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Ad-Hoc European Military Cooperation Outside Europe

Edited by Ed Arnold

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Executive Summary

EUROPE'S SECURITY ARCHITECTURE is dominated by NATO and the EU. They are, respectively, the primary hard and soft security providers to the continent, with 21 European countries holding membership of both organisations. However, there has been a gradual proliferation of additional bilateral and minilateral frameworks and initiatives. This is a result of the recognition that large multinational organisations are no longer sufficient to cover the breadth of European security challenges.

Since early 2020, ad-hoc military 'coalitions of the willing' and security initiatives operating beyond Europe's borders have emerged. They largely function outside existing European security mechanisms. This Occasional Paper argues that the emergence of European-led ad-hoc military coalitions shows the greater flexibility and pragmatism being introduced into the continent's security architecture. Moreover, they add considerable value to European countries as they allow them to bypass slow and politically convoluted processes and frameworks. They enable the quick deployment of military capabilities to address instability and provide a European presence in areas across the globe, and a method to bridge the growing political fragmentation within Europe.

Key Points

- Europe will remain reliant on US military capabilities to support ad-hoc coalitions of the willing. European expeditionary operations are directly and indirectly supported by the US, including for the provision of key capabilities, especially combat enablers such as ISR, strategic lift and logistics capabilities. Despite European capability development in these areas through Permanent Structured Cooperation projects, the reliance on US capabilities will remain in the short term.
- France has been the most comfortable with taking a leading role in ad-hoc coalitions, with Germany preferring to provide political support rather than military contributions. In addition, a small number of European countries have shown greater willingness than others to contribute political and military support to missions.
- Ad-hoc coalitions are attractive options for Europe as they allow mobilisation of its varied resources in functional, flexible and task-oriented coalitions, which can be platforms for enhancing European interoperability through operational experience.
- Despite the limitations of Western expeditionary operations since 9/11, exemplified by the outcome in Afghanistan, European countries and organisations continue to develop command and control arrangements and capabilities for these types of operation.

Introduction

EUROPEAN SECURITY IS evolving, driven by major shifts in the geopolitical landscape together with political changes within Europe itself, most notably the departure of the UK from the EU in 2020. In response to these developments, European countries are actively defining and designing the future of Europe's security architecture, levels of defence and security spending, and the military capabilities required to meet the ambition. There is an ambition for more flexibility within European security mechanisms to enable Europe to respond effectively to the new international environment.

As part of this adaption, European-led ad-hoc military coalitions and security initiatives beyond Europe have emerged. These 'coalitions of the willing', which largely operate outside existing European security mechanisms, namely NATO and the EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), have developed without the prolonged political debates that have often delayed and weakened Europe's multilateral approaches. While NATO and the EU remain the central hard and soft security providers, there is a realisation that they are no longer sufficient to cover the breadth of European security challenges and that new approaches may be required.

These ad-hoc coalitions are pragmatic and allow European countries to form mission-specific 'coalitions of the willing', to expedite deployments to combat instability overseas and protect European interests where shared national interests align. This cooperation could add a new dimension to Europe's ability to adapt to changing international security agendas and help to build confidence in Europe's evolving security architecture. At the same time, there are important questions about the scope and sustainability of these initiatives, and how they fit into the wider framework of European security cooperation.

This Occasional Paper is published as part of a RUSI research project, 'European Security Beyond Europe', which is supported by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung. It examines the emergence of European-led ad-hoc military coalitions, why these forms of cooperation have emerged and what value they add to the existing European security architecture. Furthermore, it assesses the current limitations of ad-hoc coalitions and how they are likely to develop further.

The analysis in this paper is primarily based on a roundtable discussion[1] convened with experts and officials from across Europe to consider three recent examples of ad-hoc European military cooperation outside Europe:

1. The roundtable was convened by RUSI in December 2020 as part of the 'European Security Beyond Europe' project. See <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/projects/european-security-beyond-europe>, accessed 14 December 2021.

- Task Force Takuba, a European special forces mission based in Mali and operating across the Sahel to support national forces to counter armed terrorist groups within the region and promote stability.
- The European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH) mission, a French-led maritime security military and diplomatic initiative operating within the Gulf to promote regional security.
- The increased European presence and naval cooperation within the Indo-Pacific in line with European ambitions in the region.

The research is further based on a review of academic literature, consultations with officials from European governments, media reports and open-source government documents.

The paper comprises three chapters aimed at understanding why ad-hoc cooperation was necessary through an analysis of the three case studies above. The chapters analyse the drivers for ad-hoc military cooperation, outline European national contributions, and assess their impact within each region and the future prospects for further cooperation. The conclusion assesses why ad-hoc coalitions have emerged, their impact and what value they add to the existing European security architecture.

I. Takuba Task Force: A New Approach to European Military Cooperation?

Jean-Pierre Maulny

THIS CHAPTER ANALYSES Task Force Takuba within the context of the security of the Sahel and why this region matters to European security. It sets out the rationale for why an ad-hoc mission was needed to address growing security concerns and why European countries have opted to join a French-led mission. It investigates the motivations behind the Europeanisation of the task force and assesses its achievements to date and future prospects as French forces draw down from the region.

Origins

The Sahel is an area of instability suffering from failed states, under-development, conflict between Touareg and the Malian government on the status of Northern Mali, and exploitation of these situations by jihadist terrorist groups. Multiple multilateral civil–military missions centred around Mali have been formed to stabilise the country and the wider region: the UN Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA); the EU Training Mission (EUTM) Mali; the EU Capacity Building Mission in Mali (EUCAP Sahel Mali); the EU Capacity Building Mission Sahel Niger (EUCAP Sahel Niger); and the US-led Trans-Sahara Counterterrorism Initiative.

In addition to these multilateral operations, the French military mission in Mali, Operation *Barkhane*,[2] has operated since 2014, following the success of Operation *Serval* to prevent terrorist groups taking power in Bamako a year earlier. On 13 January 2020, at the conclusion of the Pau Summit between France and the G5 Sahel countries (Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali, Mauritania and Niger), the Takuba Task Force was created at the request of the governments of Mali and Niger.[3] Its objectives are to coordinate Operation *Barkhane* and the G5 Sahel forces more effectively, focusing on counterterrorism, military capacity-building, redeployment of state authority, and development. For Europe the objective is to demonstrate that it is of mutual

2. *BBC News*, 'France Sets Up Anti-Islamist Force in Africa's Sahel', 14 July 2014.
3. Ministère des Armées, 'Task Force Takuba: déclaration politique des gouvernements allemand, belge, britannique, danois, estonien, français, malien, néerlandais, nigérien, norvégien, portugais, suédois et tchèque', 27 March 2020, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/articles/task-force-takuba-declaration-politique-des-gouvernements-allemand-belge-britannique-danois-estonien-francais-malien-neerlandais-nigerien-norvegien-portugais-suedois-et-tcheque>, accessed 18 November 2021.

interest to European countries to demonstrate the capacity to act militarily together to curb the violence in the Sahel. Operation *Barkhane*'s commander summarised the mission by saying 'if attacked separately, our Sahelian allies are extremely fragile; but united at our side, they are far less vulnerable'.[4] Task Force Takuba was declared fully operational on 2 April 2021, just one year after it was established.[5]

The Rationale for an Ad-Hoc Mission

The ad-hoc design and formation of Takuba is a departure from the traditional Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) process, driven by a growing European desire to introduce greater speed and flexibility into the decision to deploy military force. Establishing the new task force under the extant Operation *Barkhane* chain of command (CoC) allowed expediency, as it would have taken significant time to create a new EU mission through the CSDP. This construct also allows France to retain operational command, while allowing close consultation with European allies, and achieve greater operational autonomy. Moreover, expanding EUTM could have been problematic given the operational and tactical synergy required between Takuba and *Barkhane*, and the 'combat support' designation of the mission. Moreover, the UK would be unlikely to accept being under EU command in combat, and it is also questionable whether the EU would have the political will to create a new mission, taking into account the necessity to have a unanimous decision.

