *Survival: Global Politics and Strategy*, 57:2, 2015, pp. 157-172, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/00396338.2015.1026093>; Alexander Lanoszka and Luis Simón, “A Military Drawdown in Germany? US Force Posture in Europe from Trump to Biden”, *The Washington Quarterly*, 44:1, 2021, pp. 199-218, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/0163660X.2021.1894718>.

¹⁴ For an overview see, e.g., Michael E. O’Hanlon, “Strengthening the U.S. and NATO defense postures in Europe after Russia’s invasion of Ukraine”, Brookings Institution, June 21, 2022, <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/strengthening-the-us-and-nato-defense-postures-in-europe-after-russias-invasion-of-ukraine/>; Emily Holland, “Strategic Competition and Basing in Central and Eastern Europe”, Brookings Institution, February 2023, https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2023/02/FP_20230207_europe_basing_holland.pdf.

¹⁵ Mara Karlin, Acting Deputy Undersecretary of Defense for Policy and Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy, Plans and Capabilities, March 1, 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/News-Stories/Article/Article/3315827/allies-partners-central-to-us-integrated-deterrence-effort/>.

¹⁶ For example, the U.S. has over 75,000 troops are stationed in Japan and the Republic of Korea.

¹⁷ Paul Belkin, Rebecca M. Nelson and Cory Welt, “Russia’s War on Ukraine: U.S. Policy and the Role of Congress”, Congressional Research Service, January 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/IF/IF12277>.

¹⁸ Testimony of General Christopher Cavoli, Commander of United States European Command, Armed Services Committee, United States House, April 26, 2023, <https://armedservices.house.gov/sites/republicans.armedservices.house.gov/files/04.26.23%20Cavoli%20Statement%20v2.pdf>.

This augmented U.S. force posture since Russia's invasion of Ukraine has elicited a number of expert reactions. Some argue that the post-February 2022 increases are insufficient in light of Russia's aggressive behavior. For instance, Ian Brzezinski and Alexander Vershbow argue for permanently stationing substantial NATO combat forces in the frontline states around brigade-size units enabled by ISR, air and missile defense and long range-fires.¹⁹ Such changes, they contend, would both help strengthen deterrence but also lay the foundations to enable a Ukrainian victory against Russia. More importantly, perhaps, any U.S. retreat into an indirect role could undermine deterrence in Europe.²⁰ Any U.S. drawdown could make aggression more likely, and this could mean a return to Europe by America, but at a much higher material and security cost (especially should war break out).²¹ Such problems underscore the value of some form of U.S. conventional military presence in Europe.

Furthermore, those opposed to any U.S. force drawdown in Europe point to the different geopolitical factors and force requirements across the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters. Europe is seen as a predominately "continental" and, therefore, land-centric theater, whereas the Indo-Pacific is a predominately "maritime" region demanding naval and air assets.²² Insofar as some of the U.S. military assets parked in or assigned to Europe, especially those that are "heavier" and more logistics intense, are either not usable or suboptimal in an Indo-Pacific context, the "maritime vs. continental" distinction is meant to downplay the idea of direct tradeoffs. However, the broader question of whether the United States should invest in a more maritime-centric force structure or a more diverse or flexible force remains and underscores the relevance of trade-offs between Europe and the Indo-Pacific.²³

Alternatively, however, an important number of experts warn that continuing to ramp up U.S. military presence in Europe defies strategic logic because it undermines the

¹⁹ Ian Brzezinski and Alexander Vershbow, "Decisive action needed at NATO's Vilnius summit on Ukraine and the completion of Europe", *Atlantic Council*, April 2023, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/04/Memo-to-NATO-leaders.pdf>

²⁰ See, e.g., Alexander Lanoszka and Michael Hunzeker, *Conventional Deterrence and Landpower in Northeastern Europe*, (Carlisle: U.S. Army War College Press, 2019), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/monographs/381>; Heather A. Conley, John O'Grady, Anthony Bell, Jeffrey Rathke and Kathleen H. Hicks, "Evaluating Future U.S. Army Force Posture in Europe: Phase II Report", *CSIS*, June 2016, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/160712_Samp_ArmyForcePostureEurope_Web.pdf.

²¹ For a similar argument in relation to the Middle East see Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star over the Pacific: China's Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Military Strategy* (Naval Institute Press, 2013).

²² See, e.g., Michael J. Mazarr, "Why America Still Needs Europe. The False Promise of an Asia First Approach", *Foreign Affairs*, April 17, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/united-states/why-america-still-needs-europe>.

²³ *Ibid.*

decision to prioritize the China challenge in the Indo-Pacific.²⁴ Russia's military underperformance in Ukraine lends credibility to this point. In this vein, advocates of a "China first" approach contend that Europeans have enough economic and military resources to deal with the Russian threat with limited U.S. assistance, and that Washington should radically rebalance its forces – including those allocated to fulfill NATO commitments – towards deterring China.²⁵ But what would this mean precisely? What would a significant retrenchment or near-full withdrawal mean concretely for U.S. force posture and defense strategy in Europe, and for Washington's NATO commitments? On this point, we find different views even amongst those who embrace the "China first" logic.

In an article this year, Raphael Cohen has advocated for a minimal U.S. military role in Europe, structured around the preservation of the extended nuclear deterrence guarantee and the adoption of an indirect, supporting role limited to arming European allies so that they can balance against Russian military power by themselves.²⁶ Elbridge Colby and Alex Velez-Green – two prominent proponents of the "China First" doctrine – have argued that the United States should keep the extended nuclear deterrent and select conventional capabilities in Europe.²⁷ Frank Hoffman has advocated for a precision-fires and artillery-centric strategy of deterrence by denial, whereby Europeans would provide the bulk of combat forces and be augmented by U.S. strategic enablers.²⁸ Others, like Colin Wall and John Christianson, warn that Europeans made relative progress in acquiring some of the capabilities suited for permissive military environments (especially airlift) but still show significant shortcomings in enablers like airborne ISR, electronic warfare or suppression of enemy air defenses, all of which are

²⁴ See, e.g. Patrick Porter, "How Europe can defend itself: Washington will soon have to prioritize Taiwan", *Unherd*, April 27, 2023, <https://unherd.com/2023/04/how-europe-can-defend-itself/?=frlh>.

