Abstract
The AUKUS agreement between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States is a major step in formalizing Washington’s commitment to the Indo-Pacific. The announcement surprised the Biden Administration’s European allies and led to an indignant reaction from France, which saw its submarine contract with Australia fall victim of the deal. The AUKUS agreement led to a renewed debate about the soft power nature of European Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP) in which the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy called for a strategic compass. This paper analyzes the strategic policy papers of the European Union and the United States on the Indo-Pacific and concludes that their different approaches to peace and security complement each other in important ways.

Keywords
Transatlantic Relations, AUKUS, CFSP, Indo Pacific, ASEAN, Security
**Introduction**

The European Union (EU) once fashioned itself as a new type of power, a normative or soft power.\(^1\) In the post-Cold War era of the early 2000s, the EU challenged the idea of spending large amounts of money on the military and traditional forms of national security. Instead, security came to be interpreted more broadly to include ways of reducing insecurities that are caused by poverty, war, natural disasters, or environmental degradation. The EU prioritized individual or community security over regime security. Europe remained aligned in a collective security alliance with the United States (US) through the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), allowing the EU to focus its foreign policy on international development and humanitarian aid. Member states of the EU, many of whom are also member states of NATO, continued to develop hard power assets, but this did not lead to union-wide military integration. The EU was never able to overcome its internal division on whether Europe should follow the US, as the “Atlanticists” would have it, or develop a more independent role for Europe on the world stage, as promoted by the “Europeanists.”\(^2\)

Now, 30 years since the end of the Cold War, increased tensions between the US and China have EU leaders rethinking the union’s role in international affairs. The EU’s High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, has publicly questioned Europe’s reliance on soft power in the competitive environment of contemporary international relations. He has called for a “strategic compass” for Europe in which hard power considerations need to be part of the comprehensive European security approach. Europe is at risk, in the words of Borrell, of “strategic shrinkage” as its economic power, measured as percentage of global wealth, and relative size in proportion to the world’s population, decrease over the coming two decades. In the contested space of international relations which is under the influence of increased authoritarianism, disinformation, and cyber warfare, European liberal values, including the promotion of democracy, good governance and human rights, are challenged by emerging powers.\(^3\)

The announcement of the AUKUS security alliance between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the US has delivered a similar message to European leaders. The US is in a strategic competition with China that has been playing out globally, but with particular intensity in the Indo-Pacific region. This paper assesses what the AUKUS announcement means for transatlantic relations and whether Washington’s pivot to South-East Asia\(^4\) will spearhead a more “Europeanists” EU foreign security and defense policy. I will first discuss a brief history of recent transatlantic relations as a series of crises between the US and its European allies. Second, I will discuss the AUKUS agreement and place it in the context of security and intelligence cooperation between the US, the United Kingdom, and Australia since World War II. Lastly, I will compare and contrast American and European strategies towards the Indo-Pacific and assess whether the transatlantic partners share similar enough goals and objectives for the Indo-Pacific to inspire and prioritize Euro-American strategic cooperation.

**Methods**

The methodology employed in this article is document analysis of primary and secondary sources, including government reports, government websites, transcripts from meetings or presentations given by public officials, scholarly articles, newspaper articles, and blogs. For historical information and theoretical analysis, I have relied predominantly on scholarly sources. Given the timely nature of the AUKUS announcement, I have relied on newspaper articles and government websites for the most up to date information. My main analysis is based on a comparison between the strategic policy documents on the Indo-Pacific published by the US Department of State and the European Commission.

The theoretical approach for analyzing transatlantic relations is often presented as a discussion of the “glue” that holds the two sides together.\(^5\) Realists would argue that the presence of a common enemy is the strongest and most reliable bond between states in an alliance. Liberals argue instead that the presence of common interest, defined in terms of economic and security interests, is what holds an alliance together. A common identity is, according to constructivists, the key element that forges lasting alliances. The theoretical approach of this paper is that the realist and liberal approaches are best understood when merged with a constructivist identity approach. In other words, American realism, and the creation of a common enemy in the Indo-Pacific, is effective when states aligned with the US share a common identity that is sufficiently different from the enemy state. The successful construction of an enemy is based on the clear and unambiguous identification of “us” versus “them”. The same is true for the concept of interest as understood in liberalism. Common interests between a group of states, in for example free trade, are most effectively harnessed when these states share common values, such as support for democracy, sustainable development, and human rights. When these common values become part of the identity of the state the alliance is strengthened. The European experience of the development of the EU as an

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3. Josep Borrell “A Strategic Compass for Europe.” Project Syndicate, November 2021

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alliance based on common economic and security interests, bound together by a shared set of values, democracy, the rule of law, and human rights, is a primary example of this.