The objective of Takuba when established was to underline that the question of stability in the Sahel is not only in France's strategic interest but also for wider Europe. For France, Takuba enables it to step up the mission of combating terrorism within the framework of Operation *Barkhane*. It is also a way of sharing the burden of fighting terrorism in the Sahel with other European countries, thereby lending a European dimension to an operation that initially began solely under the French flag.

Moreover, there was the risk, eight years after the beginning of the military intervention, that the population of the Sahelian countries would think that the French intervention was the symbol of a neo-colonialist policy. This has been underlined by growing anti-French feeling as France has not succeeded in curbing the level of violence and insecurity due to jihadists in Mali.[6] Today the risk of expansion of jihadism is in the three borders area, the Liptoka-Gourma

4. French Senate of Foreign Affairs and Defence Committee, 'Comptes rendus de la Commission des Affaires Etrangeres, de la Defense et des forces armees', 8 July 2020, <https://www.senat.fr/compte-rendu-commissions/20200706/etr.html>, accessed 18 November 2021.
5. Ministère des Armées, 'Barkhane: Les SIC arment la Task Force TAKUBA', 12 May 2021, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/espanol/operations/actualites2/barkhane-les-sic-arment-la-task-force-takuba>, accessed 2 December 2021.
6. Sahel2r3S, 'La hausse du sentiment anti-français au Sahel', 23 September 2020, <https://sahel2r3s.medium.com/la-hausse-du-sentiment-anti-fran%C3%A7ais-au-sahel-704874ff10b5>, accessed 18 November 2021.

zone between Mali, Burkina-Faso and Niger, and not specifically in Mali itself, which explains the reorganisation of Operation *Barkhane* in 2021.

French President Emmanuel Macron outlined the reorganisation of the French military deployment during a press conference with Niger's President Mohamed Bazoum on 9 July 2021. The reorganisation will result in a reduction of the northern military footprint over the second half of 2021, to be completed by the start of 2022. The military presence in Kidal, Tessalit and Timbuktu will gradually decrease. Macron stated that the French military presence in the Sahel will revolve around two missions:

> The first will consist in continuing the neutralization and disorganization of the high command of the two enemy organizations. The second mission will focus on supporting the build-up of the armies in the region, which has largely begun through several historic missions but [which] we intend to increase further … The fight against terrorism will therefore continue around the Takuba Task Force, whose recognition in the conclusions of the last European Council illustrates the deeply European and multilateral dimension.[7]

Contribution of European Countries to the Takuba Task Force: An Expanding Process

Eleven European countries signed the original Takuba political statement.[8] In evidence of growing European support for the operation, six additional European countries – Italy, Finland, Hungary, Lithuania, Norway and Romania – have also signed a multilateral technical agreement and deployed or plan to deploy troops to Mali.[9] In addition to the counterterrorism and migration threat-based rationale, Takuba enables European countries to strengthen defence cooperation and burden share, and provides the opportunity to 'live train' their special forces in a challenging environment, without having to shoulder operational or tactical responsibility for an operation. Moreover, it allows some countries, such as Estonia, to obtain political reassurance from France about the threat from the East.

Takuba currently comprises troops from 12 European countries (see Table 1), with three countries to deploy forces in spring 2022, predominantly made up of special forces, whose mobility and light footprint are well suited to the vast geographical terrain, to combat equally mobile armed terrorist groups (ATGs) and provide directed combat support to the Malian Armed Forces (FAMa) Light Reconnaissance and Intervention Units (LRIUs). The core military

7. French Élysée, 'Conférence de presse à l'issue du Sommet du G5 Sahel', 9 July 2021, <https://www.elysee.fr/emmanuel-macron/2021/07/09/conference-de-presse-a-lissue-du-sommet-du-g5-sahel>, accessed 18 November 2021.
8. Belgium, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, France, Germany, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Sweden and the UK.
9. Ministère des Armées, 'La Roumanie rejoint la Task Force Takuba au Sahel', 18 June 2021, <www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/articles/la-roumanie-rejoint-la-task-force-takuba-au-sahel>, accessed 2 December 2021.

component of Takuba is centred around two joint French task groups, one with Estonia (TG1) and another with the Czech Republic (TG2), supported by a Swedish 150-strong helicopter-borne rapid response force.[10] In July 2021, command transferred from France to Sweden – the second largest contributor – further evidence of the European cooperation underlining Takuba. Other countries provide smaller contributions, including liaison officers to the various headquarters, to enhance coordination.

Table 1: European National Contributions to Task Force Takuba

Country	Troop Contribution	Date of Deployment
1. Belgium	4	April 2021
2. Czech Republic	65	2020
3. Denmark	105	Starting 2022
4. Estonia	95 in Operation *Barkhane*, of which 30 are in the Takuba Task Force	2020
5. France	300	2020
6. Hungary	80	Spring 2020
7. Italy	Maximum deployment 200; expected deployment 100	2021
8. Lithuania	20	Spring 2022
9. The Netherlands	2	2021
10. Norway	Small number of soldiers	Autumn 2021
11. Portugal	21	2021
12. Sweden	150	2020

Source: Author generated.

10. Jacques Deveaux, 'Mali: la force européenne Takuba se déploie lentement', *franceinfo:Afrique*, 23 September 2021.

US and NATO Contributions

Task Force Takuba is enhanced by a critical contribution from the US – the largest by a non-European country. US support is provided within the framework of a bilateral agreement with France.[11] In July 2021, French and US defence departments signed the US-France Roadmap for Increased Cooperation in the Area of Special Operations.[12] In 2021, the US supplied:

- Intelligence, surveillance and reconnaisance capabilities, in particular Reaper drones, based in Ouagadougou, Niamey and Agadez.
- Air-to-air refuelling capability from the Morón airbase in Spain, to the value of around 140 flight hours per month.
- Transport capabilities, using C17 or C130 J aircraft, to the value of an average 80 flight hours per month.[13]

US involvement, via a cooperative arrangement with Niger, allows it to legally operate surveillance drones over its territory.[14] Indeed, both Operation *Barkhane* and *Takuba* would be operationally constrained were it not for the availability of US combat enablers. The US contribution strengthens the sharing of a common counterterrorism security interest between France, the US and Europe in the Sahel. Interestingly, in the rapprochement following the fallout from the September 2021 AUKUS announcement, France was able to achieve the following commitment from President Joe Biden: 'the United States commits to reinforcing its support to counter-terrorism operations in the Sahel conducted by European states'.[15] In addition, the NATO Support and Procurement Agency (NSPA) supports Takuba through the provision of support services in Mali, including engineering, infrastructure maintenance, fuel and intra-theatre air and ground transportation.[16]

Appraisal of Takuba and its Future Prospects

While Takuba is operationally limited in size and scope, its continuing expansion with the decision to join taken in October 2021 by Hungary and Lithuania is evidence of mounting

11. Abraham Mahshie, 'France Stresses Need for Continued American ISR in African Sahel', *Air Force Magazine*, 9 July 2021.
12. US Department of Defense, 'Readout of Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin's Bilateral Meeting with France Minister of the Armed Forces Florence Parly', 9 July 2021, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2689872/readout-of-secretary-of-defense-lloyd-austins-bilateral-meeting-with-france-min/>, accessed 1 November 2021.
13. *Ibid*.
14. Samuel Brownsword, 'Drones in the Sahel: In Whose Interest?', Drone Wars, 25 August 2020.
15. The White House, 'Joint Statement on the Phone Call Between President Biden and President Macron', 22 September 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/22/joint-statement-on-the-phone-call-between-president-biden-and-president-macron/>, accessed 25 September 2021.
16. NATO, 'NSPA to Support Takuba Task Force in Mali', 15 June 2021, <https://www.nspa.nato.int/news/2021/nspa-to-support-takuba-task-force-in-mali>, accessed 2 December 2021.

