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# INSIGNIFICANT OR TRANSFORMATIVE? THE EU AND ASEAN AS INDO-PACIFIC SECURITY ACTORS

## Content analysis on the EU's and ASEAN's security approaches in the Indo-Pacific

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# ABSTRACT

Sebastian Leirimaa: Insignificant or transformative? the EU and ASEAN as Indo-Pacific security actors: Content analysis on the EU's and ASEAN's security approaches in the Indo-Pacific
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The Indo-Pacific has become a central stage for global politics and the region is home to ever-increasing geopolitical tensions, which threaten the trade routes and supply chains passing through the Indo-Pacific. Most attention is focused on the great power competition between the US and China, but many middle powers are also active in shaping the security architecture of the region. The EU and ASEAN are two middle powers, that have the potential to significantly affect the geopolitics of the region. They also have similar security interests and have expressed their desire to cooperate on Indo-Pacific security. This study examines and compares the EU's and ASEAN's approaches to security in the Indo-Pacific.

The methodology used for the study is a directed content analysis. The Indo-Pacific strategy documents of both actors, as well as other central strategy documents were used in the content analysis. The study focused on three types of measures or sectors of security. These were military, economics, and institutions, as these three areas have been identified as the central areas for competition and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The theoretical framework of the study was based on realist and neoliberal insights.

It was found that the EU's approach is based largely on material power, and it holds more competitive measures aimed at China, whereas ASEAN's approach focuses on institution-building and cooperation. While the EU and ASEAN have different areas of focus, the two actors can supplement each other's shortcomings, as the EU can help to provide the economic resources needed to improve security and stability in the Indo-Pacific, and ASEAN can utilize its role as a leader in regional institutions. Cooperation between these two actors has the potential to significantly alter the security environment of the Indo-Pacific, but whether the EU and ASEAN can leverage their respective strengths effectively enough to stabilize the region remains to be seen.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, European Union, Association of Southeast Asian Nations, Content Analysis, Realism, Neoliberalism

# TIIVISTELMÄ

Sebastian Leirimaa: Mitätön vai merkityksellinen? EU ja ASEAN Indopasifisina turvallisuustoimijoina: Sisällönanalyysi EU:n ja ASEAN:in lähestymistavoista Indopasifisen alueen turvallisuuteen
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Indopasifinen alue on noussut kansainvälisen politiikan keskiöön. Alue kärsii geopoliittisista jännitteistä, jotka ovat jatkuvasti kehittymässä huonompaan suuntaan. Nämä jännitteet uhkaavat tärkeitä ja vilkkaita kauppareittejä ja toimitusketjuja, jotka kulkevat Indopasifisen alueen läviste. Tähän mennessä, huomio on pitkälti keskittynyt suurvaltakamppailuun Yhdysvaltojen ja Kiinan välillä, mutta monet keskivallat ovat myös aktiivisia turvallisuustoimijoita Indopasifisella alueella. Erityisesti EU ja ASEAN ovat keskivaltoja, joilla on mahdollisuus vaikuttaa alueen geopolitiikkaan merkittävällä tavalla. EU:lla ja ASEAN:illa on hyvin samankaltaiset turvallisuusintressit ja ne ovat ilmaisseet haluunsa tehdä yhteistyötä Indopasifisen turvallisuuden parissa. Tämä tutkielma tarkastelee ja vertailee EU:n ja ASEAN:in lähestymistapoja Indopasifisen alueen turvallisuuteen.

Tutkielmassa hyödynnettiin teoriaohjaavaa sisällönanalyysiä. Aineisto koostui EU:n ja ASEAN:in julkaisemista Indopasifisista strategioista, sekä muista keskeisistä strategisista dokumenteista. Tutkielmassa keskityttiin kolmeen turvallisuuden osa-alueeseen: asevoimiin, talouteen ja instituutioihin. Nämä kolme osa-aluetta ovat keskeisiä Indopasifisella alueella esiintyvän kilpailun ja yhteistyön kannalta. Tutkielman teoreettinen viitekehys pohjautuu realismin ja neoliberalismin näkökulmiin.

Tutkielmassa havaittiin, että EU:n lähestymistapa perustuu pitkälti aineelliseen valtaan ja se pitää sisällään enemmän vastakkainasettelua ja kilpailullisia elementtejä, kuin ASEAN:in lähestymistapa, joka perustuu instituutioiden kehittämiseen ja yhteistyöhön. Vaikka EU ja ASEAN keskittyvät turvallisuuden eri osa-alueisiin, ne voivat korvata toistensa heikkoudet. EU pystyy tarjoamaan Indopasifisen alueen turvallisuuden kannalta olennaisia taloudellisia resursseja ja ASEAN puolestaan voi hyödyntää johtoasemaansa alueellisissa instituutioissa. EU:n ja ASEAN:in välinen yhteistyö voi mahdollisesti vaikuttaa Indopasifisen alueen turvallisuusympäristöön merkittävällä tavalla. On kuitenkin epäselvää, kykeneekö EU ja ASEAN hyödyntämään vahvuuksiaan riittävän tehokkaasti vakauttaakseen alueen geopoliittisia jännitteitä.

Avainsanat: Indopasifinen alue, Euroopan Unioni, Kaakkois-Aasian maiden yhteistyöjärjestö, sisällönanalyysi, realismi, neoliberalismi

# Contents

# 1. Introduction

The European External Services Action (EEAS) has listed seven challenges that the EU faces in Asia. Five of these are related to the EU's security objectives in the Indo-Pacific, including "building the EU as an Asia-Pacific security actor" and "reinforcing the EU's strategic focus, presence and actions in the Indo-Pacific". In 2021 the EU released a document titled "The EU strategy for cooperation in the Indo-Pacific". While the strategy is not exclusively focused on security, it is one of the central themes. The strategy lays out the logic by which the EU aims to build itself as a security actor in the Indo-Pacific. The EU highlights the centrality of ASEAN in the security structures of the Indo-Pacific, which opens the way for cooperation as ASEAN also advocates for the principle of 'ASEAN Centrality' in the Indo-Pacific security architecture. However, ASEAN's and the EU's positions are quite different to each other, considering that the ASEAN states are situated right in the middle of the Indo-Pacific, whereas the EU is a nonregional power. Nevertheless, both organizations seem to possess similar goals regarding the security and stability of the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific refers to the region consisting mainly of the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific, although definitions vary slightly. The region has become the main stage for great-power rivalry between USA and China (Samaranayake, 2021; De Castro, 2022). Especially China's assertive actions, which have been described as "gray zone" tactics or activities (Brown, 2022) in the South China Sea as well the Taiwan Strait have raised concerns and, in its Indo-Pacific strategy the EU describes these areas as "regional hotspots" that have a "direct impact on European security". These worries are well-founded. A recent example of the potential for escalation occurred when China performed a military exercise, where it practically surrounded Taiwan with its navy and fired 11 missiles in nearby waters, some of which flew directly over Taiwan. This exercise was done in response to a visit by the speaker of the United States House of Representatives, Nancy Pelosi. Such an aggressive and large-scale response reveals the intense tensions that are present in parts of the Indo-Pacific. Indeed, many have warned of the great powers heading towards a 'Thucydides trap' (He & Li, 2020; Swielande, 2019).

On top of the great-power competition, many middle-powers, such as India, Japan, ASEAN, and the EU are significant stakeholders in the region, which creates a truly complex geopolitical environment, where the risk of miscalculations and escalations is high. One of

the main reasons why so many actors are interested in the region, is that some of the world's busiest maritime trade routes pass through the Indo-Pacific, and through chokepoints such as the Malacca Strait, making the region important for global trade and economy.

While the EU and ASEAN seem to have similar security interests regarding the region, their role in the regional security architecture is not easy to grasp. One reason for this, is that both are nontraditional security actors. International Relations and Security Studies often focus on the state as the primary actor, but the EU and ASEAN are nontraditional security actors. One clear difference between these political unions and states, as security actors, is the lack of military assets under their jurisdiction, limiting the foreign policy tools available to the EU and ASEAN. Nevertheless, both organizations have several measures available to them and both have a multifaceted approach to security in the Indo-Pacific. Both organizations can also benefit from cooperation with one another. For the EU, having partners in the Indo-Pacific is necessary for power projection and thus, for pursuing its security interests (Pacheco & Leveringhaus, 2022). ASEAN on the other hand, is considered to have an important role as the mediator between great powers (Jones, 2015; Ciorciari, 2017). Increasing cooperation with other middle-powers can help ASEAN mediate these relations more effectively and thus, limit the possible negative effects of the great power competition and overall increase the policy options available to ASEAN.

Whether these benefits can be realized depends on multiple factors, but the starting point is that the security interests and the measures that are used to achieve these interests must be compatible between the EU and ASEAN. So far, the overall approaches that these actors have regarding security in the Indo-Pacific have not been studied in a comparative and comprehensive manner. This is not surprising, as it has not been long since the EU expressed its interests in becoming an Indo-Pacific security actor. Furthermore, the EU has adopted a more 'geopolitical approach' in its foreign policy only in the past few years, which by itself necessitates updated studies on EU foreign and security policies.

The Indo-Pacific is home to a multitude of security threats, both traditional and non-traditional threats. This fact is reflected in the Indo-Pacific strategies of the EU and ASEAN. This increases the scope of research that can and should be done on the topic. Most of the research so far is focused on traditional security threats, which is justified, as they have the more immediate potential for serious consequences. Many of the studies on the topic are, however, quite one-dimensional, focusing on a single aspect of security. While this enables

the researchers to present a more nuanced picture of their topic, it means that there aren't many studies that have attempted to explain the overall approaches of the EU or ASEAN. To fill these gaps and to advance the understanding of the Indo-Pacific security environment I aim to identify the main elements and measures included in the EU's and ASEAN's approaches towards security in the Indo-Pacific. As the most immediate security issues in the Indo-Pacific rise from geopolitical tensions between states, the focus of the study will be on how the EU and ASEAN aim to minimize the risks caused by these tensions. These measures will then be compared so that differences and similarities can be identified. These results have implications for determining the likelihood of EU-ASEAN security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and the nature of such cooperation. EU-ASEAN cooperation has the potential to significantly alter the Indo-Pacific security environment by providing alternative structures to the great power competition between China and the US.

