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The European Union's new Indo-Pacific strategy- An Overview

The long-awaited Indo-Pacific strategy of the European Union (EU) was formally released on 16 September which outlined its strategic focus and actions with an aim towards “regional stability, security, prosperity and sustainable development”. Thus far, trade imperatives had been the dominant driver for the EU engagement in the region. The launch of the EU’s strategy for the Indo-Pacific marks the beginning of a new approach to the region from just economic to strategic. The opening paragraphs of the document highlight this shift in stating that the “futures of the EU and the Indo-Pacific are inextricably linked given the interdependence of the economies and the common global challenges”.



The EU intends to increase its engagement with the region to build partnerships that reinforce the rules-based international order, address global challenges and lay the foundations for a rapid, just and sustainable economic recovery that creates long-term prosperity. This engagement will be based on

promoting democracy, the rule of law, human rights, and universally agreed commitments such as the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals, and the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Notwithstanding

While acknowledging the existence of “intense geopolitical competition adding to increasing tensions on trade and supply chains as well as technological, political and security areas” in the Indo-Pacific region, the EU’s strategy maintained its ambivalence by not pointing to any specific country. At the same time, the strategy implicitly recognises China’s attempts to alter the regional status quo, mentioning “tensions around contested territories and maritime zones”, and a “significant military build-up including by China”. It argues that crises in regional hotspots like the South and East China Seas and the Taiwan Strait may have “a direct impact on European security and prosperity”.

EU aims to deepen its engagement with “like-minded partners” viz, ASEAN, Australia, India, Japan, New Zealand, the Republic of Korea, the United Kingdom and the United States. In addition, the EU would also be interested in engaging with the QUAD on issues of common interest such as climate change, technology or vaccines. The EU strategy highlights a multifaceted approach in its engagement with China which includes engaging bilaterally to promote solutions to common challenges, cooperating on issues of common interest and encouraging China to play its part in a peaceful and thriving Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, the EU working with “international partners who share similar concerns” plans to protect its essential interests and promote its values while

pushing back where fundamental disagreements exist with China, such as on human rights.

The EU strategy seeks to promote an open and rules-based regional security architecture, including secure sea lines of communication, capacity-building and enhanced naval presence in the Indo-Pacific in accordance with the legal framework established by the UNCLOS. The EU plans to deepen maritime cooperation in the region through enhanced naval presence to fight piracy and protect freedom of navigation while reinforcing EU naval diplomacy in the region along with participation in bilateral and multilateral naval exercises. EU has already deployed military advisors in its Delegations to China and Indonesia. To intensify its dialogues with partners on security and defence, the EU will deploy military advisors as part of its delegations in other partner countries in the region as well.

The EU strategy has clearly outlined the contours of its regional engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. Shedding its earlier ambivalence, the EU has signalled the consensus of its member states on the Indo-Pacific debate.

Regional disquiet over Mali's plan to engage Russian Private Military Contractor (PMC)

According to reports, Mali's army-dominated government in Bamako is in dialogue with the Russian PMC Wagner group for hiring 1,000 Wagner paramilitaries leading to considerable disquiet in France and the Sahel G-5 counter-terror coalition of five countries in the Sahel region.

"If the Malian authorities entered into a contract with Wagner, it would be extremely worrying and contradictory, incoherent with everything that we have done for years and we intend to do to support the countries of the Sahel region," French Defence Minister Florence Parly told a parliamentary commission. Expressing its displeasure, Alassane Ouattara, president of Ivory Coast said that Any decision by Mali to hire Russian private security company Wagner to help it fight Islamist insurgents would be "suicide" and "a red line" for other countries in West Africa.

On the other hand, Mali PM Choguel Kokalla Maiga accused France of abandoning his country with the "unilateral" decision to withdraw troops as he addressed the UN General Assembly. He said his government was justified to "seek other partners" to boost security and slammed a "lack of consultation" by the French. As relations with France have worsened, Mali's military



government has increased contacts with Russia, including Defence Minister Sadio Camara visiting Moscow. While European countries have warned the Malian government on the sidelines of the UN General Assembly this week against hiring paramilitaries from the controversial Wagner group, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov told reporters that as Paris has planned to reduce its military presence in Mali the Malian government was turning towards "private Russian companies" for its legitimate security needs.