European support for its goals, despite it not being an EU operation. The 2021 EU Sahel strategy states that 'the EU welcomes the commitment shown by several EU Member States in the Takuba Task Force to supporting the Malian armed forces in combat'.[17] This support was firmly reiterated in the conclusions of the European Council meeting on 25 June 2021: 'The EU and its Member States will continue to support the stabilisation of G5 Sahel countries, in particular the G5 Sahel Joint Force, through the continuation of EU CSDP missions and engagement in the Takuba Task Force'.[18]

The pragmatic design of Takuba demonstrates that Europeans can show the political will, backed up by the required military force, to rapidly deploy to counter mounting security threats. Moreover, this flexibility will allow the mission to evolve and adapt to the environment. Within the EU context, Takuba could be a precursor to exploring the option of enacting Article 44 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the EU, which would allow a small number of member states to form coalitions of the willing and initiate an external operation – a facility that has not yet been exercised due to concerns about how the Article would be used. The EU Strategic Compass, due to be adopted in March 2022, will 'decide on more flexible modalities' for the implementation of Article 44 by 2023,[19] to help overcome the European incapacity to act with military means even when there is no risk that the military operations will be launched against the security interests of one or several EU member states. The Europeanisation of Takuba supports French ambitions for European Strategic Autonomy, which is likely to feature early in 2022 at a European Defence Summit, which coincides with France holding the rotating EU Council presidency.

The future of Takuba is uncertain, however, and will depend on how France wishes to shape the mission and the region, following the declaration of the Malian prime minister at the UN General Assembly about the 'abandonment in midair' of Mali by France and the prospects of talks between Malian authorities and Russia's Wagner Group.[20] The introduction of Wager Group forces in Mali would cause real concern for France, and other European countries, as it would provide a platform for Russia to compete for influence within the region and make *Barkhane* and Takuba operations more challenging. Its future depends also on the capacity of the Alliance Sahel to succeed in the other objectives of the 3D (development, diplomacy and defence) strategy, and of the capacity of the G5 Sahel to take charge of their security in the

17. Council of the European Union, 'The European Union's Integrated Strategy in the Sahel, Council Conclusions (16 April 2021)', 16 April 2021, p. 10, <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-7723-2021-INIT/en/pdf>, accessed 2 December 2021.
18. European Council, 'European Council Meeting (24 and 25 June 2021) – Conclusions', 25 June 2021, p. 8, <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/media/50763/2425-06-21-euco-conclusions-en.pdf>, accessed 2 December 2021.
19. Council of the European Union, 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence – for a European Union That Protects its Citizens, Values and Interests and Contributes to International Peace and Security', 9 November 2021, p. 9.
20. Cyril Bensimon, 'L'hypothèse Wagner fait monter la tension entre la France et le Mali', *Le Monde*, 27 September 2021.

future.[21] In that sense, Takuba is part of a transition strategy to transfer the responsibility for their security onto host countries. Military operations alone are not the solution to the crisis in the Sahel. A former French ambassador in Mali lists no fewer than seven conditions required if there is to be hope for an end to the crisis in Mali.[22]

21. Launched in 2017, the aim of the Alliance Sahel is to enhance the stability and global development of the region. Its members are France, Germany, the EU, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, the UN Development Program, Italy, Spain, the UK, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Denmark, the European Investment Bank, and Norway. See Alliance Sahel, 'Investing Today in the Sahel for the Africa of Tomorrow', <https://www.alliance-sahel.org/en/>, accessed 2 December 2021.
22. Nicolas Normand, 'Où va le Mali ? Scénarios d'évolution', IRIS, 19 July 2021, <https://www.iris-france.org/159224-ou-va-le-mali-scenarios-devolution/>, accessed 2 December 2021.

II. The European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz Mission

Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi and Tobias Borck

AS TAKUBA WAS being established, in January 2020 the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz (EMASoH) mission[23] was created in the Gulf, again to expedite military deployments to combat instability. This demonstrates European capability, willingness and ambition in establishing two *simultaneous* ad-hoc missions, within different theatres and environments (land and maritime), against the backdrop of regional security challenges that directly affect Europe.

This chapter analyses the EMASoH mission in the Gulf, outlining the rationale and its dual objectives: to counter maritime security challenges in the region; and to contribute to regional security. It assesses its achievements thus far, within the complex regional security context of the Gulf, and concludes with an assessment of its implications for European security and its future in its current form.

Rationale

The EMASoH mission represents an ambitious statement of intent to develop an independent European geopolitical role in the Gulf, separate from the US and the UK. However, after 22 months, its achievements are modest, and its impact is difficult to assess. The mission was launched during a period of mounting tensions between Iran and the US, including its regional partners Israel, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Several security incidents threatened to escalate into a wider regional conflagration, the most prominent of which were Iran's temporary seizure of the UK-flagged tanker, the *Stena Impero*, in July 2019,[24] the drone and missile attacks on oil facilities in Saudi Arabia – widely attributed to Iran – in September 2019,[25] and the US assassination of Iranian General Qasem Soleimani in early January 2020.[26]

23. Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères, 'European Maritime Awareness in the SoH (EMASOH): Political Statement by the Governments of Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, and Portugal (20 January 2020)', 20 January 2020, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/french-foreign-policy/europe/news/article/european-maritime-awareness-in-the-soh-emasoh-political-statement-by-the>, accessed 2 December 2021.
24. *BBC News*, 'Iran Seizes British Tanker in Strait of Hormuz', 20 July 2019.
25. Ben Hubbard et al., 'Two Major Saudi Oil Installations Hit by Drone Strike, and US Blames Iran', *New York Times*, 15 September 2019.
26. *BBC News*, 'Qasem Soleimani: US Kills Top Iranian General in Baghdad Air Strike', 3 January 2020.

Objectives and Origins

EMASoH, and its military component, Operation *Agenor*, were established by France – their main political and military champion – and seven other EU members.[27] The objective of EMASoH is 'safeguarding the freedom of navigation [in the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz] by ensuring adequate coordination and information sharing mechanisms with all partners operating in the area, including the maritime industry'.[28] In addition, the mission was created with a second geopolitical, and much more ambitious, objective – Europe wanted 'to play a role in de-escalating tensions'[29] in the Gulf and provide a diplomatic counterweight to the maximum pressure campaign against Iran adopted by the Trump administration. Most European countries had refused to join a US-led maritime mission in the Gulf in late 2019, fearing an intensification of tensions with Iran and the demise of the Iran nuclear deal.[30]

The UK initially explored the formation of a European mission and approached France and other European countries. London, following a change in government and outlook, ultimately concluded that without US support Europe could not provide the protection or intelligence support for the mission, and so would be autonomous from the US in name only, and therefore joined the US operation, alongside Estonia and Lithuania.[31] France then proposed a voluntary mission to several European countries to circumvent the EU's laborious consensus-building processes, particularly as not all member states share the same views on Iran.[32] While the flexibility did expedite the deployment, it ultimately allowed each coalition member's commitment to remain ambiguous and left questions of burden-sharing unresolved.