This topic holds many theoretical and empirical challenges. First, the concept of security in the field of International Relations is still contested, which means that researchers must be able to choose, from the competing concepts, one that they believe to be the most useful and accurate for describing their topic of study. Indeed, in International Relations and in its subfield of Security studies, security is sometimes described as an 'essentially-contested concept' (Smith, 2005). When defining security, the issue is balancing between intellectual coherence and between inclusivity. In simpler words, if a broad definition is used, the term might become useless for analysis as nearly anything can be included within the term. On the other hand, if a narrow definition is used, many elements that could affect the safety and well-being of states or its citizens might fall out of the scope of what is included in security. As security remains as a contested concept, the researcher cannot confidently rely on previous definitions and frameworks regarding security, but rather must decide on what kind of conceptualization is most appropriate for the issue being studied. In many cases, researchers fail to specify their understanding of security. However, as Baldwin (1997) states: "One cannot use the designation of security as an essentially contested concept as an excuse for not formulating one's own conception of security as clearly and precisely as possible." (p.12).

To answer these issues, the nature of security and of security studies will be discussed in the theory section of this paper. Ultimately, Ullman's (1983) definition of security, or rather definition of threats, was adopted for this study, as it is broad enough to capture the EU's and ASEAN's security concerns in the Indo-Pacific, but simultaneously it limits the scope of

security in a useful and meaningful way. Ullman considers threats as events that significantly threaten the quality of people's lives or as events that significantly narrow the policy options available to states or other actors.

Furthermore, theoretical insight will be drawn from realist and neoliberal schools, to provide for a deeper understanding of security and power, as power is a concept often closely linked to security. The decision to use realist and neoliberal insights was based on multiple factors. Firstly, the politics of the Indo-Pacific are largely characterized by competition and cooperation. While this is perhaps true of almost all international politics, this phenomenon of balancing between competition and cooperation is particularly intense in the Indo-Pacific. The region is home to multiple territorial disputes as well as the central stage for US-China competition, but simultaneously the stakeholders in these disputes rely heavily on the maritime trade routes passing through the Indo-Pacific. In a way, it seems that stakeholders need to balance between their geopolitical interests and trade interests. States that decide to pursue their geopolitical interests must necessarily take a confrontational approach, as China has done with most of its territorial disputes. However, even China has been quite careful to avoid escalations. After all, a large portion of China's influence comes from its trade relations and a conflict would harm these relations. China has also shown clear willingness to further regional cooperation by participating in ASEAN-led security structures and by participating in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP). Similarly, most stakeholders in the region have partaken in both confrontational and cooperative measures. The military build-up of the region as well as the efforts to institutionalize the regional politics are often contrasted with one another to showcase this balance between competition and cooperation. Due to the lack of a dominant competitive or cooperative logic in the region some scholars have called for integrating realist and neoliberal approaches when examining security in Southeast Asia (Sheldon, 1995; He, 2008). After all, realism lacks strong explanations for cooperation and neoliberalism lacks strong explanations for conflict and competition (Jervis, 1999; Niou & Ordershook, 1991). This is of course a simplification of these two paradigms, but one that holds true to a large extent. This is not however, necessarily a failure on the part of these paradigms but rather a reflection of their areas of focus. While realism provides valuable tools for analyzing conflicts, competition and the confrontational side of international relations, neoliberalism provides tools for analyzing increasing levels of cooperation. As it is difficult to determine which of these two sides is more prevalent in the Indo-Pacific, it makes sense to find middle-ground between realism and neoliberalism. This

makes it possible to utilize the strengths of each approach and to avoid theoretical bias which might occur when using a single theoretical perspective with a clear focus. For example, examining the Indo-Pacific security environment only through the lens of realism might easily lead to overly highlighting the rising tensions, while ignoring the fact that the region has been relatively peaceful for decades, despite being home to several territorial disputes and differing geopolitical interests. Using a theoretical framework which synthesizes realism and neoliberalism enables to researcher to place the issues or actors into a spectrum, similar to that of the right-left political spectrum, instead of having to frame the issue in such a way as to fit into the chosen paradigm. It is certainly possible that, within a given context, in this case the Indo-Pacific, the actions of some actors are better explained by realist logic while other actors might lean towards neoliberal logic. So, the first reason for the realist-neoliberal framework used in this study, is that neither one excels over the other at explaining the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific. While realism and neoliberalism are often contrasted to one another and are often considered as mutually exclusive approaches, there have been, already for decades, calls to do away with the unnecessarily strict realist-liberal divide (Nye, 1998).

The second reason is that most existing research on the topic of Indo-Pacific security focus on three areas where the competition and cooperation are most prevalent: Military, economics, and institutions. Thus, taking inspiration of Buzan's (2016) division of security into different 'sectors', a similar approach will be used, with the difference that Buzan's political sector is replaced with an 'institutional' sector, as there is a significant presence of institutions and regional organizations in the Indo-Pacific. Neither realism nor neoliberalism excels at explaining all three of these sectors or areas of security, realism traditionally ignoring institutions and neoliberalism lacking explanations for the role of military in international relations. However, drawing insights from both schools, it is possible to overcome these blind spots and to provide sufficient theoretical background for all three sectors. The approach of synthesizing realist and liberal traditions in explaining security in Southeast Asia or in the Indo-Pacific is not by any means novel. Multiple scholars have advocated for such an approach (Sheldon, 1995; He, 2008; He, 2018).

To further specify, the focus of this study will be on security issues and instability created by state-actors, mostly by China but also by the intensifying great power competition with the US. How the EU and ASEAN aim to minimize these threats will be examined and compared. Even though the EU and ASEAN have given plenty of attention to non-traditional threats in the Indo-Pacific, such as environmental issues, these will not be central in this study. The

reasoning for focusing mainly on state-actors or political unions such as the EU and ASEAN, is due to the ever-growing geopolitical tensions in the region, which arguably have the highest potential for large-scale consequences in the near future compared to other security issues.

The EU's and ASEAN's approaches to security in the Indo-Pacific will be compared with a qualitative content analysis. A directed approach will be used, meaning that theories or existing research will be used as a starting point for the analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005). In this case, both existing research and theoretical insights will be used to guide the content analysis. The existing research has identified military, economics, and institutions as the three most significant areas for security in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, these three themes will be the focus of the content analysis. Realism and neoliberalism will then be used to provide explanations on how these three sectors might affect security in the Indo-Pacific.

In the content analysis, I will analyze the Indo-Pacific strategy documents of the EU and ASEAN as well as other central documents that outline the foreign policy approaches of these actors. Only central documents which have relevance to the Indo-Pacific region are included. So, the aim of the analysis is to identify the differences and similarities in how the EU and ASEAN use military, economy, and institutions in the Indo-Pacific to protect their security interests.

After the introduction, the study will continue with a section discussing the Indo-Pacific concept. The Indo-Pacific, as a geopolitical concept, only gained popularity in the 2010s. As the concept is still so new, it is not necessarily well understood. The development of a new geopolitical concept has been interpreted in different ways. Some have argued that the Indo-Pacific concept is a strategy to limit China's influence while others claim that the concept is aimed at forming a new "institutional setting" (He, 2018). How the Indo-Pacific came to replace the previously dominant concept of the Asia-Pacific, and the significance of this change is discussed at length. The section also provides more context for understanding why the Indo-Pacific has become such an important region of the world and what the security environment in the Indo-Pacific is like. Understanding this context is critical for studying and understanding the EU's and ASEAN's security concerns and policies in the Indo-Pacific.

In the third section of the study, the concept of security, how it is understood in International Relations, and how it is studied will be covered. The section will point out many of the issues

related to studying security, and how these issues are tackled in this study will be discussed. In this section, the theoretical framework for this study will also be presented and explained.

The fourth section will explain the methodology used for the analysis, whereas the fifth section covers the analysis, the results, and discussion on these results. This section is divided into six smaller sections: The EU's military approach, the EU's economic approach, the EU's institutional approach, ASEAN's military approach, ASEAN's economic approach, and finally ASEAN's institutional approach. Each of these areas will be examined separately, making it easy to identify the differences and similarities in the EU's and ASEAN's security measures. The study will end with a conclusion, where the findings of the study will be further discussed. Also, the significance of the findings for the EU's and ASEAN's security cooperation, as well as for their respective roles in the security architecture of the Indo-Pacific will be discussed.

## 2. The Indo-Pacific as a geopolitical concept and its significance

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a common geopolitical concept only recently. The term "Indo-Pacific" has been used for quite some time in fields such as marine biology and oceanography and even in geopolitical context there are a few mentions from the first half of the 19th century. However, the term, in a geopolitical context, truly started emerging in the second half of the 2000s and gained further popularity in the 2010s. It is considered that the concept of "Indo-Pacific" has, to a degree, replaced the previously dominant geopolitical concept of "Asia-Pacific" and that this reconceptualization significantly affects the foreign policies of different actors in the region (Berkofsky & Miracola, 2019)

Gurpeet S. Khurana, a captain from the Indian navy is often credited for pioneering the term "Indo-Pacific" in a geopolitical context with his 2007 paper "Security of Sea Lanes: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation". Khurana highlighted the value of sea transportation to India's safety and prosperity. After all, by volume 97% of India's trade is moved by sea-routes (Khurana, 2007). He was especially concerned with India's access to energy resources such as crude oil and natural gas, since according to Khurana, 70% of India's energy imports move through sea. Such concerns, regarding high volumes of trade and critical goods, such as energy resources, would later be repeated by most actors that have formulated some sort of Indo-Pacific strategies. Khurana claimed that India and Japan have very similar interests in

the Indo-Pacific as they are both dependent on the maritime trade routes passing through the region and thus, he advocated for close cooperation for India and Japan in issues regarding the region.