²⁵ Similar arguments are made by so-called restrainers or offshore balancers, who contest the very logic of U.S. forward military presence in Eurasia in the first place, and advocate for U.S. retrenchment across the board, and not just in Europe. See, e.g. Emma Ashford, "Strategies of Restraint. Remaking America's Broken Foreign Policy", *Foreign Affairs*, September/October 2021, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/united-states/2021-08-24/strategies-restraint>; Barry R. Posen, *Restraint: A New Foundation for U.S. Grand Strategy* (Ithaca and London: Cornell University Press, 2014); John J. Mearsheimer and Stephen M. Walt, "The Case for Offshore Balancing: A Superior U.S. Grand Strategy", *Foreign Affairs*, 95:4, 2016, pp. 70-83.

²⁶ Raphael S. Cohen, "Ukraine and the New Two War Construct", *War on the Rocks*, January 5, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/ukraine-and-the-new-two-war-construct/>.

²⁷ Elbridge A. Colby and Alex Velez-Green, "To avert war with China, the U.S. must prioritize Taiwan over Ukraine", *Washington Post*, May 18, 2023, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2023/05/18/taiwan-ukraine-support-russia-china/>.

²⁸ Frank Hoffman, "American Defense Priorities after Ukraine", *War on the Rocks*, January 2, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/american-defense-priorities-after-ukraine/>.

critical in light of Russian Anti-Access and Area Denial (A2/AD) networks.²⁹ America's provision of such capabilities thus remains essential for preserving deterrence in Europe.

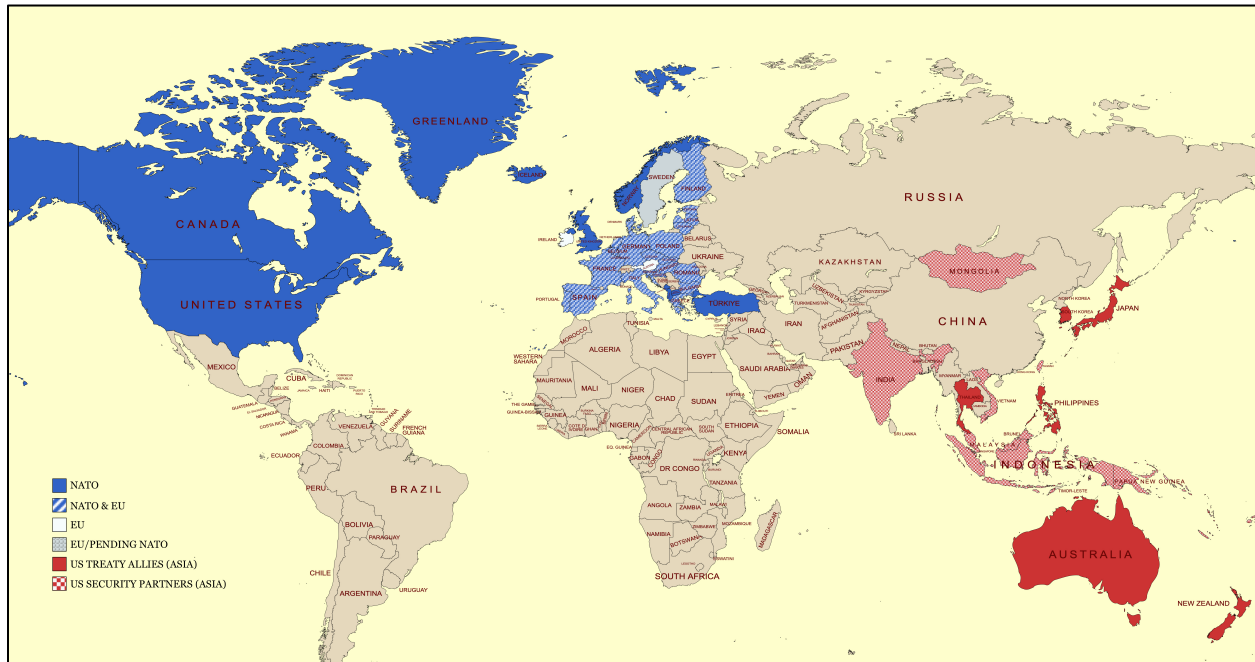
Conversely, others advocate for a position of concurrency whereby the United States should take the emphasis away from theater-specific capabilities and invest in “cross theater” assets, so as to swing easily from Europe to the Indo-Pacific or vice-versa.³⁰ Such a “global swing force” approach would emphasize ISR, missile defense, airpower, space-based capabilities or long-range precision-guided munitions (PGMs). Supporters of this view advocate for building the force posture around a principle of concurrency, as well as developing ‘globally fungible forces and capabilities that could be used to inflict unacceptable levels of punishment on multiple adversaries simultaneously’.³¹ Yet there are trade-offs even with this approach. For example, even if enablers such as ISR and PGMs are transferable across theaters, the question of whether they are assigned to Europe or the Indo-Pacific is still relevant in both peacetime and wartime. This is particularly acute for scarce capabilities such as the very small U.S. Air Force fleet of B2 stealth bombers or the nuclear-certified F35s – in this case, should Europe or the Indo-Pacific be afforded the bulk of these capabilities?

²⁹ Colin Wall and John Christianson, “Europe’s Missing Piece: The Case for Air Domain Enablers”, *CSIS*, April 2023, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2023-04/230417_Wall_European_Enablers.pdf?VersionId=iUbPOX8mfPa.UjIqPIb.PWItCb08sjur. For a discussion of Russian A2/AD capabilities see, e.g., Robert Dalsjö and Michael Jonsson, “More than Decorative, Less than Decisive: Russian A2/AD Capabilities and NATO”, *Survival*, 63:5, 2021, pp.169-190, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/00396338.2021.1982204?needAccess=true&role=button>; Stephan Frühling and Guillaume Lasconjarias, “NATO, A2/AD and the Kaliningrad Challenge”, *Survival*, 58:2, 2016, pp. 95-116, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/00396338.2016.1161906?needAccess=true&role=button>.