Achievements

When measured against its ambition, EMASoH's achievements to date have been limited, with any security improvements within the Gulf more accurately attributed to the regional context rather than European initiatives. Militarily, EMASoH planes and seven ships (not all operating at the same time) 'conducted more than 100 flights, spent 400 days at sea, reassured more than 20 merchant ships and have crossed the Strait of Hormuz close to a hundred times'[33] in its first

27. Belgium, Denmark, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal.
28. Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères, 'European Maritime Awareness in the SoH (EMASOH)'; see, for example, Denmark's explanation of its management of the mission from January to July 2021, Nathan Gain, 'Denmark Takes Lead of Europe's Operation AGENOR', *Naval News*, 15 January 2021.
29. Author telephone interview with senior European official, 18 December 2020.
30. International Maritime Security Construct, 'An International Approach', 19 July 2019, <https://www.imscsentinel.com/>, accessed 2 December 2021.
31. Guy Faulconbridge, 'UK Joins United States for Maritime Security Mission in Gulf', *Reuters*, 5 August 2019.
32. Author telephone interview with senior European official, 18 December 2020.
33. *Hellenic Shipping News*, 'EMASOH: One Year of Reassurance, De-Escalation and Dialogue', 26 February 2021.

year. Those involved in the mission have argued that the '[European] presence has provided some confidence to the shipping industry' and that the 'operation contributed in significantly lowering tensions'.[34] Yet, given the relatively small footprint compared to US-led operations in the area (the US-led maritime security mission can draw on the presence of the Fifth Fleet headquartered in Bahrain), this can hardly be attributed solely to EMASoH.

EMASoH claims that it has thus far operated mostly without any support from the US. This may count as a success for those keen to demonstrate European capacity to operate autonomously in such a geopolitically important region. However, this position is undermined by EMASoH's anaemic posture – a result of its members' reluctance to materially contribute to the mission. To date, only France, the Netherlands and Denmark have deployed frigates, with a recent addition from Italy,[35] while Belgium and Greece have contributed some personnel.[36] Germany's contribution has been limited to political support, despite the importance of maritime security in the Gulf to Europe's leading exporting country, partly due to the lack of a formal mandate from the European Council.[37]

Regional Context

Any positive security developments within the Gulf are more accurately attributed to the regional and global strategic environment than any European action. Saudi Arabia and the UAE, the two Gulf states with the most hawkish attitudes towards Iran, have noticeably tempered their rhetoric and even looked to establish channels of communication with Tehran,[38] with Iraq mediating between the two actors on mutual security concerns such as the war in Yemen.[39] They both feared that tensions could escalate into war and had grown increasingly concerned about US commitments to their security after President Donald Trump's lacklustre US response to the (alleged) Iranian attack on the Saudi oil facility in September 2019. Meanwhile, the US approach toward Iran changed following the transfer of power to Biden.[40] While US sanctions on

34. Author telephone interview with senior European official, 18 December 2020.
35. Luca Peruzzi, 'Italian Navy Frigate Contributes to Operation AGENOR', *Naval News*, 12 October 2021.
36. *Hellenic Shipping News*, 'EMASOH'.
37. Justyna Gotkowska, 'European Strategic Autonomy or European Pillar in NATO? Germany's Stance on French Initiatives', Center for Eastern Studies, 21 February 2020. Italy, which also only provided political support to the mission, was instead internally divided on how to proceed, with the security side of the Italian Defence Ministry willing to support the mission operationally as well, but with the political side concerned about the negative contribution to the security environment in the region.
38. See, for example, Bruce Riedel and Katherine Harvey, 'Why Is Saudi Arabia Finally Engaging with Iraq?', Brookings, 4 December 2020.
39. *France 24*, 'Saudi and Iran Signal Warming Ties but "Real Steps" Needed', 11 October 2021.
40. See, for example, Steven Erlanger, 'Biden Wants to Rejoin Iran Nuclear Deal, but It Won't Be Easy', *New York Times*, 17 November 2020.

Tehran have remained in place, the Biden administration has emphasised its desire to prioritise diplomacy and revive nuclear negotiations, and is calling for de-escalation in the region.

Implications for Europe

Washington's change in attitude on Iran removes one of the strategic drivers for EMASoH as the imperative to create a diplomatic counterweight to the US has become less important. Regional maritime security has arguably deteriorated again since early 2021, but at the heart of these renewed tensions is a barely concealed shadow war between Iran and Israel that neither the US nor Europe – nor the Gulf states, for that matter[41] – want to see escalate into open conflict.[42] European countries may still want to use EMASoH to demonstrate autonomy from the US, especially after the Trump years and the withdrawal from Afghanistan. However, the evolving geopolitical realities in the Gulf mean that it may be more expedient for Europe to seek closer cooperation with the US, particularly militarily, until European countries are able and willing to muster a more substantial deployment to the region.

Furthermore, while good European relations within the Gulf are evident, they are fragile,[43] with limited leverage gained from European military deployments. When European and US political and strategic objectives are mostly in alignment, it is sensible for both sides to enhance cooperation. However, as EMASoH was created precisely because of a lack of alignment between certain European countries and the US, it would be prudent to work towards the capacity to go it alone when and if needed. As both China and Russia have expressed an intent to increase their presence in the region,[44] insisting on the autonomy of the small European mission does not make sense, and EMASoH risks becoming irrelevant unless its members significantly increase their military contributions, which appears highly unlikely.

The Future of EMASoH

The requirement for a broad regional security dialogue is more pressing than ever, and this is exactly where Europe, whether through EMASoH or another diplomatic initiative, should engage and demonstrate its geopolitical mettle. Despite the limitations – both in terms of military capacity and political will of member states – its combination of soft power, economic power and constructive political relationships with regional powers are assets that can be leveraged. The European signatories of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (France, Germany, the UK

41. Darya Dolzikova and Tobias Borck, 'Alternatives to Failed Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran', *RUSI Newsbrief*, 24 September 2021.
42. See, for example, Martin Chulov, 'Israel's Shadow War with Iran', *The Guardian*, 10 August 2021.
43. Tom Kington, 'Italian Forces Kicked out of Middle East Base Over UAE Arms Embargo, Lawmaker Says', *Defence News*, 25 June 2021.
44. See, for example, Anna Borshchevskaya et al., 'Russia in the Middle East: A Source of Stability or a Pot-Stirrer?', Atlantic Council, 21 April 2021; Yoel Guzansky and Galia Lavi, 'Relations Between China and the Gulf States: Opportunities and Risks for Israel', Insight No. 1488, Institute for National Security Studies, 13 June 2021.

and the EU) remain hopeful that the agreement can be revived or updated, but this ultimately depends on the readiness to compromise of Washington and the new hard-line administration in Iran. It is clear, however, that any future deal is only likely to be sustainable if it is part of a broader initiative to settle wider issues of regional security. Therefore, a more substantial European role as a broker of dialogue and advocate for multilateral security arrangements is possible and will likely be welcomed by regional governments on both sides of the Gulf. Yet this will require determination from policymakers in Berlin, Paris, London and beyond to invest and maintain the required political capital.[45]

45. Aniseh Bassiri Tabrizi and Benjamin Kienzle, 'Legitimation Strategies of Informal Groups of States: The Case of the E3 Directoire in the Nuclear Negotiations with Iran', *Cooperation and Conflict* (Vol. 55, No. 3, 2020), pp. 388–405.