Results
Transatlantic relations as usual?
Transatlantic relations are characterized by periods of turbulence interspersed by periods of stability. The Cold War has often been characterized as a relatively stable period of deeply embedded alliances, but there were periods of tension fueled by strategic disagreements between the US and its European allies.6 In the post-Cold War era, Europe has receded from the center stage of world politics as East Asia has become the focal point of international tensions. The institutions of the Cold War, in particular NATO, have sustained themselves in the new era and become engaged in missions out of the area and scope of the defense community. The original Cold War ended 30 years ago with the demise of the Soviet Union in 1991, and there are increasingly many indications that we are on the verge of a new Cold War. In this new Cold War we see a role reversal where it is China, and not Russia, that challenges the US for domination in the international state system.7

Transatlantic relations were confrontational in the 21st century during the Bush administration, when European allies were famously caricatured into “old” and “new” Europe based on their support for or opposition against the 2003 US led war in Iraq.8 The Bush foreign policy, with its emphasis on “coalitions of the willing”, was much more transactional than European allies had experienced before. The American response to the September 11 attacks, the war on terror and the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq split European allies and made it hard for the existing alliance to respond in unison. The tone changed significantly during the Obama years, when shared values once again became the focal point of the relationship. The US once again embraced international institutions and multilateralism. President Obama had, as a US senator, opposed the US led war in Iraq and wanted to repair American relations with Europe. President Obama’s pivot to Asia was, however, somewhat of a wakeup call for European allies, reminding them that the US has global interests and that Washington’s strategic interest no longer resides primarily in Europe. During the Obama years foreign policy was more reactive, as the administration focused mostly on domestic legislation in the area of health care.9 Without strong US leadership to bring conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, or Syria to an end European states, already internally divided over the Euro crisis, became overwhelmed with the refugee crisis and did not develop a common foreign policy. The Brexit referendum in 2016 further exacerbated the existing crises.

The Trump years were in many ways an aberration in American foreign policy, as the administration was openly hostile to European allies and unusually friendly to authoritarian leaders in Russia, North Korea and Turkey. The transactional leadership style, also characteristic of the previous Republican administration, returned with unprecedented vehemence, best summarized in the “American First” slogan.10 European allies were overwhelmed with internal matters related to Brexit and increased semi-authoritarianism in Central and Eastern Europe.

The existing conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, and Syria did not diminish and European states continued to receive thousands of refugees, which further strained already tense relations in the EU. Brexit negotiations between the European Commission and the United Kingdom continued to distract the EU from responding to the multiple crises at hand. The expectation of the Biden administration was a return to “normal” political engagement between transatlantic allies. Europe, now without the United Kingdom, was expecting Washington to return to a multilateral approach to tackling the most important crises of our time, including climate change and the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. President Biden signaled this return to “normal” through his “America is Back” speech at the 2021 Munich Security Conference.11

The policy change from “American First” to “America is Back”, signaling a return to the table for American policy makers, was welcomed by European allies. The euphoria over the American return to international leadership was, however, short lived as the rushed American withdrawal from Afghanistan, and the almost immediate Taliban takeover, surprised its allies and left them under great stress to safely evacuate essential personnel. On the heels of the rushed Afghanistan exit came the news that the US had negotiated a trilateral security pact for the Indo-Pacific with Australia and the United Kingdom named AUKUS. AUKUS first and foremost signaled to European allies that the Biden administration is gearing up for a possible future confrontation with China in the Indo-Pacific. The EU and many of its member states have not been ready to see a rising China as a potential destabilizing factor for the international system. Many European states are, due to their geographic proximity, more concerned about Russia and issues related to energy security. The EU was in the process of finalizing its policy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The European Commission policy paper on the Indo-Pacific was published only days after the announcement of the AUKUS security pact, indicating that European allies were not aware of the impending deal.