³⁰ See, e.g., Clementine G. Starling, Tyson K. Wetzel and Christian S. Trotti, “Seizing the Advantage: A Vision for the Next US National Defense Strategy”, Atlantic Council Strategy Papers, December, 2021, https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/Seizing-the-Advantage_A-Vision-for-the-Next-US-National-Defense-Strategy.pdf; and Luis Simón, “Bridging U.S.-Led Alliances in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific: An Inter-theater Perspective”, CSIS Briefs, May 2022, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/bridging-us-led-alliances-euro-atlantic-and-indo-pacific-inter-theater-perspective>.

³¹ See, e.g., testimony of Jim Thomas before the House Armed Services Committee, January 30, 2018, <https://docs.house.gov/meetings/AS/AS00/20180130/106813/HHRG-115-AS00-Wstate-ThomasJ-20180130.pdf>.

America's European and Asian Allies



Source: Original map

The remainder of our analysis rests on three broad assumptions. The first is that Europeans should prepare for a U.S. approach to force structure and force posture that prioritizes the China threat in the Indo-Pacific and deprioritizes Europe, regardless of whether current developments in Eastern Europe may hinder or delay that prospect. The second is that Europeans have to either step up their contribution to deterrence or otherwise put up with more insecurity in Europe (the latter being a very likely scenario). The third is that a number of reasons (including bureaucratic inertia, the existence of legacy capabilities, bases and structures) underscore the reality of *some* form of U.S. conventional military contribution to European security for the foreseeable future.

Taking these assumptions as a point of departure, the next section discusses their implications for transatlantic burden-sharing debates in the context of two military-strategic functions critical for the operation of deterrence in Europe: 1) the provision of strategic enablers and the enhancement of deterrence; and 2) a direct contribution to conventional deterrence and defense, especially in and around the front-line.

III. EUROPE, IN EUROPE

I. PROVIDING STRATEGIC ENABLERS AND ENHANCED DETERRENCE

Strategic enablers are vital to prevailing in war, which is itself a key foundation for credible deterrence. Nuclear weapons remain central in this context, but strategic enablers also relate to state-of-the-art C2, ISR, electronic warfare and cyber defense capabilities, as well as supremacy over Europe's maritime and air approaches (i.e., to supply and sustain Europe militarily) and a deep defense manufacturing base (to sustain Europe industrially).

We expect the United States to continue to play a leading role in the provision of strategic enablers and enhanced deterrence in Europe, for at least three reasons. The first relates to the enormous gap that exists between U.S. and European capabilities, forces and infrastructure in these areas, and to the fact that developing state-of-the-art capabilities in many of these areas requires multiple decades' worth of investments, even though it has become cheaper and easier to develop certain cyber or ISR capabilities. The second is that for Europeans to develop equivalent capabilities jointly would require a level of military integration that has hitherto proved elusive, not least as many countries are not ready to accept European rather than American leadership. Nuclear weapons are the most pertinent example here, as there appears to be no European ambition to take up this role. Third, we should also recognize that even if Europe does invest in sizeable military capabilities, it may not have the requisite logistical or personnel resources required to sustain them. Again, here the United States continues to play a key role in the Euro-Atlantic region.

Nevertheless, Europeans should prepare to step up their role when it comes to strategic enablers without undermining the principle of U.S. leadership, which is a precondition for any rebalancing effort in these areas to be strategically credible. The notion that Europeans should contribute to the development of strategic enablers is not new, though. Europeans have in fact been doing so for years, even at the higher end of the spectrum (i.e., nuclear deterrence). Britain and France have their own independent nuclear forces, and a history of trilateral nuclear cooperation with the United States, which NATO recognizes as a valuable contribution to European security.³² Moreover,

³² See, e.g., Bruno Tertrais, "Entente Nucleaire. Options for UK-French Nuclear Cooperation", BASIC Trident Commission, June 2012, https://basicint.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/06/entente_nucleaire_basic_trident_commission.pdf. In its official documents, NATO

through the nuclear-sharing arrangement, several allies such as Belgium, Germany, Italy and the Netherlands host U.S. forward-deployed nuclear weapons on their territory and provide dual-capable aircraft ready to deliver them in case of nuclear war.

While a fully-fledged role for Europe in the area of nuclear weapons is not in the cards,³³ there are ways in which Europeans can step up their contribution to nuclear security. This includes the production of more British and French nuclear submarines and the renewal and strengthening of the nuclear sharing arrangements by ensuring the broadest possible participation. F-35 users could envisage certification for nuclear missions, and this could help offset the advantage Russia currently possesses at the level of theater-level nuclear capabilities. In addition, nuclear-certified F-35s flown by European air forces also free up scarce U.S. Air Force assets useful for nuclear signaling in the Indo-Pacific theater. France, in particular, could also play a more ambitious role. Short of joining the Nuclear Planning Group, which seems unlikely today, it could nevertheless engage in strengthened consultations through the North Atlantic Council and conceivably take part in joint nuclear exercises with the United States or NATO.³⁴ These exercises could ensure greater coherence between the conventional and nuclear components of NATO's overall deterrence and help showcase the extent to which any conventional shortfalls will entail a greater reliance on nuclear escalation management. Last but not least, the nuclear infrastructure owned by France and other allies can complement and boost the production capacity of the United States' nuclear enterprise (in case NATO's nuclear capability needs to be scaled up significantly).