III. European Naval Cooperation Within the Indo-Pacific

Veerle Nouwens

EUROPEAN NAVAL COOPERATION within the Indo-Pacific, unlike Takuba and EMASoH, is largely outside formal – if ad-hoc – missions, as European countries and organisations have been finalising policy towards the region. Instead, current cooperation is based on shared interests and capabilities, centred around France and the UK as framework nations. It is nascent but likely to develop further as the area becomes increasingly important to European countries and the continent.

This chapter examines European interests and motivations in the Indo-Pacific and maps recent and future European deployments to the region to highlight the growing significance of the area. It assesses current possible coordination frameworks and the options and advantages for enhancing European naval cooperation in the Indo-Pacific.

The Significance of the Indo-Pacific to Europe

The Indo-Pacific has been described in the UK's Integrated Review and the EU's Indo-Pacific Strategy as a fulcrum for geopolitical and geo-economic cooperation and competition in the 21st century.[46] At its heart is a maritime concept centred around the confluence of the Indian and Pacific oceans. Europe has joined resident powers such as India, Australia, Japan and the US in developing structured approaches to the region. For regional allies, success will not be measured by the continuous presence of European ships but by considering how Europeans can best contribute to Indo-Pacific maritime security. Following rising European naval deployments, Europe would benefit in identifying and designing cooperative and burden-sharing arrangements to project a coordinated presence across the region. However, establishing a European strategic and impactful presence in the Indo-Pacific will require significant political will, and a realistic appreciation of the amount of resources and capabilities that can be diverted to the region.

European Interests and Motivations Within the Indo-Pacific

Thus far, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the EU and the UK have all published separate Indo-Pacific strategies, guiding documents or frameworks.[47] France and the UK have a long

46. European Commission, 'Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific', 2021; HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, CP 403 (London: The Stationery Office, 2021).
47. Government of the Netherlands, 'Indo-Pacific: Guidelines for Strengthening Dutch and EU Cooperation with Partners in Asia', 2020; French Foreign Ministry, 'The Indo-Pacific Region: A Priority for France' 2021; German Federal Government, 'Policy Guidelines for the Indo-Pacific

history of diplomatic and security engagement within the region. However, Europe's willingness to consider the region as an interconnected strategic whole, rather than focusing on economic interest, overseas territories and prioritised bilateral relations, potentially moves some European countries in a new direction.

Unifying factors include concern over an increasingly assertive China and agreement that Europe's prosperity and security is directly and indirectly threatened if the maritime rules-based order within the region is not upheld. Growing scepticism about China exists at the governmental and public level. In a 2020 Pew Research Center survey, over 70% of respondents in the UK, France and Germany held negative views about China.[48] Widespread concern among the US, Europe and allies in Asia over Beijing's strategic military ambitions in the Indo-Pacific and threatening behaviour at sea has helped compel Europe to become more involved. For a continent with only two major military powers, France and the UK, the question of whether European naval capabilities can project a substantial and strategic presence at sea is a valid one.

European Deployments to the Indo-Pacific

Despite the above point, the UK and the Netherlands, with the US, have been jointly present in the Indo-Pacific between May and December 2021, forming the UK's Queen Elizabeth aircraft Carrier Strike Group (CSG21).[49] The UK fosters a network of bases across the Indo-Pacific, with the ambition to establish base access in partner countries such as Japan, India and Australia.[50] The UK is also part of the world's second-oldest defence partnership, the Five Powers Defence Arrangements, alongside Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore.[51]

Despite the UK's ambition, as stated in the Integrated Review, to be the 'European partner with the broadest and most integrated presence in the region', France currently maintains the leading European presence within the Indo-Pacific.[52] French presence has not been sporadic, nor has it avoided sensitive waters.[53] In 2016, Jean-Yves le Drian, then France's defence minister,

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Region', September 2020; HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*; European External Action Service, 'EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific', 2021; European Commission, 'Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council – the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific'.

48. Laura Silver, Kat Devlin and Christine Huang, 'Unfavorable Views of China Reach Historic Highs in Many Countries', Pew Research Center, 6 October 2020.
49. Andrew Chuter, 'British Name Enormous Carrier Strike Group Heading for the Indo-Pacific', *Defence News*, 26 April 2021.
50. William James, 'There and Back Again: The Fall and Rise of Britain's "East Of Suez" Basing Strategy', *War on the Rocks*, 18 February 2021.
51. J Vitor Tossini, 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements', *UK Defence Journal*, 28 February 2017.
52. HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*.
53. Erik Brattberg and Philippe Le Corre, 'The Case for Transatlantic Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific', Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 18 December 2019.

called for a 'regular and visible' European presence in the region.[54] Three years later, Defence Minister Florence Parly pledged to sail 'more than twice a year in the South China Sea'.[55] Like the UK, France has also sought to create a network of base access arrangements with India, Japan and Australia.[56] Both France and the UK also conduct maritime surveillance missions as part of enforcement efforts of UN Security Council sanctions against North Korea.[57]

Other European deployments have been more sporadic, and many of them have not been sovereign national deployments but rather have formed part of exercises or cooperative frameworks. While there is a clear increase in European deployments, and various strategies have been issued, there is little sense that they constitute a single concept for European naval deployments, rather than being deployed for diverse national interests.

Table 2: Recent and Formally Announced Future European Naval Deployments in the Indo-Pacific

Country	Date	Capabilities Deployed Within the Indo-Pacific
1. UK	2018–20	Near-continuous presence of six ships, including three frigates, one amphibious transport dock, one destroyer and one survey vessel
	2021	Carrier Strike Group (CSG) 2021
	2021 onwards	Two offshore patrol vessels deployed for five years to the region, without a formal home base
	By 2023	Littoral Response Group, based in Duqm, Oman
	By 2030	One destroyer

54. *Ibid*.
55. Florence Parly, 'Asia's Evolving Security Order and its Challenges', presentation at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue 2019, Singapore, 31 May–2 June 2019, 36.21, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=sjNIBuZwwcw>, accessed 3 December 2021.
56. For example, see Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 'Japan-France Foreign Ministers' Meeting', 4 May 2021, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/fr/page4e_001125.html>, accessed 3 December 2021.
57. Royal Navy, 'HMS Montrose Identifies Evasion of North Korea Sanctions', 5 April 2019, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2019/april/05/190405-montrose-north-korea>, accessed 3 December 2021.

Country	Date	Capabilities Deployed Within the Indo-Pacific
2. France	2016	One Amphibious Task Group to Indian Ocean Region and Southeast Asia
	2016	One frigate in South Pacific, from French Polynesia
	2017	One Amphibious Task Group to Northeast and Southeast Asia
	2017	One frigate in South Pacific and Southeast Asia, from French Polynesia
	2017	One destroyer
	2018	One Amphibious Task Group to Indian Ocean, Southeast Asia and Australia
	2018	One frigate to Northeast Asia and South Pacific
	2018	One polar patrol vessel across Indian Ocean to Polar region, from Réunion
	2019	One helicopter carrier and one frigate to Western Indian Ocean as part of annual Jeanne D'Arc mission
	2019	One frigate in South Pacific, from French Polynesia
	2019	One CSG (*Clemenceau 19*)
	2019	*Charles de Gaulle* nuclear CSG (*Clemenceau 19* naval mission), including ships from Portugal, Denmark, the UK and Italy
	2021	10–15 ships, including four frigates, 38 air assets and 8,000 troops
	2021	One frigate anchored off the coast of Taiwan
	2021	*Charles de Gaulle* nuclear CSG (*Clemenceau 21* naval mission), including one Belgian frigate, two Greek frigates and one Italian frigate
	2021	One nuclear attack submarine and one support vessel
3. The Netherlands	2021	One frigate, part of UK-led CSG21 with separate port visit agenda
4. Germany	2021	One frigate deployed as far as Japan
5. Spain	2019	One frigate to Guam
	2019	One frigate transported suspected pirates to the Seychelles as part of European Union Naval Force Somalia (EUNAVFOR) Operation *Atalanta*
	2021	One navy training ship to the US naval base in Guam
	2021	One frigate to the Gulf of Aden, participated in EUNAVFOR exercise with Italy, France and India
6. Denmark	2017	One frigate as part of a US CSG to the Mediterranean and Persian Gulf
	2019	One frigate as part of a CSG to the Mediterranean and Arabian Seas
	2020	One frigate to the Arabian Persian Gulf and Strait of Hormuz as part of Operation *Agenor*
7. Belgium	2021	One frigate as part of French CSG *Clemenceau* 21 led by aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* to the Indian Ocean
	2021	One frigate to the Strait of Hormuz as part of EMASoH