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11 Biden Declares “American is Back” in Welcome Word to Allies: https://apnews.com/article/biden-foreign-policy-g7-summit-munich-cc10859ad0f0f542fd268c0a7ddcd9bb6 AP News, February 2021.
AUKUS is building on already existing intelligence cooperation between Washington, London, and Canberra as members of Five Eyes and, for Australia and the US, the ANZUS security treaty. The AUKUS announcement was significant because it included a provision to provide Australia with nuclear-powered submarines. While many of the details still need to be worked out, the purchase of nuclear-powered submarines immediately raised concerns about nuclear non-proliferation. Australia would be set to become only the 7th nation in the world with nuclear submarines, and besides India the second non-permanent member of the United Nations Security Council, as well as the first non-nuclear weapon state. Australia will also purchase American missiles, increase joint military exercises, and allow the US wider military access to its military bases for the operations in the area. The AUKUS announcement sparked concerns over nuclear proliferation, as mentioned above, and a sense of abandonment by France, and other European allies, over the canceled deal between France and Australia for the delivery of non-nuclear submarines, the largest weapons expert deal in French history worth 56 billion Euros. French President Macron, having received a text message only the night before the AUKUS announcement, felt a strong sense of betrayal by Australia for walking away from a deal with France, and the US and the United Kingdom for undercutting an ally. Acknowledging that European allies, especially France, should have been informed a joint press statement on the phone call between Presidents Macron and Biden was circulated.

In an effort to further mend the relationship with President Macron, President Biden traveled to Paris before the G20 meeting in Rome stating that the omission of briefing France in advance of the AUKUS announcement was “clumsy.” He did not specify whether it was clumsy due to his administration or the Australians. Australian prime minister Morrison doubled down at the G20 on his earlier statement that France was informed of the cancellation prior to the AUKUS announcement, something that President Macron vehemently declined. The French presidential election in April 2022, and a parliamentary election in Australia sometime in 2022, will undoubtedly have played a role in their respective responses to the diplomatic row.

The AUKUS announcement, and the European response of collective indignation, are not uncharacteristic of the transatlantic relationship. France was successful in Europeanizing the crisis and the US was able to bring closure to the matter without having to make any concessions. The incident certainly impacted the already poor relationship between Paris and London, and will hamper negotiations over fisheries and Brexit related border complications in Northern Ireland. The diplomatic row also affected Australia’s relationship with the EU as free trade talks have been postponed over the incident. In the long term the more important question is how the AUKUS deal affects the role of Europe as a global actor, aligned with the US, in providing peace and stability to the international system. Before addressing that question, I will first discuss the significance of AUKUS.

The significance of AUKUS
The significance of AUKUS is a key indicator of how important the Indo-Pacific region is for American global strategy. The US, and as we will see the EU, is determined to continue to act as one of the key players, in the Indo-Pacific security environment. The AUKUS security pact is not the first security tie between the US and Australia. The ANZUS treaty of 1951 is a security treaty for the Pacific between the US, Australia and New Zealand in response to the Korean War and the threat of the spread of communism to the South Pacific. The United Kingdom, although connected to Australia and New Zealand through the Commonwealth, was not invited to join the treaty. ANZUS was never expanded to include other states because European allies of the US were already members of NATO. During the 1980s New Zealand declared itself a nuclear free zone and would not allow American nuclear submarines to visit its ports. This stance by New Zealand led Washington to withdraw its security guarantee for New Zealand, although the ANZUS treaty remained in place. The nuclear free declaration of New Zealand in response to the Korean War and the threat of the spread of communism to the South Pacific.


15 Biden Admits to Macron that the US was “clumsy” in AUKUS Submarine Deal. Guardian News: October 29, 2021: https://www.theguardian.com/world/2021/oct/29/biden-admits-macron-us-was-clumsy-submarine-deal


18 US Department of State, Office of the Historian: https://history.state.gov/milestones/1945-1952/aukus

19 New Zealand History “Nuclear free New Zealand” https://nzhistory.govt.nz/politics/nuclear-free-nz
Zealand did not particularly harm its relationship with the US, as it continued to participate in the Five Eyes alliance.