Second, if Europeans are to strengthen their capabilities and contribution to upholding deterrence in Europe, they should expand their presence and influence within NATO's C2 architecture. For example, Europeans could take on greater responsibility for NATO's joint operational (Naples, Norfolk, Brunssum) and component (land, air, sea) commands, with four out of six currently falling under U.S. command. However, any effort to expand Europe's influence in NATO's C2 architecture should respect the overarching principle of U.S. leadership, embodied in the position of Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR). Two reasons stand out in this regard. First, U.S. extended nuclear deterrence guarantees across the Euro-Atlantic region – and U.S.

recognizes the value of British and French nuclear arsenals: the 2022 Strategic Concept acknowledges that “the independent strategic nuclear forces of the United Kingdom and France have a deterrent role of their own and contribute significantly to the overall security of the Alliance”. Similar language is used in the Alliance's 2012 Deterrence and Defence Posture Review which also embraces “the importance of the independent and unilateral negative security assurances offered by the United States, the United Kingdom and France”.

³³ See, e.g., Barbara Kunz, “Switching Umbrellas in Berlin? The Implications of Franco-German Nuclear Cooperation”, *The Washington Quarterly*, 43:3, 2020, pp. 63-77,

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/0163660X.2020.1814007>.

³⁴ Liviu Horovitz and Lydia Wachs, “France's Nuclear Weapons and Europe”, SWP Comment, 2023/C 15, 2023, <https://www.swp-berlin.org/10.18449/2023C15/>.

strategic cover more broadly – would become less credible if the United States were to yield the position of SACEUR, especially as SACEUR is also a theater-level nuclear force commander. Relinquishing command authority to another ally could not be reconciled with the United States’ nuclear command and control structures or its commitments under the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Second, it would be very difficult for Europeans to agree to be under the permanent military command of any other European country in a NATO context. Taking those assumptions as a point of departure, any rebalancing within NATO’s C2 structure would need to mirror a broader rebalancing in terms of allied contributions to deterrence. In this regard, and in line with the other recommendations offered throughout this paper, such rebalancing would need to give greater space to Britain, France and Germany at the strategic level of C2, and Germany and Poland at the theater level.

Third, NATO Europe and the EU should take on more responsibility for ISR, outer space, cyber defense and electronic warfare capabilities. European nations are already stepping up investments and capacities to counter space-based threats, as observed in NATO through the Space Operations Centre and the EU’s moves to develop space domain awareness capabilities.³⁵ Here, the EU is also modernizing its observation (Copernicus) and positioning (Galileo) satellite constellations, as well as building the next-generation space-based secure communication network (IRIS²).³⁶ On cyber defense and electronic warfare, European investments are being made in early-warning structures (e.g., ENISA), even if fully digitalizing Europe’s armed forces is estimated to cost \$120–140 billion.³⁷ While more European investment is clearly required, European governments have pledged to jointly develop cyber defense rapid response teams, and joint investments are already being channeled to airborne electronic warfare capabilities.

Finally, the return of war in Europe has highlighted the need to reassess the defense industrial base across the Euro-Atlantic region. The experiences of the war in Ukraine show that high-attrition warfare is back in Europe, and lessons are being drawn for any possible future contingency involving Taiwan. Euro-Atlantic leaders are rightfully calling for a “war economy” footing that would see Europeans significantly upgrade their defense manufacturing capacities. For Ukraine, this has been largely framed in terms of a need to produce and deliver more ammunition. Over the long term, however, Europe’s

³⁵ Daniel Fiott, “In Orbit: The European Union, Defence and Space Domain Awareness”, CSDS Policy Brief, No. 22, July 2023, <https://csds.vub.be/in-orbit-the-european-union-defence-and-space-domain-awareness>.

³⁶ Daniel Fiott, “A Stellar Moment? Spain, Strategy and European Space”, Elcano Royal Institute Analysis, February 15, 2023, <https://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/en/analyses/a-stellar-moment-spain-strategy-and-european-space/>.

³⁷ Munich Security Conference/McKinsey, “More European, More Connected and More Capable: Building the European Armed Forces of the Future”, Special Report, 2017, https://securityconference.org/assets/02_Dokumente/01_Publikationen/MSCEuropeanDefenceReport2017.pdf.

industrial capacity must address the need to produce military capabilities jointly and ensure that European armed forces can rapidly replenish military stocks and inventories. In practice, European countries are already stimulating increased manufacturing through greater equipment orders, but more time will be needed for industry to meet demand (i.e., labor and skills, raw materials, delivery times).³⁸

Interestingly, the EU has emerged as a key venue for developing defense-industrial policy and supporting this manufacturing renaissance with joint funding. This focus on industrial policy has also contributed to renewed concerns about the proliferation of harmful technologies and investments by Russia and China. In particular, Europe is learning that as it develops its own defense industrial base, it cannot afford to hemorrhage industrial capacity to China. This is one of the reasons why the EU has invested in developing semiconductor technologies in Europe, while also curtailing through regulation the roll-out of Chinese 5G technologies and diversifying its industrial resource base. Such decisions also highlight Europe's role in responding to risks from China in the Euro-Atlantic region, which itself is a contribution to the United States' own strategy of tackling the non-military challenges emanating from Beijing.³⁹ In addition, European allies and NATO partners can promote the moratorium on the production of fissile materials in future NPT Review Conferences and seek to hold Russia and China to account for driving forward nuclear modernization and expansion. This is also a crucial element of Europe's ability to alleviate the United States' "two-front" burden.

II. DIRECT CONTRIBUTION TO CONVENTIONAL DETERRENCE

The second key area of interest is the direct contribution to conventional deterrence and defense in the Euro-Atlantic region. Here is where we see more potential for serious rebalancing in terms of burden-sharing. We would argue, though, that it is important for the United States to maintain some sort of role and presence in the conventional space, not just for strategic assurance purposes, which is a persistent structural Eastern European need, but also to manage escalation dynamics and avoid entanglement risks. Victor Cha has argued that in designing its alliance system in East Asia, the United States' interest in keeping certain allies from going rogue was an important consideration.⁴⁰ A similar logic would apply to contemporary Europe (i.e., preventing European allies from overreacting to perceived Russian weakness or signals, and

³⁸ Daniel Fiott, "Strategic Competition: Toward a Genuine Step-Change for Europe's Defense Industry?", *Economics of Peace and Security Journal*, 18:1, 2023, pp. 7-17.