Based on Khurana's paper, it is not surprising that the first state where the concept of Indo-Pacific received high-level attention was Japan. Later in the same year as Khurana's paper was published the Japanese prime minister at the time Shinzo Abe visited India and gave a speech to the Indian parliament titled "Confluence of the Two Seas" in which he expressed similar thoughts and ideas as those written by Khurana. Abe majestically stated that "The Pacific and Indian Oceans are now bringing about a dynamic coupling as seas of freedom and prosperity" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 2007), suggesting that the previous geographical boundaries, where the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific were thought of as two distinct areas no longer made sense for the "broader Asia". Rather, the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific should be thought of as a highly interconnected region. While Abe did not use the term 'Indo-Pacific' in this speech, some experts have interpreted his words as a reframing or as a reconceptualization of Asian geopolitics, shifting away from the previously dominant concept of the 'Asia-Pacific', which usually excluded India and the Indian Ocean. (Hemmings, 2020).

However, this new concept of the Indo-Pacific remained in very limited use. In 2011 the concept gained a considerable boost when the US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton wrote an article to the Foreign Policy -magazine titled "America's Pacific Century". In the article she wrote of US's pivot to Asia and of India's central role in securing economic and political stability in the Asia-Pacific. While Clinton did highlight India's role, she nevertheless preferred to use the more established term of Asia-Pacific instead of Indo-Pacific, which she only used once in her article. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the term Indo-Pacific was not yet known well enough that it could replace the Asia-Pacific. Yet the article followed the trend of shifting the geopolitical center of gravity from East Asia closer to India and the Southeast Asian states. A month after Clinton's article was published, the Obama administration announced intentions for a "strategic rebalancing", where the US would increase its focus towards the Asia-Pacific, which was seen as a move to balance against China's growing regional influence (De Castro, 2018). This policy of rebalancing towards the Asia-Pacific was later continued by Obama's successor, president Donald Trump (Liu, 2020).

Following this, in 2012 Australia's government published a white paper titled 'Australia in the Asian Century' in which they briefly introduced the Indo-Pacific concept. The concept, it was written, combines Western Pacific Ocean and the Indian Ocean as one strategic arc. In the next year Australia's Department of Defense released a white paper that included a strategic overview of the Indo-Pacific region, and the region was described as a strategic priority for Australia. This is considered as the first time that a state officially adopted the Indo-Pacific concept (Taylor, 2020) and soon many would follow.

In 2013 Indonesia's minister of Foreign Affairs Marty M. Natalegawa shared his own thoughts on the term 'Indo-Pacific' which he noted had become more common in a geopolitical context. He understood the Indo-Pacific as a triangular area where Japan, Australia and India form the three corners, with the Indonesian archipelago firmly in the center of the region. Natalegawa (2013) eloquently described the region:

> "Amid its archipelagic waters, are found some of the most strategic sea lanes in the world: connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Serving as highways for the movement of global trade, as well as of people and the associated ideas and cultural expressions they bring forth.• •

While the concept of the Indo-Pacific had largely formed at this point, it wasn't until 2016-2018 until many states officially adopted the concept and started basing their foreign policies on it. Once again Japan's prime minister Shinzo Abe was at the forefront of reimagining Asia's geopolitical environment as he shared his thoughts on the Indian and Pacific Ocean's as well as their importance to the Asian and African continents in the Sixth Tokyo Conference on African Development (TICAD VI). He spoke of the oceans as places that "values freedom, rule of law and market economy" and is "free from force or coercion" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs Japan, 2016). While he didn't even use the term 'Indo-Pacific' in his speech, peculiarly this became known as the event when Abe unveiled the concept of 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (Xi, 2021). This concept, which can also be called a strategy or a vision, soon became the cornerstone of Japan's approach to the Indo-Pacific. Other actors would soon adopt approaches that greatly resembled that of Japan's FOIP, and so Japan can be considered as a central actor in developing the Indo-Pacific concept. The FOIP concept has three pillars (Ministry of Defense):

1. Promotion and establishment of the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade
2. Pursuit of economic prosperity (e.g. improving connectivity)

3. Commitment to peace and stability

After this point, the term and concept of 'Indo-Pacific' started truly taking off, as country after country released their own strategies, approaches, visions and plans for the region. The US especially was quick to adopt Japan's FOIP -concept as President Donald Trump used the exact same wording at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) summit in 2017 when he presented his own 'vision for a free and open Indo-Pacific'. The US's official stance became even clearer as the National Security Strategy of 2017 included a section on the 'Indo-Pacific' for the first time. While the approach closely echoed that of Japan's, it was more antagonistic and confrontational, clearly placing the blame for Indo-Pacific's geopolitical tensions on China. Furthermore, the US renamed its 'United States Pacific Command' to 'United States Indo-Pacific Command' in 2018 and in 2019 the US released for the first time a proper Indo-Pacific strategy, in the form of a document titled 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific; Advancing a shared vision'. For the U.S policymakers, the need to pivot from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific was clear, and once the U.S had officially adopted the Indo-Pacific, it was inevitable that other western powers would follow, at least to a degree.

In 2018 the French president Emmanuel Macron described France as an 'Indo-Pacific power', due to its overseas territories located in the region, which consequently form 93% of France's exclusive economic zone according to France's ministry for Europe and Foreign affairs (2021). In 2019 France also became the first European country to release a strategy document focused on the Indo-Pacific region. Germany and the Netherlands released their documents in 2020 while the UK and the EU released theirs in 2021. By this point, it is clear that the Indo-Pacific has become a common way for the western policymakers to understand the geopolitics of Asian maritime regions.

Similarly, many Asian powers have also adopted the concept and based their foreign policies on it. Japan was the most proactive in developing and adopting the concept, but it has been followed by India with its 'Indo-Pacific Ocean's Initiative' and ASEAN with its 'Outlook on the Indo-Pacific', both of which were announced in 2019.

As we've seen the Indo-Pacific developed not through the policies of a single actor, and not necessarily due to conscious effort, but rather it developed over time in different places at the same time, as if to respond to emerging issues and trends. The Indo-Pacific can simultaneously be considered a simple concept that combines the geographic areas of the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific, but at the same time it can be understood in a more

complex manner, as a geopolitical and geo-strategic concept, which affects how policies are formed. Khurana's (2019) explanation is a useful starting point for understanding the "Indo-Pacific":

> Concepts like the "Indo-Pacific" that lead to the creation of new mental maps of how countries view the world are broad and evolve over a considerable period of time. The process is an amalgamation of the thoughts of statesmen, think-tanks, and the academia over many years and decades, and is underpinned by the imperatives of the geopolitical environment. (p.15)

As Khurana points out, the Indo-Pacific is simply a "mental map", which differs from the one that was previously mainstream. The region itself is mostly the same as it has always been, but due to trends that have developed over years or decades, some policymakers considered it useful to update the mental maps of the region.

One reason for updating the "mental maps" seems to be inclusiveness. This reframing was largely initiated by Indian and Japanese policymakers due to their converging interests and the subsequent security cooperation between the countries (Langel, 2021; Kaura & Kuwamat, 2021). India's involvement in the politics of the Asia-Pacific had been underwhelming, but by adopting the wider concept of Indo-Pacific, India's inclusion could be enhanced. After all, India's geographical location is more central to the Indo-Pacific region than the Asia-Pacific. Similar trends can be seen in other actors, that aim to further justify their presence in the region, and this is reflected in the definitions adopted of the Indo-Pacific.

For example, in the US's definition the Indo-Pacific starts from US's east coast and stretches to the Indian Ocean whereas the EU defines the area as starting from the east coast of Africa and ending in the 'Pacific Island states'. So, the EU's and US's definition of the Indo-Pacific differs by around 8690 kilometers (distance from the Philippines to the US west coast). It seems that actors are prone to adopt a definition that maximizes their proximity or centrality in the region as is evident from the US's, the EU's and perhaps also Indonesia's definition (where Indonesia is placed in the middle of the region). The US's definition is the only one where the Indo-Pacific stretches all the way to the US's east coast, while in the EU's definition the Indo-Pacific starts from Africa's east coast, which is closer to the EU than the Indian Ocean. This proximity arguably makes it easier to justify one's role as a security actor in the region and this is one significant result of moving from the Asia-Pacific to the Indo-Pacific. Such differing definitions are not surprising, but it is important to realize that "like

every imaginative space, the Indo-Pacific is virtually a construct of contested interpretation." (Xi, 2021, p. 222).

More interesting than geographical definitions, however, is what makes the region so important for all these actors. The official reasons provided by different actors and their strategies repeat very similar points. The Indo-Pacific region is important because it is home to 60% of the world's population, produces 60% of the world's GDP and most of the world's economic growth comes from the Indo-Pacific (EEAS, 2021). The Indo-Pacific has some of the world's busiest trade routes with 60% of all maritime trade passing through it (Cordesman, Burke & Molot, 2019), which includes two critical maritime chokepoints, the Bab-Al Mandab strait, and the Malacca Strait. According to Australia's white paper from 2012, two thirds of the world's oil shipments pass through the Indian Ocean, making the routes critical for the energy security of multiple states.

Thus, one aspect that has made the Indo-Pacific such an important region, even for actors that are quite distant, is the regions value for the world's economy due to critical maritime trade routes. These dependencies have turned the Indo-Pacific into an arena with significant security concerns, as a disruption of any sort could prove truly expensive to many states. As a result, great powers as well as multiple middle-powers have become active in the region, which increases the risk of miscalculations and escalations. This convergence of economics and security is a central part of the Indo-Pacific concept. Without the trade routes spanning the entire region, it wouldn't have been necessary to combine the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific into a singular concept. Without the creation of such a concept actors would not have treated this region as a single geopolitical area, towards which comprehensive strategies needed to be created.

Also, it is important to note that without the creation of the Indo-Pacific concept, it would have been difficult for the EU to rationalize participating in Asian geopolitics in a significant manner. The EU was never an active player in the Asia-Pacific and why would it have been? The trade routes in Asia-Pacific are more important for the US than the EU and the region is geographically very distant to Europe. The EU didn't have particularly strong interests in the region. The Indian Ocean, however, is important to the EU as it connects the European and Asian economies. Thus, the reconceptualization of Asian geopolitics which was made to better include India in such affairs, also enabled the EU to rationalize more active participation.