The Five Eyes alliance goes back to the 1940s when the US and the United Kingdom actively started sharing signal intelligence. Although formalized as the UKUSA Agreement in 1946, the treaty included Canada in 1948 and Australia and New Zealand in 1956. During the Cold War cooperation between intelligence services of the member states, including human intelligence as well as signal intelligence, continued. After the September 11 attacks, intelligence collection between the members increased, as was revealed by National Security Agency contractor Edward Snowden. The Five Eyes alliance has shifted its focus from the War on Terror to concerns over the increasing assertive politics of China in the South China Sea. The increased focus on China has led to some tensions in the alliance as New Zealand’s Prime Minister Ardern made it clear that New Zealand, although committed to Five Eyes, does not let its foreign policy be determined by the alliance. It is, therefore, not surprising to see that New Zealand was not included in the AUKUS agreement. New Zealand’s strong antinuclear stance, combined with a fear of entanglement in a conflict between the US and China, has led it to remain outside of the new alliance.

Given the long history of intelligence sharing between the US, the United Kingdom, and Australia in Five Eyes and ANZUS it is perhaps understandable that, in response to a more rhetorically vocal China, the US partners first with these states. That Canada, the other member of Five Eyes besides New Zealand, was not included is likely related to the fact that it lacks a direct territorial connection to the Indo-Pacific. That other European allies, in particular France, and to a lesser degree Germany, were not included does not diminish transatlantic security and defense cooperation in the NATO framework. It does raise the question of whether Europe, that is the EU or some of its key member states, has a role to play in resolving tensions in the Indo-Pacific. This discussion on the role of Europe in the Indo-Pacific might have some implications for the realism through which alliances are viewed in Brussels, Paris and Berlin. European leaders in the aforementioned capital cities will wonder how Europe will protect its vital interest in the Indo-Pacific when European leaders are not connected to the inner circle of American policy making in the region through AUKUS or “the Quad” (Japan, India, Australia and the US). US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan has indicated that he is interested in working together with the Quad to counter China’s increasingly assertive politics in the area. The transatlantic relationship is pointed out as the model for future American relations with Asian allies, but the role of Europe, especially without the United Kingdom, has yet to be determined.

In order to assess whether there is a place for the EU in the US strategy for the Indo-Pacific it might be insightful to compare the EU and the US strategies for the region.

Cooperation or competition: two strategies for the Indo-Pacific

The EU’s High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, as a member of the European Commission, developed the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The strategy document is focused mostly on trade relations and emphasizes mutual values and interests. The EU is described as a natural partner to the G20 countries and ASEAN member states in the Indo-Pacific. Geopolitical competition over maritime zones and the increased military buildup in the area are mentioned alongside human rights and the promotion of democratic values. The Quad is mentioned as a possible partner for cooperation on climate change, technology, and vaccines. China is mentioned as a partner with whom the EU wishes to continue to cooperate on common challenges, such as climate change. Human rights are noted as an area of fundamental disagreement between the EU and China. Central in the EU’s approach to the Indo-Pacific is the EU’s relationship with ASEAN in the Asia Europe Forum (ASEM) and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Besides trade, the second area of focus for the EU in its relationship with the Indo-Pacific states is human security. This includes cooperation with the COVID-19 vaccine distribution and other health related matters and disaster preparedness due to climate change. The EU strategy document is characteristic of the European approach to China and politics of the Indo-Pacific. The EU, as a regional trading bloc, is first and foremost interested in international trade and developing economic partnerships and cooperation agreements (PCAs). Europe is not an island and the EU is also aware that humanitarian disasters often mean direct pressure on the continent to take in more refugees from war torn countries. This means in practice that the EU encourages regime stability by supporting good governance, human rights, sustainability, and human security. The EU is concerned about maritime security in the Indo-Pacific as it affects global value chains and international trade. The EU also seeks to advance its Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA) program, which includes counter terrorism, cyber security, maritime security, and crisis management, in partnership with India, Indonesia, Japan, South Korea, Singapore, and Vietnam.

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20 UKDI https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/the-five-eyes-the-intelligence-alliance-of-the-anglosphere/


25 Ibid., 2.

26 Ibid., 4.

27 Ibid., 5–6.

28 Ibid., 15–16.

29 Ibid., 14.
is clear from this document that the EU is promoting itself as a multifaceted partner for the Indo-Pacific region offering technical training and expertise, development aid, and collaborative partnership with states in the region.