³⁹ See, e.g., Luis Simón, Linde Desmaele and Jordan Becker, "Europe as a Secondary Theater? Competition with China and the Future of America's European Strategy", *Strategic Studies Quarterly* Vol. 15, no. 1 (2021), 90-115.

⁴⁰ Victor D. Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton University Press, 2016).

thereby risking entangling the United States in a war with Russia at a time when the Indo-Pacific needs to be prioritized).

A European-led effort in conventional deterrence would need to revolve around a Polish-German core within NATO, which would help structure a conventional deterrent posture along the Eastern Flank. This would also include three other critical nodes: Sweden and Finland in the north, the Baltic states in the east, and Romania in the south, with Ukraine ideally acting as a shield limiting the flank, and the U.K. and France playing important support functions in the north-east/Baltic and south-east/Med-Black Sea continuum through upgraded links to the Baltics-Nordics and Romania respectively. The NATO link is key to facilitating the channeling of resources and capabilities from other allies in western and southern Europe to augment those core nodes. By leveraging Polish-German capabilities, Europe should be ready to provide the great majority of army capabilities while still counting on the logistical depth of the United States. In this regard, Germany could focus specifically on theater enablement.

Poland has clearly been doing its homework, with contracts signed for 1,000 K2 and approximately 500 Abrams tanks, 672 K9 howitzers, three missile frigates, 32 F35 fighter aircraft and more.⁴¹ However, the single most important factor is for Germany to step up its defense modernization efforts and for Poland and Germany to enhance their military-to-military cooperation, especially in the land and air domains. The recent announcement by Germany to permanently station 4,000 soldiers in Lithuania is a good start,⁴² if it materializes, but Poland and Germany can also do more together. A substantially enhanced German presence in the Multinational Corps Northeast (MCNE) would send an important signal of how committed Poland and Germany are to providing the conventional force backbone for Europe. Such steps should work in parallel with a substantial increase in the level of high readiness forces – a core need for NATO’s new force model. However, two big obstacles to a more ambitious approach are Germany’s sluggish efforts and divergent threat perceptions.⁴³ This would be a dramatic shift, and the inertial default, which is the United States maintaining its backbone presence, is not sustainable, especially if and when Russia recovers. Here, there is a political imperative to ensure that Germany and Poland develop a coherent response to defend the Eastern Flank.

⁴¹ See, Ministry of Defence of Poland, “Modern military – safe homeland”, March 1, 2023, <https://www.gov.pl/web/national-defence/modern-military---safe-homeland>.

⁴² “Germany to station 4,000 troops in Lithuania”, Deutsche Welle, June 26, 2023, <https://www.dw.com/en/germany-to-station-4000-troops-permanently-in-lithuania/a-66031051>

⁴³ Justyna Gotkowska, “The Zeitenwende and Germany’s Unsatisfactory Stress Test: A View from Poland”, *internationale Politik Quarterly*, February 24, 2023, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/zeitenwende-and-germanys-unsatisfactory-stress-test-view-poland>.

Secondly, any credible European-led effort in conventional deterrence presupposes a substantial shift in the way that Europe invests in skills, capabilities and technologies. Yet, the NATO Vilnius Summit underlined how European states are still not entirely serious about spending more on defense. Even though the official summit communiqué implied that the 2 percent of GDP target is the floor in terms of defense spending, most still fail to meet the NATO 2 percent of GDP spending target, and there are questions about how quickly the 2 percent average can be met. In fact, only 11 NATO allies currently spend more than the 2 percent average.⁴⁴ Without adequate spending on defense, Europeans will not be able to sustain a meaningful contribution to conventional deterrence, and it will make it harder for Europeans to ensure deterrence and any military tasks that may arise in geographical regions such as the Indo-Pacific, Africa and the Middle East.

Nevertheless, at the theater-level, Europeans can play a more important role in missile defense, especially with collective investments in air defense systems through the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI),⁴⁵ and the joint investments being made via the EU in ballistic missile detection and interception systems. It also calls for more focus on the EU-NATO relationship, with a need for NATO to continue to focus on the defense planning and operational aspects of deterrence and the EU to concentrate on the industrial and technological aspects of deterrence.⁴⁶ Finally, no discussion about NATO-EU cooperation is complete without mention of “military mobility” or the ability to transport military capabilities and weapons across the Euro-Atlantic space. Even though the United States is working directly with the EU on military mobility today under the EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation, far greater investment is required to develop the transport links and nodes required to maneuver NATO forces. The new regional plans adopted at the Vilnius Summit help quantify the operational needs of sustaining forward defense in Article 5 scenarios. Yet, even here, significantly greater efforts are required especially given the imperative to develop new ballistic missile and air force basing infrastructure in Europe.

⁴⁴ This includes Estonia, Finland, Greece, Hungary, Latvia, Lithuania Poland, Slovakia, the U.K. and the U.S. in 2023. See, <https://www.nato.int/nato-static-f2014/assets/pdf/2023/7/pdf/230707-def-exp-2023-en.pdf>.

⁴⁵ Douglas Barrie and Bastian Giegerich, “European Missile Defence – Right Questions, Unclear Answers?”, *IISS Military Balance Blog*, February 10, 2023, <https://www.iiiss.org/online-analysis//military-balance/2023/02/european-missile-defence-right-questions-unclear-answers>.

⁴⁶ See, e.g., Luis Simón, “The Ukraine War and the Future of the European Union’s security and Defence Policy”, CSIS, January 30, 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/ukraine-war-and-future-european-unions-security-and-defense-policy>

IV. EUROPE, IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has triggered much debate about similar contingencies in the Indo-Pacific, and how the United States and its regional allies may respond.⁴⁷ Most discussions have focused on a possible Taiwan contingency, and how it could potentially escalate into an all-out war between the United States and China, the possible outcomes, and the implications for Japan, Australia or other U.S. Indo-Pacific allies. However, the question of what such a contingency may mean for Euro-Atlantic security is also getting increasing attention.⁴⁸ To be sure, there are other hotspots that could trigger a military conflict in the region, including Sino-Japanese disputes in the East China Sea or China's disputes with several countries in the South China Sea – with the former being more likely to lead to a US-China conflict. The Korean peninsula is another possible flashpoint, and one that would not necessarily directly implicate China. Europe's political and military response to a possible contingency in the Indo-Pacific would of course depend very much on the place and circumstances. Yet, the Taiwan referent has become a proxy for the broader discussion on what Europe may or may not bring to the table in any Indo-Pacific contingency.