While it is clear that the Indo-Pacific has become an important geopolitical concept, the emergence of the concept has been interpreted in quite a few different ways. One common view is that the Indo-Pacific concept is a balancing strategy led by the US against an ever more assertive China (Denisov, Paramonov, Arapova & Safranchuk, 2021; Liu, 2020; He, 2018). Xi (2021) claims that "Strategically, the concept of "Indo-Pacific" was designed by the United States to counterbalance China's rise given the latter's growing economic and political weight in the region" (p. 221). While it is somewhat simplistic to consider the Indo-Pacific as a US led project, the view that the US aims to limit China's influence is well justified. In the first US Indo-Pacific strategy, formed by the Trump administration it is written that:

> The People's Republic of China (PRC) practices repression at home and abroad. Beijing is intolerant of dissent, aggressively controls media and civil society, and brutally suppresses ethnic and religious minorities. Such practices, which Beijing exports to other countries through its political and economic influence, undermine the conditions that have promoted stability and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific for decades. (U.S Department of State, 2019, p. 21)

US's second Indo-Pacific strategy was formed by the Biden administration, which continued the strict approach towards China. In the strategy it is written that "The PRC's coercion and aggression spans the globe, but it is most acute in the Indo-Pacific" (The White House, 2022, p. 5). It should not come as a surprise then, that many see the Indo-Pacific as a stage for great power competition and that this competition is seen as perhaps the main security issue in the Indo-Pacific (De Castro, 2021; Xi, 2021). De Castro (2021) explains US's involvement in the following way:

> From the US perspective, Southeast Asia is an important region because of its geography (i.e. its location in the middle of the Indo-Pacific region astride the strategically and commercially vital sea lane routes) and its vulnerability to Chinese economic inducements, diplomatic pressures, and growing naval presence (p. 283)

While the US's approach is antagonistic towards China and the US has been one of the most important actors in the development of the Indo-Pacific concept, it cannot be considered simply as an US-led strategy. Multiple actors had already adopted the concept to some degree before the US and as Khurana (2019) claims "The primal catalyst for the "Indo-Pacific" concept was the growing strategic convergence between India and Japan with regard to the

increasing politico-military assertiveness of China" (p.17). Also, the US approach very closely echoes the one put forward by Japan in 2016, so instead of US being the actor that has 'led' the process, it seems more like the US adopted a concept that other actors had developed, since it was useful for US foreign policy goals.

Furthermore, different actors have different interests and thus, they utilize the concept in different ways. For example, in the EU's strategy it is only written that the EU "encourages China to play its part in a peaceful and thriving Indo-Pacific region", whereas China is not even mentioned in ASEAN's outlook. The EU and ASEAN then, seem to diverge from the US's strategy. Although great power competition is undeniably a critical element of Indo-Pacific geopolitics, considering the geopolitics mainly from the standpoint of the great powers, leaves one's understanding of the Indo-Pacific one-dimensional. Especially, since there are multiple significant middle-powers as stakeholders.

While the effort cannot be considered US-led, for most, if not for all of the middle-powers active in the Indo-Pacific, the question of how to deal with China, seems to be a central theme in their strategies, whether expressed explicitly or implicitly. The EU and ASEAN have more diplomatic approaches than the US, but it would be a mistake to claim that they do not consider China as a potential security threat. The ASEAN especially has plenty of reasons for concern, due to its geographical centrality in the Indo-Pacific. As Xi describes:

> With rising geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN is running the risk of becoming a victim of a hegemonic war against China waged by the United States and its Quad partners, a pessimistic scenario for the future of the Indo-Pacific. (2021, p. 219)

On top of running the risk of getting caught between US-China competition, ASEAN states have their own bilateral issues with China due to the South China Sea territorial disputes. China claims almost 80% of the South China Sea (Hiebert, Nguyễn & Poling, 2015), overlapping significantly with Vietnam's, Philippines', Brunei's, and Malaysia's claims.

The EU has also pointed out China as the main culprit behind the rising geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific (European Parliament, 2022). China's actions in the Indo-Pacific region, and especially in the South China Sea are often described as 'gray zone tactics'.

> Gray zone tactics—coercive actions that are shy of armed conflict but beyond normal diplomatic, economic, and other activities—are widely recognized as playing an

> increasingly important role in China's efforts to advance its domestic, economic, foreign policy, and security objectives, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. (Lin *et al.,* 2022, p.1)

The recent case of China encircling Taiwan during a military exercise was quite an extreme example, perhaps even exceeding what is considered as 'gray zone'. But there are plenty of previous examples of China practicing similar behavior, which has given rise to concerns. Some examples include building military outposts on disputed islands, using fishing vessels as maritime militia to pursue political objectives (Poling, Mallory & Pretat, 2021) and updating its coast guard law to authorize its law-enforcement fleets to "use lethal force on foreign ships operating in China's waters, including the disputed waters" (Trung, 2021). Considering that China is an active participant in many maritime and island disputes, the geographically ambiguous nature of the coast guard law is indeed alarming. These actions are not limited towards Taiwan either. China has practiced similar behavior towards Japan in the East China due to the Senkaku/Diaoyu island disputes as well as towards Vietnam and Philippines in the South China Sea. For example, the maritime militias were used to seize the contested Scarborough Shoal in 2012 as well as to establish a Chinese oil rig near the contested Paracel Islands (Poling, Mallory & Pretat, 2021). Erickson & Martinson (2019) explain China's reasoning behind these strategies:

> Beijing conducts these operations — more intensely assertive than normal interstate relations, but less intense than armed conflict — to alter the status quo without resorting to war. Chinese analysts and strategists regard these operations as efforts to "safeguard China's maritime rights and interests," or simply as "maritime rights protection". They include actions to assert Chinese sovereignty over waters adjacent to disputed land features and jurisdiction over other parts of the ocean, based on China's heterodox interpretation of international law. (p. 1)

Another case for concern has been China's enormous infrastructure development project, the Belt and Road (BRI) Initiative, which has a number of projects in the Indo-Pacific. Some claim that it is a part of China's 'grand strategy' and is meant to increase China's influence (Green, 2018; Bhattacraya, 2016). It is also described as a geo-economic strategy, which is likely to have more impact on geopolitics than on infrastructure development (Li, 2018). Similarly, Matsumura (2019), claims that the BRI is a "propaganda instrument" which has been used for "luring many states to cooperate with the country". One specific concern is that

China could use the ports, that are built or expanded through the Belt and Road Initiative, as strategic and logistical facilities for its navy (Ghiasy *et al.*, 2018).

| Year | Region | Host state | Port | Lease period |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 2015 | Indian Ocean | Pakistan | Gwadar | 40 years |
| 2015 | Indian Ocean | Myanmar | Kyaukpyu | 50 years |
| 2015 | South China Sea | Malaysia | Kuantan | 60 years |
| 2016 | Indian Ocean | Djibouti | Obock | 10 years |
| 2016 | South China Sea | Malaysia | Melaka Gateway | 99 years |
| 2017 | Indian Ocean | Sri Lanka | Hambantota | 99 years |
| 2017 | South China Sea | Brunei | Muara | 60 years |
| 2017 | Indian Ocean | Maldives | Feydhoo Finolhu | 50 years |

*Figure 1. Ghiasy, Su & Saalman (2018) The 21st century Maritime Silk Road: Security implications and ways forward for the European Union. Stockholm international peace research institute.*

However, others claim that the strategic drive behind the Belt and Road Initiative has been overvalued and that the main purpose is indeed economic in nature and its main purpose is to alleviate China's industrial overcapacity (Li, 2020; Leverett & Bingbing, 2017). A third view is that BRI is a not a clearly defined concept and that the projects are fairly haphazard and plagued by incompetence, which explains the economic irrationality of some projects (Jones & Zeng, 2019). Which ever view is correct is up-to-debate, most likely there is some truth to all of them, but what seems clear at the very least, is that policymakers have perceived increased economic competition in the region, and not the good kind of competition either. In the 2019 Indo-Pacific strategy report of the US, it was written that China seeks to "reorder the region to its advantage by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations". In the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy it is also written that there is an increasing amount of "unfair trade practices and economic coercion" present in the Indo-Pacific.

While BRI is not necessarily the only economic measure utilized by China that has raised concerns, it is the one that has received the most attention. Another example is a case from 2010, when Chinese and Japanese coast guard had an incident in the East China Sea and as a response China stopped all rare earth element exports to Japan for two months. Rare earth elements are critical for technology industry and China produces the majority of the world's rare earth elements. (Klossek, Kullik & van den Boogart, 2016). A more recent example is

when in 2021 Lithuania let Taiwan open a delegation in their capital, after which China stopped imports from Lithuania. Such actions threaten the global value chains and can be used to pressure actors to conform to Beijing's policies.

China has been reluctant to adopt the Indo-Pacific concept preferring instead the traditional Asia-Pacific framing, which signifies that Beijing also considers the concept and the accompanying strategies as measures aimed at limiting its influence (He & Li, 2020). In 2020, in a press conference in Kuala Lumpur, Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi claimed that the Indo-Pacific "strategy" is aimed at erasing "the name of the Asia-Pacific". In the same statement he continued "Facts will prove that the so-called Indo-Pacific Strategy is in essence a strategy that creates divisions, incites confrontation and undermines peace." Also, The Mission of the People's Republic of China to the European Union recently responded to a report done by the European Parliament regarding security challenges in the Indo-Pacific. In the response, the term 'Indo-Pacific' wasn't used even once, instead the term 'Asia-Pacific' was used.

Despite differing views, the EU and ASEAN especially, but other actors as well, must be able to cooperate with China in order to protect the stability of the region. The EU describes its approach in regard to China in its Indo-Pacific strategy as follows:

> The EU will also pursue its multifaceted engagement with China, engaging bilaterally to promote solutions to common challenges, cooperating on issues of common interest and encouraging China to play its part in a peaceful and thriving Indo-Pacific region.

Cooperation is likely to prove difficult however, especially if China is basing its policies on the Asia-Pacific concept, while others are basing their policies on the larger area of the Indo-Pacific. However, considering the high level of economic interdependence that exists between China and other Indo-Pacific actors, there are strong incentives for avoiding escalations and for resolving issues in a peaceful manner. There is a plethora of institutions and organizations in the Indo-Pacific that are indeed aimed at fostering cooperation and reducing uncertainty in the region's security environment. Many of these are led by ASEAN, such as the East Asian Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Minister's Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). ASEAN uses these institutions to balance between

There are also institutions or groupings in the Indo-Pacific that are perceived as being directed against China. One such grouping is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), sometimes called 'Asian NATO', which is formed by the US, India, Japan, and Australia.