France has deployed its troops in Mali since 2013 when jihadist fighters overran the north of the country. Since then, Paris has deployed thousands of troops to the wider Sahel region where they carry out operations alongside local forces against fighters linked to al-Qaeda and the ISIL (ISIS) group. Relations between France and Mali have deteriorated since a coup in August 2020 removed President Ibrahim Boubacar Keita. The French lost patience after the removal of Bah Ndaw, the President of transitional government through another coup in May 2020 when France suspended military cooperation with Mali last June, and President Macron has announced plans to close bases in northern Mali and draw down the presence of French troops in the region.

The Wagner group is considered close to Russian President Vladimir Putin and has been accused of acting on behalf of Moscow. Russian paramilitaries, private-security instructors and companies have grown increasingly influential in Africa in recent years, particularly in the conflict-ridden Central African Republic, where the United Nations has accused Wagner contractors of committing abuses.

France is worried the arrival of Russian mercenaries would undermine its decade-old counter-terrorism operation against al Qaeda and Islamic State-linked insurgents in the Sahel region of West Africa at a time when it is seeking to draw down its 5,000-strong Barkhane mission to reshape it with more European partners. In addition to reducing the size of its deployment, France is expected to shift the focus of its operations to Niger which, along with Burkina Faso, has been the target of increasingly intense terrorist attacks.

Experts have said that such a deal between Mali's military-led government and the private security firm to hire nearly 1,000 mercenaries would increase Moscow's influence while undermining French-led operations against armed groups operating in the country and the wider Sahel region.

A New US Navy task group for countering Russian undersea threat in Atlantic

The U.S. Navy has established a dedicated anti-submarine task group of Arleigh Burke-class destroyers for anti-submarine warfare operations in the North Atlantic Ocean. The establishment of this force follows years of Navy and other U.S. military officials sounding the alarm about the potential threats posed by increasingly quiet nuclear-powered Russian submarines off the East Coast of the United States. This new anti-submarine force, officially named Task Group

Greyhound will be a rotational force with four Arleigh Burkes assigned to it at all times.

According to Rear Admiral Brendan McLane, the Commander of Naval Surface Force Atlantic, Greyhound's job is to "provide the fleet with predictable, continuously ready and fully certified warships," The ships of this task force will aim to accomplish the full range of missions including tracking Russian undersea activity in the Atlantic and maritime homeland defence of the United States.



The creation of the new task group comes as the Navy has refocused assets and efforts on the Atlantic region due to Russia's undersea capability. The ships will be based out of Mayport and Norfolk, Va., and the task group is set for full operational capability by June 2022, according to McLane, who noted the ships will still have a

post-deployment stand-down so sailors can see family after being out at sea.

The task force shares a name with the 2020 surface warfare movie "Greyhound," in which a collection of allied destroyers defend a North Atlantic convoy from German U-boats. Certain types of destroyers, undertaking convoy escort, at that time were referred to as greyhounds. Those convoy escort operations were part of a larger Allied naval campaign that became known as the Battle of the Atlantic. Soviet and Western naval activity in this ocean during the Cold War has been referred to on occasion as the Third Battle of the Atlantic. U.S. military officials have more recently dubbed the latest increase in Russian naval activity in this region, and Western responses to it, as the Fourth Battle of the Atlantic.

The US Navy formally re-established U.S. 2nd Fleet, which covers the North Atlantic and East Coast, in 2018 amid concerns over Russian submarines operating in the waters. The Russian Navy has developed next-generation attack submarines armed with long-range land-attack missiles with ranges of 1,000 miles or more. The US Officials have been particularly concerned with the Yasen and Yasen-M class guided-missile submarines due to their enhanced stealth and less radiated noise.