Conventional wisdom in Asia, the United States, and even in much of Europe has it that, if there were a direct military conflict in or around Taiwan, Europe could and likely would contribute diplomatically and economically.⁴⁹ The expectation that Europe would indeed take diplomatic and economic actions against China in the case of aggression would in itself be geopolitically meaningful, as it would presumably affect Beijing's cost-benefit calculation. In this regard, even if peacetime deployments of European vessels to the Taiwan Strait or South China Sea may not be that significant militarily, they might be useful from a signaling viewpoint. Beyond such signaling roles, however, the general sense is that there is not much point in talking about a European military contribution in an Indo-Pacific context – the best Europeans can do is to shore up deterrence in

⁴⁷ See, e.g. Mark F. Cancian, Matthew Cancian and Eric Henginbotham, "The First Battle of the Next War: Wargaming a Chinese Invasion of Taiwan", CSIS, January 2023, https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/publication/230109_Cancian_FirstBattle_NextWar.pdf?VersionId=WdEUwJYWIySMPIr3ivhFolxC_gZQuSQ; Stacie Pettyjohn, Becca Wasser, and Andrew Metrick, "Bad Blood: The TTX for the House Select Committee on Strategic Competition Between the United States and the Chinese Communist Party (CCP)", CNAS, April 26, 2023, <https://s3.us-east-1.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/documents/Pettyjohn-Wasser-Metric-Statement-for-the-Record-for-House-Select-Committee-on-China.pdf?mtime=20230427122552&focal=none>; Stacie Pettyjohn, Becca Wasser, and Chris Dougherty, "Dangerous Straits: Wargaming a Future Conflict over Taiwan", CNAS, June 2022, <https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/CNAS+Report-Dangerous+Straits-Defense-Jun+2022-FINAL-print.pdf>.

⁴⁸ See, e.g. Sheryn Lee and Benjamin Schreer, "Will Europe Defend Taiwan?", *The Washington Quarterly*, 45:3, 163-182, 2022, <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/epdf/10.1080/0163660X.2022.2128565?needAccess=true&role=button>

⁴⁹ See, e.g. Larry Diamond and James O. Ellis Jr., "Deterring a Chinese military attack on Taiwan", *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, March 13, 2023, <https://thebulletin.org/premium/2023-03/deterring-a-chinese-military-attack-on-taiwan/>.

eastern Europe and free up U.S. military bandwidth, so that Washington can devote its full or near-full military attention to the Indo-Pacific, in cooperation with regional allies.

It goes without saying that the United States would be the key military player in any Indo-Pacific contingency involving a war with China. Specifically, the subsurface domain is likely to prove critical in any Taiwan or first-island chain contingency. This is because China's A2/AD capabilities would make it very difficult for surface vessels or non-stealthy aircraft to survive in a high-end fight.⁵⁰ This underscores the importance of ground-based long-range strikes (500 to 5,000 kms range), airpower (stealth and non-stealth), and attack submarines to repel a possible Chinese amphibious assault of Taiwan, deny sea control to China and even strike – and deeply penetrate – China's A2/AD complex. Only the United States can play a meaningful contribution when it comes to ground-based long-range strikes.⁵¹ Stealthy airpower is probably the least critical of those three capabilities, and it is one area in which U.S. allies in Europe and the Indo-Pacific can both contribute. Several U.S. allies and partners across the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions operate the F-35 fighter aircraft, which will improve interoperability and allow for substantial ISR and joint domain operations.⁵²

Nevertheless, the importance of offensive, submarine-based capabilities cannot be understated as both a critical military capability and the one area in which U.S. allies can decisively contribute. Allies like Japan, Australia or the Philippines have of course a particularly valuable role to play from a basing perspective. Moreover, Japan has significant operational experience in the underwater domain, as well as an impressive array of conventional submarine and anti-submarine warfare capabilities. However, it lacks nuclear-powered submarines and has important legal restrictions when it comes to land-attack and offensive operations more broadly, critical in any Taiwan contingency. Indeed, when it comes to adding capabilities in a potential high-end fight, Europeans have at least as much to bring to the table as U.S. Indo-Pacific allies, if not more. All in all, European maritime capabilities are significant – amounting to five aircraft carriers,

⁵⁰ See, e.g. Andrew Krepinevich, "Maritime warfare in a mature precision-strike regime", CSBA, 2014, <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/190270/MMPSR-Web.pdf>; Evan Braden Montgomery, "Contested Primacy in the Western Pacific: China's Rise and the Future of U.S. Power Projection", *International Security*, SPRING 2014, Vol. 38, No. 4, pp. 115-149, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/24481102.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A162a9f9a0cdd9f8ac1dd688af61ab651&ab_segments=&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1; David A. Deptula and Heather Penney, "Mosaic Warfare", *Air & Space Forces Magazine*, November 1, 2019, <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/article/mosaic-warfare/>; Robert Haddick, *Fire on the Water. China, America, and the Future of the Pacific* (Annapolis: U.S. Naval Institute, 2022);

⁵¹ Eric Stephens Gons, "Access Challenges and Implications for Airpower in the Western Pacific", RAND Report, 2011, https://www.rand.org/pubs/rgs_dissertations/RGSD267.html.

⁵² Authors' discussion with senior NATO official, January 2023.