Another example is AUKUS, which is a trilateral security pact between Australia, the UK, and the US.

Due to the geopolitical competition on the one hand and the large number of institutions as well as economic cooperation on the other hand, both realist and neoliberal approaches have been used to explain the politics of the Indo-Pacific. The realist logic is perhaps more prevalent, suggesting that the reconceptualization of Asian geopolitics in the form of the Indo-Pacific, is indeed a sort of a strategy to balance against the growing influence, assertiveness, and aggression of China. The neoliberal view on the other hand, argues that the Indo-Pacific as a concept is aimed at improving economic relations and institutionalizing the region (He, 2018). This setting, where actors balance between cooperation and competition, is indeed a core element of international politics and perhaps no other region in the world crystallizes this as well as the Indo-Pacific.

The truth, as is often the case, is probably somewhere between the realist and neoliberal logics. The Indo-Pacific politics resembles an endless web, where a multitude of different actors utilize a multitude of different measures to pursue their policy goals, balancing between competition and cooperation. While each actor has its own interests and plans to pursue these interests, which is reflected in the differences between strategies, Pacheco Pardo & Leveringhaus (2022) point out three commonalities between most Indo-Pacific Strategies:

1. Security and economics are acknowledged as being very closely linked in the Indo-Pacific region.
2. In contrast to the Trump administration's strategy, China is not treated (exclusively) as a threat (at least explicitly)
3. The waters of the Indo-Pacific and Southeast Asia are treated as central to the region

The first point is especially relevant. Viewing the security of the Indo-Pacific in narrow, militaristic terms, does not present the full picture of the security environment. Especially, in the case of EU, this link between security and economics cannot be understated. After all, when discussing security issues in the Indo-Pacific, it is quite clear that the EU's territory is not under direct threat. The security concerns that the EU has in the region, are mainly due to the economic importance of the region to Europe.

Pacheco Pardo's & Leveringhaus' three-point summary is quite accurate and useful, but a fourth point could be added. That is the fact that the role of regional institutions is highlighted

in almost all Indo-Pacific strategies. Mohan (2020, p. 177) provides an alternative four-point summary of what is included in the Indo-Pacific strategies of most countries:

1. building issue-based coalitions among middle players using various bilateral, trilateral, and mini-lateral formats
2. providing alternative pathways to regional connectivity beyond the BRI
3. strengthening regional security by investing in organizations and building capacity of partners.
4. Enhancing economic security by diversifying supply chains

In this section I have aimed to present some of the most relevant security issues concerning the Indo-Pacific, as well as the wider politics of the region. In order to paint a well-rounded picture of the politics of the Indo-Pacific, the discussion was not solely focused on the EU and ASEAN. Instead, the aim was to explain the context or the setting where these actors must operate. However, to summarize the EU's and ASEAN's position or role in the Indo-Pacific, there are three points I would like to highlight:

1. The EU and ASEAN are in a difficult position, considering the increasing tensions between the great powers, as well as the EU's and ASEAN's dependence on both great powers
2. To pursue their interests in this difficult position and to avoid increasing tensions, they must use multifaceted approaches
3. The EU and ASEAN are likely to utilize different measures to different degrees, due to their differing positions in regard to security and stability in the Indo-Pacific

As was made clear in this section, the Indo-Pacific is home to intensifying military and economy cooperation. Many actors, however, wish to avoid further tensions, and these actors have made calls to develop the regional security institutions and organizations. How the EU and ASEAN plan to use institutions, economy, and military to improve their security in the Indo-Pacific will be examined closer in this study. Before moving on to the analysis, the next section will discuss how security is studied and understood in International Relations and Security Studies, and thus provide a theoretical framework for this study.

# 3. Security in International Relations

> *We believe that there are many ways to understand security, and that each will have its merits and its drawbacks. Focusing on any one element will always make some things clearer at the cost of obscuring or distorting others. That is the nature of social theory, and there is no escape from it* (Buzan & Weaver, 1997, p. 250).

In politics, security is often used as an "ambiguous symbol" to justify one's preferred policies (Wolfers, 1952). In research however, such ambiguity can lead to incoherence. The issue with studying security starts from the concept itself, as it is difficult to accurately define. During the early years of International Relations as a science, the debate was often divided between the narrow, traditional conception and the broader, non-traditional conception of security. The narrow concept was focused purely on the military aspect of security, which had the advantage of being well-defined and arguably more useful for analysis as it retained its 'intellectual coherence'. The broad concept on the other hand, takes into account nonmilitary security issues as well. The broad concept has the advantage of being able to study a wider range of issues, but it suffers from a poorly defined concept of security. After all, if nonmilitary issues can be included in the study of security, what than is excluded? Not everything can be included in the concept of security or else, the concept simply loses its meaning.

These days, it seems clear that the narrow concept is not sufficient in the field of International Relations or its subfield of Security Studies. The relevance of military power as a tool to achieve policy goals has been decreasing (Baldwin, 1995) and threats from other sources are perhaps increasing, leading to the need to utilize the broader conception. The recent example of Russia's attack to Ukraine could be considered as proof for either approach but considering the way that the EU and US especially sanctioned Russia and provided Ukraine with weapons to defend itself, has led to Russia not achieving its goals through military means. If the usage of military power receives such opposition, it is not a useful foreign policy tool in most cases. The violence has not spread to other parts of Europe but there is a conflict being fought between Russia and the EU, but this fighting is happening in the form of sanctions, in the economic arena. Both sides are well aware that an open conflict between them, would lead to undesirable results for both. Such reasoning highlights the role of the economic sector in power, competition, and security, as well as undermines the usefulness of military power as a foreign policy tool. Of course, the attack also works as an example that states might still use military power to pursue policy objectives and thus, foreign aggression remains as a threat that must be accounted for.

This example is comparable to the situation in the Indo-Pacific. While China has taken fairly drastic military measures to pressure its adversaries and to pursue its foreign policy objectives, it has usually been careful to not cross the limits of *casus belli*. No side is keen to escalate the tensions and to trigger a military conflict. If military measures are not considered as a particularly effective foreign policy tool, the narrow concept of security is not very useful in the case of the Indo-Pacific. Of course, this doesn't mean that military measures can be ignored, it just means that security must be understood more broadly. Furthermore, as the EU is not under direct military threat in the Indo-Pacific, but rather its security interests are strongly linked to economics, a wider concept of security must be used to study EU's security in the Indo-Pacific.

The narrow versus broad debate is perhaps a bit outdated, as most scholars seem to understand that security cannot be studied in purely militaristic terms. However, the issues that have been highlighted in the debate are still relevant and problematic. While the broader concept seems to have become the more popular approach, as Walt (1991) describes the broad concept:

> "Runs the risk of expanding "security studies" excessively; by this logic, issues such as pollution, disease, child abuse, or economic recessions could all be viewed as threats to "security." Defining the field in this way would destroy its intellectual coherence and make it more difficult to devise solutions to any of these important problems" (p. 213)

While Walt recognized the significance of nonmilitary security issues, he claimed that these should not be included in security studies, as it would widen the field too much and make it incoherent. Walt's critique is thirty years old and yet it remains relevant to security studies to this day. Perhaps, due to the fact that the broad concept of security has become the more popular one, security studies have indeed lost its "intellectual coherence" as Walt claimed, but at the same time the questions of security that fall outside the scope of the narrow approach are too important to be excluded from the field. It seems that when it comes to studying security, it is a balancing act between coherence and asking interesting questions.

Indeed, while security is at the very center of both International Relations and Security Studies, the concept itself remains challenging to grasp. Understanding security as an "essentially contested concept" (Smith, 2005), might then explain this difficulty. Essentially contested concepts refer to concepts that contain ideological elements, and thus, cannot be

determined through empirical evidence (Little, 1981). However, "One cannot use the designation of security as an essentially contested concept as an excuse for not formulating one's own conception of security as clearly and precisely as possible." (Baldwin, 1997, p.12) If security is accepted as such a concept, it would also mean accepting that security studies necessarily contain a high degree of subjectivity due to its ideological elements. This issue, combined with the fact that security usually cannot be studied through rigorous scientific tests (Kolodziej, 2005) and must instead be studied through indirect observation, makes security studies extremely weak as a science. While there may be certain questions that can be studied fairly scientifically and objectively, these seem to be the exceptions to the rule. As Nye (1998, p. 235) proclaims "International relations theory is constrained by the fact that history provides a poor substitute for a laboratory"

Nevertheless, the subject is too important to not be studied, even if it cannot be accomplished in a "scientific manner" (although whether this is possible or not depends on one's understanding of what science is). There are two points that should be understood from these issues. Firstly, security studies, for the most part, should not be approached in an objective manner, as it can usually not be accomplished. Instead of pretending to perform objective studies, it is better to accept the limitations of one's research and to accept that a degree of subjectivity is present. Of course, researchers should aim to be as objective as possible and avoid simply presenting opinions, but they should also recognize that pure objectivity is usually not possible. Secondly, due to the theoretical and methodological issues knowledge cannot be accumulated very effectively. This is why, in many cases, the researcher must start from the very beginning and present their own understanding of *What is security?*

Of course, the natural starting point is to study the established approaches and see if they are useful to your research. However, it is easy to get lost in this first step. Some examples of approaches that I came across during my research were realist, liberalist, feminist, critical theorist, the Copenhagen school, the English school, the Welsh school, which is also known as emancipatory realism, Marxist, pluralist, liberal-pluralist, postmodern realist, structural realist, neorealist, neoliberalist, liberal institutionalist, traditionalist, non-traditionalist, neo-Gramscianism, idealist, materialist, and postmodern pluralist. As Kolodziej's (2005) accurately describes:

> The frustration about what to believe or expect is highlighted by the fundamental discord and debate among practiced and accomplished scholars, analysts,

commentators and political leaders about what the future holds for us as members of an emerging global society." (p. 11)

This plethora of different approaches once again speaks for the complexity of security as a concept. It is also not surprising that there are so many differing approaches, considering how important it is for people to feel *safe*. This importance is perhaps reflected in the number of approaches for the study of security. When security is defined, a choice is made to include certain things and to exclude others. This exclusion, however, might result in a situation where something that *threatens* someone, is excluded from the definition. In this case, there is clearly a need for an alternative approach that includes this threat in the study of security, which explains why there are so many different approaches. This is also one reason why researchers must be careful with the concept of security. Their conception determines what they can study as security and how they can study security.