On the face of it, the American approach to the Indo-Pacific is remarkably similar to that of the EU. The Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations all take pride in American cooperation with ASEAN and its involvement in the ARF. US Secretary Blinken, speaking to foreign ministers of ASEAN, reiterated Washington’s support for ASEAN’s Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). The AOIP specifies four priority areas of concentration including maritime cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development, and cybercrime, nuclear proliferation, maritime security, and terrorism. North Korea, China and Russia are specifically mentioned as states that engage in malicious cyber activities. China is directly linked to issue of maritime claims in the South China Sea. The US continues to work with ASEAN states to provide maritime security in the region. Joint US – ASEAN maritime exercises were held in 2019. US State Department and US Agency for International Development (USAID) security cooperation initiatives provide financial incentives that allow ASEAN member states to detect threats, share information, and respond collectively to man-made or natural crises.

The US, unlike the EU, is able to offer strategic partners in the Indo-Pacific the benefits of military cooperation in addition to development aid. The US strategic paper differs from the European paper in that it identifies specific states, in particular China, Russia, and North Korea, as strategic competitors in the region. Whereas the Europeans focus on cooperation and efforts to provide mutually beneficial outcomes, the Americans envision their relationship with China as one of competition.

Conclusion

_ubi Maior Minor Cessat_, freely translated as in the presence of the major power, the minor power recedes, has been a fairly accurate description of the transatlantic relations from the start of the Cold War until the present. The question addressed in this article is whether Washington’s pivot to South-East Asia will spearhead a more “Europeanists” EU foreign security and defense policy? The strategic policy papers from Brussels indicates that the EU sees cooperation in the Indo-Pacific as an opportunity for extending trade relationships. In the interest of further regional integration, the EU is ready to provide extensive support for regime resilience in the region, including assistance for disaster preparedness, climate action, cyber security, and counter terrorism measures. The EU will invest in Indo-Pacific states in a manner that is not unlike its neighborhood policy in which capacity building for the regime is supported in return for the adherence to European values, such as democracy, human rights, the rule of law, and sustainable development. The goal of the European strategy is to build a network of internally stable regions and trading partners with shared values as the key for cooperation.

The American strategic policy towards the Indo-Pacific mirrors many of the same values as described in the European strategy, however, the key difference is that Washington is providing states in the Indo-Pacific with external security from possible aggressive neighbors, primarily focusing on China. For the US, regime stability is about the preservation of state sovereignty and the ability of states to withstand the pressure from Beijing to alter its domestic politics. The goal of the American strategy is to build a coalition of states that under US leadership will withstand the pressure from China to gain more influence over the region. The coalition is not primarily based on shared values, but rather on the existence of a common enemy.

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34 Ibid., 22-23.
It is not likely that these key differences between Europe and the US will lead the former to develop a more “Europeanist” or independent foreign policy that is less aligned with the US. It is not likely that the call for a “strategic compass” by the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, Josep Borrell, will lead to European *Realpolitik* or hard power based foreign policy. With the United Kingdom outside of the EU, and a traffic light coalition in government in Germany, it is likely that European foreign policy will be even more strongly embedded in the shared values of democracy, rule of law, and human rights. In the transatlantic relationship, and in the Indo-Pacific, the EU will remain the minor power that recedes in the presence of the major power.

The strategies as envisioned by Washington and Brussels are not, however, mutually exclusive. States need both internal and external security to survive. If the EU can enhance state capacity in for example Vietnam, Laos, or Cambodia, these states will be more secure in the case of a natural or man-made disaster. At the same time, the US, by for example joint naval exercises, can enhance the external security of these regimes, and the regional cooperation forum ASEAN. States that already have strong state capacity, such as Australia, will naturally align with the US to protect its external security, as we have seen in the case of AUKUS. As long as Washington and Brussels continue to have a relationship based on shared values and interests, and the Europeans, like the New Zealanders, are not forced into a possible entrapment based on a common enemy, they should be able to complement each other in the Indo-Pacific region.

**Data availability**

No data are associated with this article.