Country	Date	Capabilities Deployed Within the Indo-Pacific
8. Greece	2021	One frigate conducted a passing exercise with the US coast guard in the Arabian Gulf
	2021	Two frigates as part of French CSG *Clemenceau 21* led by *Charles de Gaulle* to the Indian Ocean
9. Italy	2015–20	Routine frigate deployments to participate in EUNAVFOR patrols and exercises in the Gulf of Aden
	2019	*Charles de Gaulle* nuclear CSG (*Clemenceau 19* naval mission), including ships from Portugal, Denmark, the UK and Italy
	2021	One frigate participated in EUNAVFOR exercise in the Gulf of Aden with Spain, France and India
	2021	One frigate as part of French CSG *Clemenceau 21* led by *Charles de Gaulle* to the Indian Ocean
10. Portugal	2019	*Charles de Gaulle* nuclear CSG (*Clemenceau 19* naval mission), including ships from Portugal, Denmark, the UK and Italy

Source: Author generated.

Coordinating European Naval Engagement in the Indo-Pacific

Cooperative naval arrangements for engagement within the Indo-Pacific are attractive to some in Europe (see Table 1) given limited naval capabilities and continuing pressures closer to home. In addition to the deployments outlined in Table 1, various cooperative frameworks have already been established.

The Combined Maritime Forces is a voluntary 34-member multinational naval security partnership focusing on the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Oman, the Arabian Sea, the Red Sea and the Northern Indian Ocean (at its widest interpretation the Indo-Pacific can be seen to include some of the geographical remit that CMF covers).[58] European members include Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Spain and the UK.[59] Missions such as NATO's *Ocean Shield* (2009–16) and the EU's Operation *Atalanta* (2008–22) have likewise offered frameworks for European navies to participate in anti-piracy and maritime security missions.[60] The desire for continued cooperation is evidenced by the extension of Operation *Atalanta* until 31 December 2022, underpinning the EU's Maritime Security Strategy.[61] Within the Gulf, two complementary missions are active. First, the US-led International Maritime Security Construct

58. Royal Navy, 'Combined Task Force (CTF) 150', <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/indian-ocean/ctf-150>, accessed 2 December 2021.
59. Combined Maritime Forces, 'Combined Maritime Forces (CMF)', <https://combinedmaritimeforces.com/>, accessed 2 December 2021.
60. Mirna Galic, 'As China Poses Challenges, Europe Makes its Presence Known in the Indo-Pacific', United States Institute of Peace, 3 August 2021.
61. EU Naval Force Somalia, 'Operation Atalanta's New Mandate Enters into Force on 1st of January 2021. New Tasks Will Reinforce the EU NAVFOR's Counter-Piracy Core Responsibilities',

in the Persian Gulf (2019 onwards), including the UK, Estonia, Albania and Lithuania.[62] Second, the French-led EMASoH (2020 onwards), including Belgium, Denmark, France, Germany, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal.[63]

These cooperative frameworks offer flexible and diverse political coalitions. One report by Danish think tank, the Danish Institute for International Studies (DIIS), noted that 'contributing a Danish frigate to French-led navy operations in the Indo-Pacific that also involve other European states would not play into US-China strategic rivalry in the same direct way as contributing … to US-led navy operations, but rather support French and British efforts to establish an independent European security and defence presence in the region'.[64] The report seemingly believed that US desires for greater European presence in the region would be satisfied. One may question whether Beijing will necessarily view this the same way. Indeed, Beijing has so far viewed European naval engagement in Asia with scepticism, even denying Germany's request for a port visit.[65] Japan has conversely called on European countries to pursue a stronger military presence in Asia.[66]

While not every country in the Indo-Pacific will agree on what a European naval presence in the region should look like, given the overlapping areas of operations and similar objectives among European interests in the region, finding coordinated approaches to naval deployments would help with burden sharing and avoid duplication of effort.

Enhancing European Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Meaningful enhanced naval cooperation that meets the strategic objectives of the various European Indo-Pacific strategies should include French and UK cooperation. This is particularly important given their past experience as framework nations for deployments, as it is unlikely that less-resourced European countries will be able to sustain frequent deployments to the region on their own. France and the UK have the experience and in-depth understanding of regional and sub-regional contexts and sensitivities that would be valuable to other European countries – operating within the South China Sea will be politically and operationally more challenging than European naval deployments in the Gulf.[67]

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30 December 2020, <https://eunavfor.eu/news/operation-atalantas-new-mandate-enters-force-1st-january-2021-new-tasks-will-reinforce-eu>, accessed 2 December 2021.

62. *The Economist*, 'How America and its Allies Are Keeping Tabs on Iran at Sea', 4 January 2020.
63. Ministère de l'Europe et des Affaires Etrangères, 'European Maritime Awareness in the SoH (EMASOH)'.
64. Camilla T N Sorensen, 'U.S.-China Strategic Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific – Security and Defense Policy Implications for Denmark', DIIS Policy Brief, 1 April 2020.
65. *Reuters*, 'China Denies German Warship Entry into Harbour, Berlin Says', 16 September 2021.
66. Catherine Wong, 'Japan Urges Europe to Have Stronger Military Presence in Asia to Tackle China', *South China Morning Post*, 20 June 2021.
67. Veerle Nouwens and Blake Herzinger, 'Above the Law: Holding China to Account in the South China Sea', Observer Research Foundation, 12 April 2021.

It is likely that France and the UK will pursue national missions around core interests but could coordinate when these interests align. There are a variety of options available, including: developing CSG and naval missions to lead respective European multinational deployments as framework countries; agreeing rotational deployments – especially in regard to CSG deployments between Europe and the Indo-Pacific, ensuring a continuous European naval presence, involving submarine and anti-submarine warfare capabilities; alternately deploying a battle group each year; and increasing intelligence sharing, as well as coordinating cooperation with the Quad (Australia, India, Japan and the US).

However, French–UK cooperation within the Indo-Pacific is far from certain. Despite the 2010 Lancaster House Treaties, the formation of the Combined Joint Expeditionary Force and greater naval cooperation expressed in a June 2021 joint statement by the UK, French and US heads of navy,[68] the defence and security relationship is being tested for two main reasons.[69]

First, Brexit has split the only two potential European framework nations inside and outside the EU, creating a poor political relationship in the process. Their respective Indo-Pacific strategies have been developed in isolation and their strategic cultures towards the region are different. For France, the Indo-Pacific is seen as an extensive part of French overseas territory, a permanent part of its strategic identity, and its own sphere of influence – particularly in the Western Indian Ocean and South Pacific regions. While the UK seeks to engage Germany and France,[70] France has so far said little about cooperation with the UK in the region.