This leads to another issue, which is state centrism in the study of security. There are reasonable arguments for the central role of the state, perhaps the most convincing being the fact that states have a monopoly on violence. Indeed, many IR scholars, prefer to use definitions of *national security* instead of security. This is useful in the sense that it specifies what kind of security is being discussed, but if too much attention is given to national security, it comes at the expense of excluding many important perspectives. What about ethnic groups that are being oppressed and perhaps even slaughtered by their own governments? The people belonging to this ethnic group do not form a nation, so does that mean such events cannot be included in the study of IR? Also, how to study intergovernmental unions, such as the EU or ASEAN in the context of security? These unions are not states after all. The distinction between security and national security is useful, but an overly state-centric approach must be avoided, in order to not lose focus of many important security issues, which are not necessarily national security issues.

Fortunately, one does not need to be familiar with all of the theoretical and epistemological approaches to be able to research security. There are certain aspects that should be included in one's approach to the study of security. Kolodziej (2005) provides a useful starting point in his book *Security and International Relations*. He lists three issues for studying security, which I have simplified to the form of:

1. Whose notion of security should count?
2. What should be included in the definition of security?

3. How to understand soft and hard power in terms of security?

According to Kolodziej, there is no theory or conception of security that perfectly answers these questions. However, an adequate approach must answer these questions to some extent. Similarly, Baldwin (1997) notes that "One could specify security with respect to the actor whose values are to be secured, the values concerned, the degree of security, the kinds of threats, the means for coping with such threats, the costs of doing so, and the relevant time period" (p. 17).

Buzan answered these questions quite well in his book *People, States and Fear*, which was originally published in 1983. Buzan divides security into four different levels and five different sectors. The levels of analysis are one's which are quite commonly used in IR research. They are the individual level, the national level, the regional level, and the international level. The sectors are the more interesting part of Buzan's approach. He claims that "the security of human collectives is affected by factors in five major sectors: military, political, economic, societal and environmental" (Buzan, 2016, p. 38). Buzan's approach is good in two ways. Firstly, it remains within the scope of International Relations, which is not an obvious thing by any means, as many issues that threaten people are outside the scope of the field. Thus, Buzan's approach answers the criticism that advocates of the narrower approach place on broad approaches. Secondly, it is a flexible approach and doesn't overly restrict the questions we can study regarding security, as the narrow approach does.

Of course, it is not by any means perfect. For some security issues, it might be difficult to determine which sector it falls under, if any. A recent example is the COVID-19. It is quite unclear which sector diseases fall under and yet diseases have been one of the major threats throughout the history of humanity. Nevertheless, Buzan's approach, while quite simple, is useful, as most of the security issues that are studied in IR fall neatly under these sectors. My approach to study EU's and ASEAN's security policies in the Indo-Pacific, is loosely based on Buzan's sectors. However, the political sector is too wide, and it would be difficult to differentiate between measures that are militaristic, economic, and political. Thus, instead of political sector, I will replace it with institutional sector. The difference between my approach and Buzan's approach, is that Buzan included threats and the responses to these sectors. I will only use the sectors to analyze, what kind of measures the EU and ASEAN have adopted in order to respond to security threats in the Indo-Pacific.

Going back to Kolodziej's and Baldwin's notions of what to include in concepts of security, I will attempt to tackle these questions in order to build an appropriate concept of security for studying EU's and ASEAN's approaches to security in the Indo-Pacific. Starting with the first question of "whose security?", it can be tempting to study security from the perspective of the individual, since danger and safety can be understood as feelings. All people have felt these feelings and it can be used as an easy-to-understand starting point for studying threats and security. As Hough (2008) describes the traditional approach to security: "The human part of a human condition had been lost and the term had become synonymous with realpolitik, the interest of the state" (p.42). Focusing on the individual is a valid approach, as security can be understood as a "human condition". When discussing security or safety, people have a good instinctive understanding of what is meant, since they have felt these conditions. This is only true however, when discussing simpler threats, but in the case of threats that are a result of complex international dynamics, the instinctive understanding becomes somewhat irrelevant. Another argument for the individual perspective, is that an individual is a simpler concept than a state or a region and what counts as a threat to an individual is also clearer. It can also be argued that good science and research should be useful to societies or humanity and studying how to recognize and respond to threats that might directly affect the individual is without a doubt useful. Perhaps due to such thinking, the *human security* approach has received plenty of attention. The UN describes human security as "identifying and addressing widespread and cross-cutting challenges to the survival, livelihood and dignity of their people" and "people-centered, comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented responses that strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people." (UN Trust Fund for Human Security).

This approach, without a doubt, has its uses. It might even be one of the more intellectually coherent approaches to security in international relations and one, that doesn't get too far lost in theory and abstraction. It could, perhaps, even be used for my topic of study. Depending on one's understanding of security, it could be claimed that the EU does not face any threats in the Indo-Pacific. After all, if a violent conflict were to break out, no European cities would be bombed, no territorial conquests of European land would be made and for the most part no European people would be injured (apart from the unlucky tourists in the Indo-Pacific). In such cases, examining how certain events affect the well-being of the individual, can be a useful way to determine if the event actually threatens the people or if security is used as an "ambiguous symbol". However, the state, which largely remains as the main actor in

international politics, cannot be reduced to a collection of individuals, but rather it is something more complex. Threats to states are also more abstract than threats to individuals. A reduced capability to make policy decisions, for example, is often thought of as a threat to a state (Ullman, 1983).

While individual security is perhaps the most concrete and the easiest to understand, unfortunately it seems that international politics and international security cannot be reduced to the individual level. Buzan (2016) even claims that human security is "largely redundant in analytical terms" (p. 7). Another reason for focusing on state security is that it is usually states instead of individuals that utilize military and economic power to affect foreign policy. Even in dictatorships, where one individual might make the most important decisions, the process of carrying out the decisions cannot be done by one person. Rather, the process of foreign policy is usually performed by the complex entities we understand as states.

Security can also be studied at the regional or international level. If I were to study the threats of the Indo-Pacific, the regional level could be appropriate. In this case, the Regional Security Complex Theory could be used, which argues that security threats do not travel distances well. This study, however, is more focused on the measures taken by the EU and ASEAN towards the threats that exist in the Indo-Pacific, so the regional level is not applicable. The international level is also relevant in the sense that I am studying a European actor and a region that is halfway across the world, so the regional level is surpassed. Studying the EU's and ASEAN's Indo-Pacific policies through a security lens is difficult as they are peculiar security actors. There are plenty of theories in International Relations that aim to explain how a state should act, but the EU and ASEAN are not states. However, to provide an answer to the first issue brought up by Kolodziej and Baldwin, the issue of whose notion of security counts or whose values are being secured, in the case of the EU and ASEAN the most interesting answers can probably be found, if we focus on the security of the member states. This is of course somewhat ambiguous as some threats might be more prevalent to some member states than others, but certain shortcuts will have to be made when studying something as ambiguous as the approach to security by certain political unions.

Indeed, while it is clear that the tendency in IR to view states as unitary actors that act with a single will towards some goals does not coincide very well with reality, the state is often chosen as the unit of analysis since most people can somewhat understand what is meant when referring to a state. However, a state's foreign policy can make a 180 degree turn with a

single election and sometimes it might even be ambiguous what is meant by a 'state'. Nevertheless, states remain as the most useful unit of analysis when discussing international politics. While it may not be intellectually as coherent as the individual level, useful and accurate analysis can be made, even if it requires drastic simplifications of reality.

More justification for the state level approach will be provided as we tackle the next question laid out by Kolodziej, which is "what should be included in a definition of security?" We can start by taking a look at some examples.

**Kolodziej** (2005, p. 2-3):" Security as a humanly created phenomenon embraces both the use of force and coercive threats by humans and their agents and the transformation of these exchanges, charged with real or potential violence, into non-lethal, consensual exchanges"

**Buzan** (2016, p. 37): "In the case of security, the discussion is about the pursuit of freedom from threat. When this discussion is in the context of the international system, security is about the ability of states and societies to maintain their independent identity and their functional integrity"

**Booth** (2005, p. 23) "Security in world politics is an instrumental value that enables people(s) some opportunity to choose how to live. It is a means by which individuals and collectivities can invent and reinvent different ideas about being human."

**Walt** (1991, p. 212) "Security studies may be defined as the study of the threat, use and control of military force"

**Wolfers** (1952, p. 485): "Security, in an objective sense, measures the absence of threats to acquired values, in a subjective sense, the absence of fear that such values will be attacked"

**Baldwin** (1997, p. 13): "a low probability of damage to acquired values" (a reformulation of Wolfer's definition)

**Ullman** (1983, p. 133) "A threat to national security is an action or sequence of events that (1) threatens drastically and over a relatively brief span of time to degrade the quality of life for the inhabitants of a state, or (2) threatens significantly to narrow the range of policy choices available to the government of a state or to private, nongovernmental entities (persons, groups, corporations) within the state." (So, security would be the absence of such events)

Here we can see wide differences between the definitions. Some scholars define security from the perspective of the individual, some through a militaristic perspective, and some as a somewhat abstract value. Perhaps the only certain commonality between definitions of security is the notion of threats, whether or not the word is explicitly included in the definition. The simplest definitions consider security to be the absence or freedom of threats. However,

> "What it means to be or to feel free —or relatively free—from the absence of threats in world politics depends upon whether the security issue being considered is by a political realist, a Marxist, a feminist theorist, a racist, a liberal internationalist, or whatever." (Booth, 2005, p. 21)

The threats that I briefly covered in the previous section fall quite neatly into the thinking of neorealists. The threats to the EU and ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific are mainly caused by another state, through military and economic measures and thus, it would be reasonable to study the issue through a neorealist understanding of security. Yet, the approaches taken by the EU and ASEAN to these threats, do not necessarily reflect neorealist thinking. There are neorealist elements in these approaches but there are also neoliberalist elements, which is reflected in their cooperative and institutionalist measures. Thus, the definition or conceptualization of security that is used to study the EU's and ASEAN approaches, should be able to cater to at least both the neorealist and neoliberal approaches, for which Ullman's definition of threats and security is well-suited. While his definition is one of *national security,* it takes into account threats to individuals, which lessens the ambiguous nature of security by grounding the phenomena to something that can often even be measured, which is quite a rare case in security studies. Furthermore, the definition is not limited to the individual, but is able to also encompass the fact that national security is something more than the security of a group of individuals. While Ullman was describing national security or the threats to such, there is no reason his definition couldn't be used with the EU and ASEAN as well, especially if the focus is on the security of the member states. Baldwin's and Wolfers' definitions are useful as well, but Ullmans is clearer and more specific.

