



Redefining Asia-Europe Security in a Multipolar World

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Redefining Asia-Europe Security in a Multipolar World

By Michael Raska

SYNOPSIS

Europe and Asia are entering a new phase of strategic interdependence, driven by converging threats across traditional and emerging domains. Cyberattacks, AI-enabled warfare, space-based disruptions, and tech supply chain fragility are exposing critical gaps in resilience. Transforming security cooperation will therefore require both regions to move beyond symbolic engagements to interoperable frameworks tailored to multi-domain competition.

COMMENTARY

At this year's Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore, French President Emmanuel Macron called for a "positive new alliance" between Asia and Europe – anchored in shared principles, strategic autonomy and practical cooperation – amid intensifying great power rivalries.

His message builds on the argument that Asia and Europe's security is increasingly interconnected – whether through the global repercussions of Russia's war in Ukraine, Chinese coercion in the South China Sea and Taiwan Strait, or the broader erosion of norms underpinning the international order.

Over the past decade, Europe's forays into the Indo-Pacific have largely sought to align with the United States in supporting a "free and open Indo-Pacific".

France and the United Kingdom have deployed naval task groups; Germany has sent frigates; and the European Union has launched its own Indo-Pacific strategy. These moves were part of a wider effort to demonstrate Europe's strategic presence and influence in the region.

Yet the reality has been more constrained.

Despite the rhetoric, European navies and air forces do not have sufficient resources and operational capacity to make a strategic difference in the Indo-Pacific. There is also a lack of political will. Most deployments have been symbolic, limited in duration and inherently stretching European capabilities.

Now, with the return of a more isolationist US administration prioritising competition with China and questioning the utility of traditional alliances, the foundational logic of Europe's Indo-Pacific engagement is also under pressure. If Washington is no longer the glue binding transatlantic and transpacific interests, then what anchors Asia-Europe security cooperation?

In other words, the underlying security paradox on both sides is this: At a time when Europe's bandwidth for Indo-Pacific engagement is shrinking, Asia's demand for reliable and resilient partnerships is growing.

The convergence of Sino-Russian interests – from joint military exercises to energy and arms cooperation – has created shared vulnerabilities across the Eurasian landmass. Yet the institutional and strategic links between Europe and Asia remain underdeveloped, fragmented and reactive.

The key question, then, is not whether Europe can project power in Asia. It is whether Europe and Asia can rediscover each other in ways that reflect their evolving strategic needs – and forge new modes of cooperation that go beyond symbolic presence.

Why Europe Still Matters for Asian Security

Despite its limited capacity for sustained power projection in the Indo-Pacific, Europe retains strategic relevance for Asia – not through hard military presence, but through its normative influence, technological capabilities and experience in managing complex security challenges.

In particular, European nations offer valuable lessons in national resilience, civil-military integration and whole-of-government approaches to hybrid and grey-zone threats – capabilities that are increasingly vital in an era where the boundaries between war and peace are blurred.

Finland's model of national readiness provides a compelling reference point for small states in East Asia, especially Singapore. Its doctrine of societal resilience and defence preparedness is gaining wider relevance, offering practical lessons for states grappling with regional instability and non-linear threats.

For decades, Finland – a relatively small country of 5.5 million – has maintained a comprehensive approach to national defence, blending universal conscription, territorial defence, decentralised logistics and robust civil-military integration. Its ability to absorb and adapt under pressure has long been central to its strategic culture, now even more so as a full NATO member sharing a direct border with Russia.

Whether in cyberspace, energy security or defence infrastructure, Finland's integrated

readiness model reinforces a broader truth: Deterrence today is not only about projecting force – it is about sustaining it under duress, across multiple domains.

The war in Ukraine further amplifies these lessons. Three years of attritional warfare have shattered assumptions that future conflicts would be swift, high-tech and low-casualty events. Instead, the war in Ukraine has demonstrated the brutal reality of protracted, high-intensity warfare – marked by mass mobilisation, drone swarms, long-range missile strikes and an ongoing battle to sustain logistics, morale and infrastructure under constant attacks.

Crucially, Ukraine's resilience has not been solely military. Its ability to integrate Western weapons systems, ensure command, control and communications under electronic warfare, and coordinate intelligence across domains has underscored the importance of adaptability, decentralised decision-making and whole-of-society resource mobilisation.

In other words, Ukraine has created a reverse asymmetry against a conventionally stronger adversary – not by matching Russia tank for tank, but by leveraging agility, innovation and societal resilience to offset numerical and material disadvantages. From battlefield improvisation with commercial drones to the rapid repair of critical infrastructure under fire, Ukraine's defence effort illustrates how flexibility and endurance can become strategic assets.

For East Asian states facing similarly powerful neighbours and the threat of grey-zone coercion or high-intensity conflict, the Ukrainian experience offers an important blueprint: Resilience is a key enabler of deterrence and defence. The critical challenge is to prepare for sustained, complex and multi-domain crises that test the endurance of entire societies.

New Areas of Cooperation

The next phase of Asia-Europe security cooperation must be defined not by symbolic gestures, but by practical mechanisms that reflect the strategic realities of a more contested, multipolar world. This means shifting the focus towards the critical domains that will shape deterrence, resilience and technological advantage in the coming decade: cyber security, responsible behaviour in space, artificial intelligence (AI) governance in military applications and resilient technology supply chains.

Each of these areas reveals shared vulnerabilities – but also opportunities for deeper coordination, norm-setting and capability development.

Asia-Europe cyber-security cooperation must evolve beyond ad hoc information exchanges towards institutionalised frameworks for threat intelligence sharing, joint incident response and resilience-building exercises. Estonia-based NATO Cooperative Cyber Defence Centre of Excellence and Singapore's ASEAN-Singapore Cybersecurity Centre of Excellence can serve as scalable models for cross-regional initiatives that enhance cyber deterrence, operational responsiveness and diplomacy.

Also, space is emerging as a contested strategic domain. The expansion of civilian

and military satellite constellations raises the risks of congestion, collision and deliberate interference.

Europe's efforts to advance space norms at the United Nations – together with Japan's and South Korea's expanding space capabilities – create openings for new confidence-building measures, crisis communication protocols and shared domain awareness. This is especially if connected to regional efforts such as the Quad's Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness.

AI governance in military domains remains a critical but underdeveloped area. As militaries integrate AI into surveillance, targeting and command-and-control systems, Asia and Europe must work together to define frameworks for ethical use, human accountability and interoperability.

Countries such as France, Germany, South Korea and Singapore are already advancing military AI strategies. Structured collaboration on explainable AI, testing protocols and human-in-the-loop requirements could lay the foundation for a responsible rules-based regime in this emerging domain.

Technology supply chains have become a front-line security concern. The strategic weaponisation of semiconductors, rare earths and other critical inputs highlights the urgency of diversification and supply chain resilience. The EU's Critical Raw Materials Act and Japan's Economic Security Promotion Act both seek to reduce systemic dependencies on politically vulnerable sources.

In this context, Singapore can serve not just as a convenor, but as a strategic facilitator – bridging operational capacities, aligning technological standards and building trust across regions. The objective is not to recreate legacy alliance structures, but to design flexible, forward-looking and enduring partnerships that can adapt to evolving geopolitical and technological shifts – before others define the rules of the game.

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