Second, the September 2021 formation of the AUKUS trilateral defence pact between Australia, the UK and the US has worsened an already poor political relationship. The reaction from France has been severe, describing it as a 'stab in the back' and recalling ambassadors to Washington and Canberra.[71] This directly affects French interests and strategy within the Indo-Pacific and will likely constrain potential for cooperation in the near term. Yet, despite the recent rhetoric, there remains a clear rationale for France and the UK to cooperate within the Indo-Pacific.

Advantages of Enhanced Cooperation for Europe

Greater naval cooperation between France and the UK, enabling the participation of additional European countries, would not only help alleviate European resource restraints, burden share

68. Tom Dunlop, 'UK, US and France Commit to Increased Naval Cooperation', *UK Defence Journal*, 5 June 2021.
69. UK Ministry of Defence (MoD) and French Ministère des Armées, 'Military Cooperation: United Kingdom and France', <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/742817/UKFR_MilitaryCooperationA5.pdf >, accessed 2 December 2021.
70. HM Government, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*.
71. *BBC News*, 'Aukus: France Recalls Envoys Amid Security Pact Row', 18 September 2021.

and avoid duplication, but would also allow better management of the priorities between the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions. European countries have already proven their ability to react to maritime insecurity as part of cooperative frameworks, especially in the Gulf. These are an ideal platform to build on; increasing Indo-Pacific deployments highlights the ambition to extend their reach where European engagement remains nascent. However, any enhanced or even independent European naval presence within the Indo-Pacific would need to set out clear and realistic objectives as part of a more comprehensive approach to the region,[72] and what additional contribution they would be making, in addition to what is already provided by France and the UK, would need to be examined. Europe has the capability to play an important supporting role within the maritime domain in the Indo-Pacific, provided European leaders can generate and sustain the political will to work in concert, underpinned by investments in capabilities and clearly defined shared strategic objectives.

72. Veerle Nouwens, 'Why Europe's Enhanced Military Presence in the Indo-Pacific Is an Asset', *Internationale Politik Quarterly*, 30 September 2021, <https://ip-quarterly.com/en/why-europes-enhanced-military-presence-indo-pacific-asset>, accessed 2 December 2021.

Conclusion

THE EUROPEAN SECURITY architecture is dominated by NATO and the EU, with 21 European countries holding membership of both organisations. Despite this dominance, there has been a gradual proliferation of additional bilateral, minilateral and multilateral frameworks and initiatives designed to support European security interests, such as the UK-led Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), the Anglo-French Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF) and the European Intervention Initiative (EI2).[73] These formats have been developed to enhance European security and provide more flexible options for the deployment of military force, not to detract from NATO or CSDP structures, in recognition that Europe needs more flexible deployment options to adapt to a changing threat environment. The drivers for change are not confined to intra-EU discussions, and an increase in ad-hoc missions within a short space of time suggests that Europeans see real benefits of such approaches. These developments, in conjunction with the greater use of opt-in/opt-out arrangements to bring in non-EU countries, namely the UK, would add more legitimacy and military efficacy to European deployments outside Europe.

The case studies in this Occasional Paper further this trend, providing even more flexible, adaptable and non-binding approaches to deploying mission-specific ad-hoc coalitions of the willing. Indeed, the primary benefit of ad-hoc coalitions is to bypass slow and politically and bureaucratically convoluted frameworks such as the CSDP. This allowed Task Force Takuba to deploy quickly to curtail growing instability and EMASoH to deploy to improve maritime security and support European Interests. Within the Indo-Pacific, it has enabled European multinational formations and CSGs to operate and show an increased European presence in a critical area, prior to European countries and organisations finalising their strategies towards the region and providing foundations for future cooperation.

This option is attractive to European countries as it is pragmatic and provides a different approach to existing structures and the requirements on unanimity. Specifically, within the EU context, these case studies could be supportive precursors in debates on the use of Article 44 of the Treaty of the European Union, which would allow EU coalitions of the willing to be formed

73. MoD, 'Joint Expeditionary Force Policy Direction – July 2021', 12 July 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-expeditionary-force-policy-direction-july-2021>, accessed 24 November 2021; MoD and Ben Wallace, 'UK and France Able to Deploy a 10,000 Strong Joint Military Force in Response to Shared Threats', 2 November 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-france-able-to-deploy-a-10000-strong-joint-military-force-in-response-to-shared-threats>, accessed 24 November 2021; UK Parliament, House of Commons Library, 'The European Intervention Initiative (EII/EI2)', 22 September 2019, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-8432/>, accessed 24 November 2021.

through the CSDP.[74] In addition, Article 44 would further add to the flexibility and rapid reaction capability of the CSDP by allowing the 'possibility' for the CSDP to adopt operations that were initially launched by member countries outside the framework.[75]

Equally, they could remain standalone missions outside the CSDP, as the 9 November 2021 draft of the EU's Strategic Compass, to be adopted in March 2022, suggests that European-led ad-hoc coalitions will endure and could even be mutually supported by CSDP operations in two of the case studies in this paper:

> We will strengthen mutual support between CSDP missions and operations and European-led ad hoc coalitions. By end of 2022, as a first step, we will establish operational links between EUTM Mali and Task Force Takuba as well as EUNAVFOR Atalanta and the European Maritime Awareness Mission in the Strait of Hormuz.[76]

Therefore, European-led ad-hoc coalitions should be regarded as a useful addition to the European security architecture, meeting the requirements of those European countries who are able and willing to deploy as part of expeditionary operations. Furthermore, while these case studies are all limited in scope and size, they represent useful pilots, whose foundations could be developed into a scaleable format. Below are factors that are common within each of the case studies and are priority areas to address in the further development of European ad-hoc military cooperation.

European political leaders should prioritise cooperation over competition with European allies, underpinned by the funding of required capabilities

Fundamental to the development of European military cooperation is the political will to deploy military force in pursuit of national and multinational objectives. The EU Commission president directly acknowledged this reality in her 2021 EU State of the Union speech, stating: 'You can have the most advanced forces in the world – but if you are never prepared to use them – of what use are they? What has held us back until now is not just a shortfall of capacity – it is the lack of political will.'[77] The EU has 1.26 million serving troops, compared to 1.37 million US troops.[78] The EU spent a total of €186 billion ($211 billion) on defence in 2019, according to the

74. Thierry Tardy, 'In Groups We Trust – Implementing Article 44 of the Lisbon Treaty', European Union Institute for Security Studies, 7 October 2014.
75. Anne Bakker et al., 'Spearheading European Defence: Employing the Lisbon Treaty for a Stronger CSDP', Clingendael Report, September 2016, p. 31.
76. Council of the European Union, 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence', p. 12.
77. European Commission, '2021 State of the Union Address by President von der Leyen', 15 September 2021, <https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/SPEECH_21_4701>, accessed 22 September 2021.
78. Henry Foy and Sam Fleming, 'European Defence: The Quest for "Strategic Autonomy"', *Financial Times*, 27 September 2021.

European Defence Agency,[79] compared to $734 billion in the US.[80] Despite this theoretical heft, the EU have had 18 battle groups constituted on rotation since 2007, but have never taken the decision to deploy them.

Within this context, ad-hoc coalitions are attractive options for Europe as they allow mobilisation of its various resources in functional, flexible and task-oriented coalitions, which can be platforms for enhancing European interoperability through operational experience. They also provide a method to bridge the growing political fragmentation within Europe, especially within defence and security following Brexit. Despite the desire for the EU to have the political will to act, this will take time to develop. Therefore, ad-hoc coalitions could be used where European countries assess that an EU-wide agreement on the use of force would not be possible, or that a decision would take too long.