If we use Ullmans definition to describe the on-going conflict between EU and Russia, we can see how it could be applied in the Indo-Pacific context. The EU has not seen any violence, rather all the fighting has been contained in Ukraine, which is not a member state. Nevertheless, especially among policymakers but also among EU citizens there seems to be

heightened feelings of insecurity, despite no one expecting Russia to start attacking EU states. This is exemplified by Finland's and Sweden's NATO applications. So, if there are no expectations of an incoming attack, why might there be feelings of insecurity? As a result of the conflict and the sanctions imposed by the EU states, Russia has started exporting less natural gas to the EU. This, among many other things, has led to strong inflation, which degrades the quality of life of EU citizens, especially affecting the poor. The situation is expected to worsen by the winter, as EU's gas consumption will be at its highest. If a situation is reached, where the poorer citizens of the EU cannot afford to heat their homes during winter, this could be considered as a drastic degradation of quality of life and thus, can be considered as a threat according to Ullman's definition. Furthermore, the situation has indeed lessened the policy options available to the governments of EU member states, as Russia has been the largest importer or fossil fuels to Europe and there are no easy alternatives available. So, due to Russia's actions, EU leaders have less options in their energy policies as they used to have, once again making it a security issue as per Ullman's definition.

This simple exercise shows that the definition is useful in a situation, where security is more complex than violent conflicts. The threats that the EU and ASEAN face on the Indo-Pacific, mainly through the actions of China, are comparable to the situation with Russia, in the sense that there is a high degree of economic interdependence between actors, but at the same time a risk of military escalations, which is an undesirable outcome for all actors involved. A conflict in the Indo-Pacific, even an economic one, would likely lead to a degradation of quality of life for the EU and ASEAN citizens as well as reduce the policy options available for these political unions.

So, the second issue raised by Koloziej, "what should be included in the definition of security?", will in this case, be solved with Ullmans definition. The definition is apt for describing security issues that are not directed towards one's territory, as is the case for the EU and Indo-Pacific. Also, as most European states are quite wealthy, the state might be able to temporarily protect its citizens from drastic changes to quality of life, but such actions usually limit the states policy options, as considerable amounts of resources must be expended. Such situations can also be considered with Ullmans concept of security, which is necessary not only in the case of the EU, ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific, but overall is appropriate in the current era where military action, in the developed world, has become quite an inefficient tool of foreign policy.

Let us move on to Kolodziej's third and perhaps most difficult issue in studying security "how to understand soft and hard power in terms of security?" Indeed, similarly as the concept of security is often understood by threats, so it is also closely related to the concept of power, at least in International Relations theory. The amusing thing here is that security, which is an essentially contested concept is often understood through power, which can also be considered as an essentially contested concept, leading to a situation closely resembling that of an abstract puzzle.

Power is a concept that is just as difficult to understand as security, but at its simplest form, power in international politics, can be thought of as the ability to affect other states and in this case such a simple understanding of power is sufficient. The EU and ASEAN are aiming to influence others in a way that positively affects their security, and this requires some form of power. However, the more intense debate regarding power concerns the measures which can realistically be used to affect other states. Most theoretical approaches have a tendency to lean heavily on one type of measures, on one form of power without giving enough attention to other forms. Many theorists have the assumption, or they simply prefer to make a vast simplification of reality, in which there is a single dynamic which is much more prevalent in shaping international politics than all other dynamics. By making such simplifications it is possible to focus on studying the one dominating dynamic, while alternatives can be considered insignificant or inconsequential. For realists, the dominating dynamic would be competition through material power and especially military power, whereas soft power has traditionally received little attention. For this reason, traditional realists didn't pay much attention to institutions. International politics, however, is best understood as being affected by an amalgamation of differing and intertwining dynamics. A state's behavior, in most cases is likely to be affected by military factors, economic factors, institutions, ideas, values and so on. In almost any given situation, all these forces affect state behavior to some degree, meaning that all of these factors can be a source of power, if we understand power as the ability to affect the behavior of other states.

Naturally, when analyzing state behavior, not all of these can be considered, and unfortunately vast simplifications of reality must be made, which is what different theoretical approaches are used for. As Hough (2008, p. 25) describes:

> The main paradigms of international relations offer alternative conceptual frameworks for comprehending the complexity that emerges from attempting to study the huge

> volume of interactions between actors that makes up the contemporary global system. These different ' lenses' for making sense of this political complexity focus on very different ways when it comes to thinking about issues of security in International Relations

The issue is that advocates of one approach often overestimate their preferred approach while underestimating others, often leading to one-dimensional research of international politics and state behavior. The main paradigms, the "lenses" are useful for focusing our attention on important factors but focusing too closely on one issue can make a researcher blind to other, equally as important factors. Indeed, most theories have something to offer but no theory can offer everything. Security and power are some of the most central concepts of IR, yet they remain challenging to grasp, especially in the Indo-Pacific setting, where the EU, ASEAN and many states are carefully balancing between competitive and cooperative approaches. As the competition and cooperation occurs in three main areas; military, economy and institutions, the logical approach is to utilize theoretical paradigms that have a strong focus in these areas. However, "given the weaknesses of single theories, many scholars advocate a 'tool box' approach to synthesize certain theories to build up new frameworks in Southeast Asian studies" (He, 2008). Indeed, as my aim is to provide a comprehensive and well-rounded comparison of the EU's and ASEAN's approaches to security in the Indo-Pacific, utilizing a single theory might result in overly highlighting certain aspects while disregarding other equally as important aspects. Sheldon (1995) claimed over twenty-five years ago that Southeast Asian security is best understood by combining realist and neoliberalist theories due to ASEAN-led institution-building but at the same time ASEAN states were improving their military capabilities and relying on the United States as an external security guarantor. These elements have remained similar in the past decades, although the risk of serious escalation has risen as the power balance between the US and China has shifted. Nevertheless, I argue that the approach of combining realist and neoliberalist theories is still useful for understanding not only security in the Southeast Asia, but in the entire Indo-Pacific. The reasoning for adopting realist and neoliberalist perspectives is twofold. Firstly, as I have claimed the security policies in the Indo-Pacific are most visible in the areas of military, economy, and institutions, and so it is necessary to use theories that provide strong analytical tools for these areas. (neo)Realism and neoliberalism provide such tools. Secondly, most actors in the Indo-Pacific seem to alternate between competition and cooperation. simplified terms, realists focus more on competition and neoliberals more on cooperation.

Both excel at explaining their own area of focus, but realism is often criticized for lacking strong explanations for cooperation and similarly liberal approaches are often criticized for lacking explanations for conflicts. By using these contrasting approaches, it is possible to minimize their weaknesses and to provide a more nuanced understanding of the EU's and ASEAN's approaches to security.

Before closer examining these approaches, there is another element of security and power that is relevant to this study. That is the nature of middle powers. Great powers receive lots of attention in International relations, but the EU and ASEAN are better understood as middle powers. Middle power and great power behavior is understood differently in International Relations and so let us briefly examine these differences in the context of the Indo-Pacific.

The Indo-Pacific has many elements that are reminiscent of classic International Relations. The previous hegemon aiming to uphold the status quo, the revisionist rising power aiming to claim its position at the top, saber-rattling, coalition building and economic competition. At the same time, the great powers have plenty of incentives for cooperation and aversion of violent conflict, due to high economic interdependence as well as due to high destructive capabilities.

This ambivalence of great power relations arguably opens up possibilities for the middle-powers to be proactive in shaping international politics and this can be seen in action in the Indo-Pacific, where middle-powers such as Japan, India and ASEAN have been very proactive and where the EU is also aiming to become a significant player. However, in IR there seems to be an understanding that whereas great powers can pressure actors to their will quite effectively due to overwhelming material resources and political capital, middle powers need to be more creative and utilize more multifaceted approaches to advance their interests.

Swielande (2019) claims that whereas usually the options available to middle-powers are considered to be balancing or bandwagoning, in the Indo-Pacific middle-powers have a third option, which is cooperating with other middle-powers. The Indo-Pacific, as a geopolitical concept, started gaining traction due to cooperation between two middle-powers, Japan and India, and the region indeed has an exceptionally high presence of middle powers, especially now that the EU is aiming to increase its presence. Many middle powers hold similar interests in the region, meaning that there are chances for building large coalitions, which could potentially off-set the influence of great powers. Mohan (2020) shares this view and argues that the motive behind the Indo-Pacific strategies of many countries, is to enhance middle-

power cooperation and thus, limit the negative effects of assertive or uncertain great powers. Emmers (2018, p. 47) on the other hand, argues that the rising tensions "make it much harder for middle powers to influence the regional security environment through the promotion of a rules-based order." Such arguments are rooted in the view that both the US and China are pressuring smaller powers to choose sides, which leaves less space for strategic maneuvers (Liu & Liu, 2019; Tung, 2022).