116 large surface combatants and 66 submarines.⁵³ Yet, the jewels in the crown remain the naval capabilities provided by Britain and France,⁵⁴ not least their submarine capabilities. With their seven Astute- and six Barracuda-class boats, Britain and France have nuclear-powered submarines that can combine with the 50 U.S. Virginia-class submarines in a major show of collective lethality. In time, Australia will be joining this “club” on the back of the trilateral Australian, British and American pact, AUKUS, but in the meantime Europe’s principal naval powers bring the bulk of credible allied submarine power in the region. With greater investment,⁵⁵ this Franco-British submarine core may even give life to a European fleet of surface vessels with air and missile defense that can operate as both stand-in or stand-off forces, as well as help in keeping key sea lines of communication open. In this regard, it is important to highlight the inter-theater value of European military power, especially in the naval domain.

Specifically, in an Indo-Pacific contingency, European naval capabilities could play an important role in keeping the Indian-to-Pacific sea lines of communications secure, and thus contribute to any resupplying effort, especially with China’s growing global presence.⁵⁶ More broadly, European space capabilities could help expand the network of allied space-based assets, play substitution roles in the case of a Chinese attack against U.S. satellite systems and decrease the Alliance’s overall vulnerability to Chinese challenges in space.⁵⁷ To ensure proper coordination of these and other possible actions, Europeans should have plans in place to react to a possible Indo-Pacific contingency, including a reflection of how to assist a U.S.-led military effort in the region, as well as fill possible U.S. force gaps in the Euro-Atlantic.

To be sure, mutual defense commitments will probably - and by and large - remain intra-regional, as opposed to inter-regional, and Europeans may not play a major or direct role in underwriting deterrence in the Indo-Pacific save through economic means. That means they may not need a permanent presence in terms of headquarters or combat assets, but instead rely on signaling through regular peacetime rotations, exercises and port calls. However, insofar as Indo-Pacific developments are likely to

⁵³ See, e.g., Pierre Morcos and Colin Wall, “Are European Navies Ready for High-Intensity Warfare?”, *War on the Rocks*, January 31, 2022, <https://warontherocks.com/2022/01/are-european-navies-ready-for-high-intensity-warfare/#:~:text=Collectively%2C%20Europeans%20had%20197%20large,height%20of%20the%20Cold%20War.>

⁵⁴ See, e.g., Michael John Williams, “New British carriers can transform Europe’s NATO naval capabilities”, *New Atlanticist*, April 7, 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/new-atlanticist/new-british-carriers-can-transform-europes-nato-naval-capabilities/>.

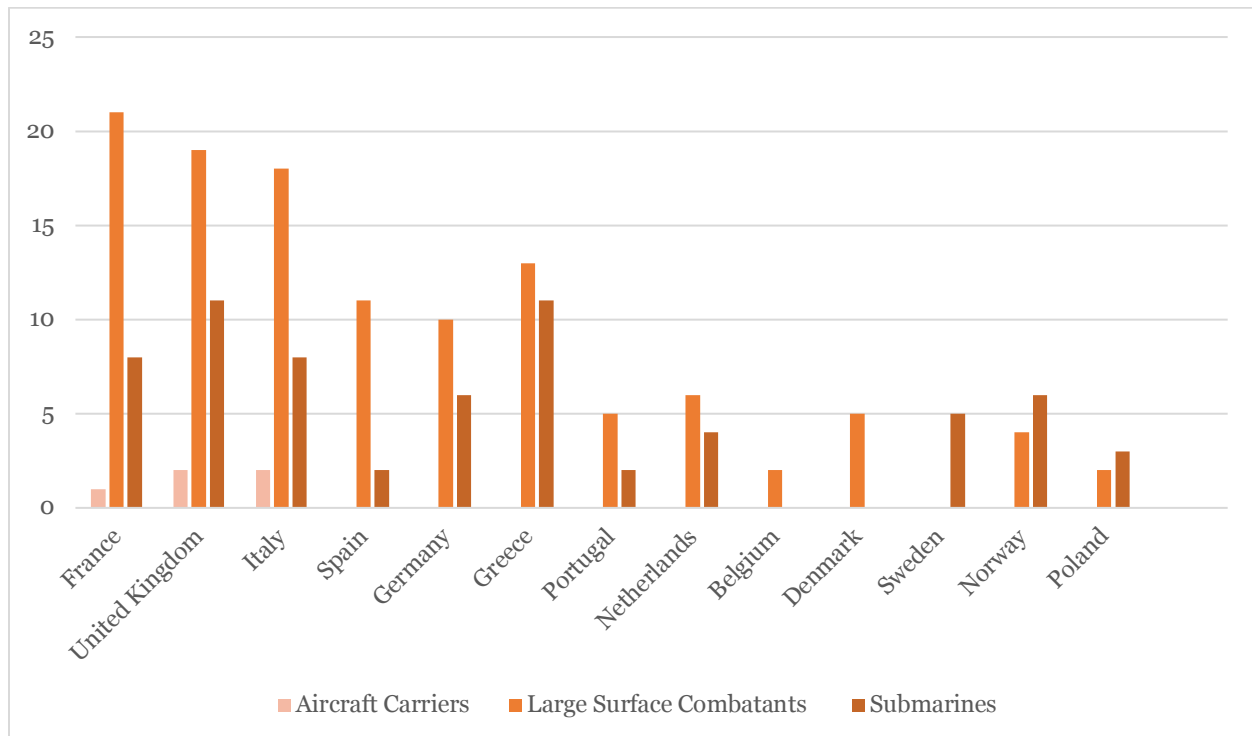
⁵⁵ Johannes R. Fischbach, “Europe’s Navies and the Return of the Cruiser”, *IISS Military Balance Blog*, May 5, 2023, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2023/05/europes-navies-and-the-return-of-the-cruiser/>.

⁵⁶ See, e.g., Toshi Yoshihara and James R. Holmes, *Red Star Over the Pacific: China’s Rise and the Challenge to U.S. Maritime Strategy*, (U.S. Naval Institute Press, 2013).

⁵⁷ Jonas V. Berge and Liselotte Odgaard, “NATO in the Global Commons: Defending Outer Space Against Threats from China”, *International Journal* (forthcoming, 2023).

have a significant impact on U.S. force planning and Euro-Atlantic security, Europeans will need to have eyes and ears in the Indo-Pacific. Improving coordination with U.S. regional partners and allies – both politically and militarily – is arguably the best way to do that. One such way of doing so is to establish NATO liaison offices in the Indo-Pacific or by stationing NATO liaison officers in U.S. Indo-Pacific command or relevant allied headquarters in Australia, Japan or the Republic of Korea.