One of either the UK or France, as the only two European military framework countries, must realistically lead any European expeditionary operation. While this has been a constant feature of European military cooperation since St Malo and the creation of the now CSDP in 1998, Brexit has now split these framework countries to become inside and outside the EU and has led to a period of exceptionally poor UK–France relations. However, as our Indo-Pacific case study shows, there are many advantages and opportunities for enhanced cooperation. Moreover, there are a wide range of possible areas for further cooperation which, for political reasons, might best be enabled by new formats.[81] Ad-hoc formations could help the UK and France identify the low-hanging fruit of military cooperation and support the rebuilding of trust on defence and security affairs.

Europe will remain reliant on US military capabilities to support ad-hoc coalitions of the willing

This paper's case studies all demonstrate that European expeditionary operations remain reliant on the US for the provision of key capabilities, especially combat enablers such as ISR, strategic lift and logistics capabilities. Indeed, both Operation *Barkhane* and Task Force Takuba are supported by US AFRICOM assets and it is unlikely that the task force could operate in the same way without this support, if at all. While EMASoH claims to act autonomously from the US, the larger US presence within the region provides both a diplomatic and military backstop for European forces. While European Indo-Pacific deployments are increasing and becoming more ambitious, the US is by far the most significant Western power, and regional allies such as Japan are much more important to the US approach to the region.

79. European Defence Agency, *Defence Data 2018-2019: Key Findings and Analysis* (Brussels: European Defence Agency, 2019), p. 4, <https://eda.europa.eu/docs/default-source/brochures/2019-eda-defence-data-report.pdf>, accessed 2 December 2021.
80. Statista, 'U.S. Military Spending from 2000 to 2020', <https://www.statista.com/statistics/272473/us-military-spending-from-2000-to-2012/>, accessed 2 December 2021.
81. Rachel Ellehuus and Pierre Morcos, 'Sticking Together or Drifting Apart: The Future of Franco-British Defense Cooperation', Center for Strategic and International Studies, 29 October 2020.

Even with a significant and immediate uplift in investment in defence capabilities, any development of Europe's ability to act truly autonomously from the US will take time and will need to be gradual. These capability gaps are being addressed and many of the now 60 Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) projects are directly aimed at combat enablers for the types of missions in the case studies, such as ISR and strategic lift.[82] However, after four years, many of the extant 46 projects remain in their infancy or are behind schedule.[83]

Regardless of occasional transatlantic setbacks, the US and Europe remain united on values and agree on most key security issues, even when national interests may sometimes diverge on specific questions. Therefore, considerations of European strategic autonomy and burden-sharing are two sides of the same coin. The purpose of strategic autonomy should be to provide Europe with the ability to operate, with US assistance, and to lead in certain areas, enabling the US, with European cooperation, to focus on other priorities, such as the Indo-Pacific. This collective geostrategic approach would be beneficial to Europe, the US and NATO, with the aim that strategic autonomy serves as a means to promote stronger transatlantic cohesion.

European ad-hoc military coalitions are made up of the same forces

Burden-sharing is a perennial challenge for European security, both in terms of the transatlantic relationship and within Europe itself. The case studies in this paper highlight that while more flexible approaches have allowed Europe to circumvent laborious decision-making processes, they have produced unequal burden-sharing, with a small number of countries doing the heavy lifting, namely France. These deployments and others in Syria, the Baltics and internal security in France under Operation *Sentinelle* have contributed to overstretch in the French military, who have prioritised breadth, not depth, of forces.[84] Military capabilities, alongside political support, are provided by the same countries – Belgium, Denmark, France, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands and Portugal contribute forces in all three case studies. It must also be noted that Sweden, Estonia and the Czech Republic are significantly involved in Takuba, with other countries providing more limited support. Just 14 European countries took part in the three case studies.[85] In addition, the EI2 currently has 13 EU members, plus Norway and the UK, with the JEF currently having 10 members, seven of which are EU members (Denmark has a CSDP opt out).

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82. European Defence Agency, '14 New PESCO Projects Launched in Boost for European Defence Cooperation', 16 November 2021, <https://eda.europa.eu/news-and-events/news/2021/11/16/14-new-pesco-projects-launched-in-boost-for-european-defence-cooperation?s=03>, accessed 18 November 2021.
83. Jacopo Barigazzi, 'EU Military Projects Face Delays, Leaked Document Shows', *Politico*, 12 July 2021.
84. Stephanie Pezard, Michael Shurkin and David Ochmanek, *A Strong Ally Stretched Thin: An Overview of France's Defence Capabilities from a Burdensharing Perspective* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021).
85. France, Sweden, Denmark, Estonia, Belgium, Czech Republic, Greece, Italy, the Netherlands, Norway, Portugal, Romania, Germany and the UK.

Germany currently provides political support to both Takuba and EMASoH but is limited militarily due to constitutional issues and the lack of sufficient mandates for coalitions of the willing. In addition, Germany chose a unilateral deployment for its frigate *Bayern* in the Indo-Pacific in 2021. However, if the political will existed, these issues could be overcome; consider the fact that Germany chose to join anti-Islamic State Peshmerga forces in Syria in 2015 to show solidarity with France following the Bataclan terrorist attacks in Paris.[86] This suggests that Germany will remain supportive of the objectives of ad-hoc formations, but they are unlikely to receive German military support in the future, with a preference for supporting NATO and CSDP missions, backed by UN mandates.

Europe faces a significant threat in the East, alongside threats to its neighbourhood. Indeed, a perennial challenge of European security has been to balance the requirements for territorial defence, primarily delivered through NATO, with the capabilities to conduct expeditionary operations to promote and secure European interests abroad. Despite the limitations of Western expeditionary operations since 9/11, exemplified by the outcome in Afghanistan, there will still be a place for them in Europe's toolkit, and the development of frameworks such as the JEF, CJEF, EI2 and ad-hoc coalitions demonstrate European intent in this area. Moreover, European security organisations remain committed to expeditionary operations. NATO's Afghanistan 'lessons learned process', conducted in September–November 2021, concluded that crisis management should remain a core Alliance task.[87] Meanwhile, the EU plans to create an EU Rapid Deployment Capacity of up to 5,000 troops by 2025.[88] Considering European experience of expeditionary operations over the past 20 years, especially in Afghanistan, any future operations will likely be more limited in scope, configured to secure a set of narrower objectives and shorter in duration.[89] The flexibility and non-binding nature of ad-hoc coalitions are well suited to this requirement, allowing them to more easily adapt to the situation as they operate without causing institutional burden-sharing issues, ensuring that they remain attractive options for European countries in the future.

86. Christian Dewitz, 'Bundeswehr unterstützt erstmals Luftangriffe gegen den IS', *Bundeswehr Journal*, 16 December 2015, <http://www.bundeswehr-journal.de/2015/bundeswehr-unterstuetzt-erstmals-luftangriffe-gegen-den-is/#more-6091>, accessed 15 September 2021.
87. NATO, 'Afghanistan Lessons Learned Process', November 2021, <https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/12/pdf/2112-factsheet-afgh-lessons-en.pdf>, accessed 6 December 2021.
88. Council of the European Union, 'A Strategic Compass for Security and Defence', p. 12.
89. Helen Warrell, Guy Chazan and Richard Milne, 'NATO Allies Urge Rethink on Alliance After Biden's "Unilateral" Afghanistan Exit', *Financial Times*, 17 August 2021.

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