European Naval Forces



Source: Marcos & Wall, “Are European Navies Ready for High-Intensity Warfare?” War on the Rocks (2022)

Upgrading political consultation mechanisms is another logical step. Building on the existing NATO-AP4 (or the “Asia Pacific Four,” which includes South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand) momentum, a permanent “NATO-AP4 Council” could help the United States and its Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific allies have more systematic exchanges on common threats and how to address them, share relevant intelligence and lessons on how to deter revisionist great powers and, critically, exchange perspectives on the evolution of Sino-Russian relations and coordinate their responses to Sino-Russian cooperation.⁵⁸ In time, any “NATO-AP4 Council” could lead to more structured

⁵⁸ Simón, “Bridging U.S.-Led Alliances”.

linkages such as strengthening the presence of AP4 countries in NATO's Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe (SHAPE), Allies Command Transformation (ACT), Defense Planning Process (NDPP) or new innovation mechanisms such as the NATO Innovation Fund or DIANA (the latter three probably in an observatory capacity) could also be instrumental in that regard. We recognize that this is a challenging and complex suggestion, but such ideas hit at the roots of what is required in bridging the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions.

However, even without more formalized linkages between NATO and the AP4 minilateral and bilateral defense industrial ties between Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific partners will be reinforced. AUKUS readily comes to mind here, but so too does the Global Combat Aircraft Programme (GCAP) between the UK, Japan and Italy. Despite questions about technology-sharing arrangements, such ties would be crucial in ensuring that U.S. allies can work out any vulnerabilities to their respective defense manufacturing bases.⁵⁹ Any war in Taiwan will arguably entail a higher attrition rate than Ukraine,⁶⁰ so ensuring supply chain security and rapid production is vital.

⁵⁹ Jennifer Kavanagh and Jordan Cohen, "The Real Reasons for Taiwan's Arms Backlog – And How to Help Fill It", *War on the Rocks*, January 13, 2023, <https://warontherocks.com/2023/01/the-real-reasons-for-taiwans-arms-backlog-and-how-to-help-fill-it/>.

⁶⁰ Michael Brown, "Taiwan's Urgent Task: A Radical New Strategy to Keep China Away", *Foreign Affairs*, January 25, 2023, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/china/taiwan-urgent-task-new-strategy-to-keep-china-away>.

V. CONCLUSIONS

In this paper, we have outlined how Europe can help alleviate the “two-front” predicament. Beyond the more immediate need to ensure the defense of the Euro-Atlantic region and keep in check Russia’s military evolution over the longer term after the war in Ukraine,⁶¹ we have also argued that any “Europe first” approach by Europeans need not exclude a role for them in the Indo-Pacific. For each element of the predicament, we recognize that there are trade-offs and pay-offs in each claim we make. For Europe, a key trade-off is freeing up the United States to focus on China at the cost of substantially increasing European defense expenditure, the fielding of forces, the development and procurement of capabilities and enablement of the European defense industry. The cost here is that Europeans will have to do more for their defense, which is long overdue in any case, but the pay-offs include a more decisive U.S. response to China, which is in Europe’s interest, more equitable burden-sharing in Europe, and a healthier defense industry. In the case of the Indo-Pacific, Europeans will not play a central role, but the pay-off for ensuring naval support and other contributions is a strengthening of the U.S. position and inter-theater alliance frameworks.

Such a role for Europe is long overdue. We recognize that at the core of this dual approach is a need for substantially increased defense investment: 2 percent of GDP simply does not cut it anymore, but the reality is that most European allies do not even meet this amount. In this sense, the United States has a vested interest in devising ways to encourage and push European allies to up their defense spending – the same is true of U.S. allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific too. However, the Vilnius Summit did not result in any major change to NATO spending targets (2 percent of GDP), even if the language on meeting capability requirements has become clearer. Yet, while European defense spending efforts remain woeful in many quarters – yes, even after the Ukraine war – we see weak signals of change for the better. Poland, for example, is on the verge of building one of Europe’s most robust multi-layered defense systems with tanks, air defense, artillery and long precision fires. We also observe evidence of shifting strategic approaches in Europe, as the long-vaunted focus on expeditionary missions and counterinsurgency comes to an end. In the end, we recognize that Europe is hobbling along while chewing four-day-old gum, but banging Europe into shape is vital for its own defense and the health of the United States’ global network of alliances.

Our analysis also contributes to the ongoing policy debates about U.S. grand strategy, Europe and the Indo-Pacific. We highlighted these debates in the first section of this paper. We have outlined the risks of a sudden and substantial downsizing of the U.S.

⁶¹ Lisa Aronsson and John R. Deni, “Agile and Adaptable: U.S. and NATO Approaches to Russia’s Short-Term Military Potential”, CSIS Report, July, 2023.

force presence in Europe, and we have stressed the importance of the United States continuing to play its nuclear role and its substantial contribution to conventional deterrence and defense in Europe. Nevertheless, we have argued that Europe needs to do much more for its defense to alleviate the force burden on the United States, especially in the conventional domain. If the Indo-Pacific is a predominately maritime region and Europe a land-centric one, we call for far greater investments in Europe's land and air capabilities even as we insist that European naval capabilities have a role to play in an Indo-Pacific context too. At the conventional level, we do not see greater European investments in defense as contradictory to U.S. interests or a risk in terms of the threat from Russia. We have acknowledged in this paper that a constantly increasing U.S. force presence in Europe is unsustainable, especially in light of the United States' need to respond to the threat from China. Regardless of how the "two-front" debate plays out in U.S. domestic politics, Europe clearly has to do more to ensure a long-term response to the threat from Russia, while also developing the capabilities required of a lighter but no less important contributory role in the Indo-Pacific, where Europeans have interests too.