Scholars seem somewhat confused as to what role middle-powers can play at the Indo-Pacific. Going back to Kolodziej's issue of how to understand hard and soft power in terms of security, it seems that in the context of the Indo-Pacific, middle-powers have become more open to adopting measures that resemble hard power, but at the same time they are conscious of the fact that they are highly interdependent on both superpowers, China and the USA, which means that cooperative measures, often performed through institutions, remains as the preferred option, whenever possible. This approach taken by middle-powers in the Indo-Pacific is often described as hedging (Tan, 2020; Yoshimatsu, 2022; Koga, 2019):

> "a national security or alignment strategy, undertaken by one state toward another, featuring a mix of cooperative and confrontational elements. It is often contrasted with balancing or bandwagoning, concepts developed during the Cold War era to depict the alternative strategies of resisting or accommodating a mighty or menacing great power" (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019, p. 367)

Emmers (2018, p. 42-43) also notes that the strategies of middle-powers can be divided into two distinct categories; "functional strategies, which advocate that middle powers utilize their resources to address specific issues; and normative strategies, which suggest that middle powers actively promote behavioral norms and rules through multilateral institutions". While the focus in IR is often on the great powers, and similarly research regarding the Indo-Pacific has a strong focus on the US and China, it is important to remember that "Middle powers have enough weight to influence what happens around them so as to protect their interests. They can negotiate with great powers, not simply obey them. Small powers just take what happens" (White, 2010, p. 67).

Indeed, the issue in IR, once again, is that the answer usually lies somewhere in-between different theoretical approaches, but there is a tendency to think in terms of binary opposites. Realism and neoliberalism certainly contain some mutually exclusive assumptions, for example the role of institutions in international politics or the role of relative and absolute

gains, but when considering power, or more accurately, what affects state behavior, there are mostly artificial barriers towards synthesizing these approaches. Jervis (1999) argues that the differences between realists and neoliberals are not as wide as they are often painted as. For Jervis, there are two main differences between the schools of thought. First difference is that realists are weak at explaining cooperation, whereas neoliberals are weak at explaining conflict. Second difference is that for neoliberals institutions are *causes* and for realists they are *effects*. What this means is that realists believe institutions are tools of statecraft, that are mostly used for pursuing national interests. They are effects born of these interests. For neoliberals institutions can be causes for peace, stability, and cooperation. Neoliberals, according to Jervis, usually believe that institutions lead to cooperation through altering the preferences of actors and so they are causes in themselves. This description is in no way novel, as most scholars would probably describe the main differences similarly. However, realist and neoliberal approaches are often seen as polar opposites, as mutually exclusive rival theoretical outlooks, which is reflected in the fact that the first and the third 'great debates' of International Relations focused on this dichotomy. This way of thinking inhibits synthesizing these approaches, while such a synthesis could, in some cases, paint a fuller picture of many international phenomena. The interesting part of Jervis' description is that other than the two differences mentioned here, he considers that the differences between realists and neoliberals are often exaggerated. Of course, realism, liberalism and any off-spring of these are not monolithic schools, so how the differences are perceived, depends on the individual scholar and on the issues he or she chooses to focus on. As Buzan (1996, p. 47) has written "unfortunately there is no precise consensus on where the boundaries between these bodies of thought should be drawn" Weaver (1996) also claims that neorealism and neoliberalism are much more compatible than their previous counterparts as they don't focus as much on metaphysics, and they put more emphasis on "theoretical minimalism".

Sheldon (1995) has argued that the realist and neoliberal paradigms coexist in Southeast Asian security as states simultaneously improve their military capabilities and rely on self-help according to realist logic, but also Southeast Asian states have put great effort into developing regional cooperative platforms, which follows neoliberal logic. The same trend is still very visible in not only Southeast Asian security structures but also in the wider Indo-Pacific.

Similarly (He, 2008) has advocated for a theoretical approach that integrates neorealist and neoliberal elements. He argued that in situations where states have a high degree of economic

interdependence power politics often occur through institutions. He refers to this as institutional balancing. Such an argument is somewhat of an oddity in IR theory as balance of power theories fall under realist tradition which often claims that institutions are not particularly significant factors in international politics. On the other hand, neoliberals usually claim that high economic interdependence and multilateral institutions lead to increased cooperation, instead of opening up new ways for competition. However, in reality the fact that institutions also serve as a platform for competition should be obvious, even if it is not particularly well acknowledged by mainstream IR theories. He claims that Southeast Asia is one region where high economic interdependence and balance of power behavior collide, opening way to integration of neorealist and neoliberalist logics in the form of institutional balancing. Donnelly (2018) shares similar ideas with He, but he refers to advocates of this approach as "realist institutionalists".

The arguments of Sheldon and He have become even more convincing in the 2010s and 2020s. For example, trade between ASEAN and China more than doubled between 2010 and 2019 signifying an ever-increasing degree of economic interdependence between them (ASEAN, 2020). At the same time, many ASEAN countries, especially those that are direct stakeholders in the South China sea have experienced a continuous military build-up (Hendler & Motta, 2021). Indeed, in Southeast Asia it is difficult to justify using realism or neoliberalism over the other and we can see that even multiple scholars synthesized, integrated or blurred the lines of realist and liberal traditions. Instead of following strict but ultimately vague conceptions of realism or liberalism, it should be possible to draw insights simultaneously from both paradigms, as they both provide useful analytical tools, descriptions, and theories for understanding international politics and these paradigms can be used to supplement each other's weaknesses.

For this study, I am mostly interested in how realists and neoliberals approach military, economy, and institutions, especially in terms of security. These insights will be useful when analyzing documents and statements by the EU and ASEAN. Such theoretical insights are necessary since, such texts usually cannot be taken at face value, but rather they must be interpreted. Particularly, in matters of security, a large portion of information might be implicit and sometimes measures that are aimed at increasing security are not officially presented as such in order to avoid raising suspicion or concerns. So, realist and neoliberal insight will be used to 1) examine elements in the material where security goals are not explicit. They will work as 'lenses' that will help with focusing attention to the relevant

matters. 2) Realist and neoliberal insight will also be used to interpret and explain the findings. Before moving on to the methodology section, I will present further reasoning for examining and explaining Indo-Pacific politics through realist and neoliberal perspectives and I will examine how these theoretical approaches explain the role of military, economy, and institutions in shaping international relations and security.

## 3.1 Realism and the Indo-Pacific

*" The state among states, it is often said, conducts its affairs in the brooding shadow of violence. Because some states may at times may use force, all states must be prepared to do so - or live at the mercy of their militarily more vigorous neighbors. Among states, the state of nature, is a state of war." (Waltz, 1979, p. 102)*

This often-quoted passage by Waltz paints a bleak picture of international politics. But unfortunately, it remains relevant. While there is little doubt that war, as a foreign policy tool, has become more ineffective, a fact that liberal institutionalists would explain through increased levels of economic interdependence and a higher degree of institutionalization of global politics, the risk of being victim of military force can never be completely shut out. The invasion of Ukraine by Russia was a stark reminder of this for the western world. Perhaps another reminder is that economics and institutions are not always effective at suppressing aggression. If a state is keen on attacking, ultimately the choices are to give in to the demands of the aggressor or to respond with military power.

Due to this logic, states must ensure that their military is able to mount an effective defense and that they are relatively stronger than their adversaries. The issue that arises from this logic, is that one's security can only be increased by the expense of another's. After all, if one state increases its military capabilities, that state might become stronger than others, and thus would potentially be able to overwhelm its rivals. To avoid such a situation its rivals will also increase their military capabilities, which might lead to higher tensions and to an arms race. This issue is often referred to as the 'Security dilemma' (Hough, 2008; Holman, 2019). While international politics are obviously not in a constant state of arms race and conflict and war, the logic aptly describes why military power remains so relevant, even if the prevalence of armed conflict as a foreign policy tool has decreased. Realists often explain periods of stability with the balance of power theory. The theory suggests that states engage in behavior that is aimed at countering states from becoming too powerful in comparison to others. What

such balancing behavior might entail is up-to-debate, but the usefulness of balance of power theory, is that it can be applied to a wide variety of measures. Waltz (1979) divides balancing into internal and external forms. Internal balancing refers to "moves to increase economic capability, to increase military strength, to develop clever strategies" whereas external refers to "moves to strengthen and enlarge one's own alliance or to weaken and shrink an opposing one" (Waltz, 1979, p. 118). Traditionally, the balance of power theory has had a strong focus on material capabilities and especially on military power. However, it is quite clear that balancing done by military action can at best explain only a tiny fraction international politics and state behavior. While Waltz focused largely on hard power, other scholars have advanced the idea of 'soft balancing', where the balancing is done through nonmilitary measures and instead institutions and economic measures are utilized. Paul (2018) defines soft balancing as

> "Restraining the power or aggressive policies of a state through international institutions, concerted diplomacy via limited, informal ententes, and economic sanctions in order to make its aggressive actions less legitimate in the eyes of the world and hence its strategic goals more difficult to obtain" (p. 20)

The type of balancing that Waltz advocated for is instead referred to as 'hard balancing', which Paul (2018) describes as "hard-balancing alliances are formal arrangements, often with combined command structures, operational plans, bureaucratic frameworks, and military forces permanently stationed and ready to fight" (p. 20). So hard balancing constitutes measures that are thoroughly confrontational and quite rigid. For the most part, developed states prefer to resolve disputes without relying on such confrontational measures that will likely lead to higher tensions and thus, increase the risk of conflict. This might explain why there aren't a lot of clear examples of hard balancing in the Indo-Pacific. The closest examples are the QUAD and AUKUS, but even these groupings seem to fall short of what is understood as hard balancing. There is also a third form of balancing which is called 'limited hard balancing', which is the middle-ground between the two. In limited hard balancing states participate in some form of coordinated military activity which falls short of a formal alliance (Paul, 2018). Such behavior is common in the Indo-Pacific, as the QUAD and AUKUS fall under this category and even some ASEAN states, such as Vietnam have participated in limited hard balancing against China by cooperating with the US (Paul, 2018).

It can be confusing to distinguish different forms of balancing from each other, but that is not the main point. The point is, that the balance of power theory and the balancing behavior of

states is an analytical tool, which can be used to explain a wide variety of situations, especially if there are clear competitive elements involved. Indeed, many scholars have explained the behavior of middle powers in the Indo-Pacific as balancing (Cottey, 2019; Rubiolo, 2020; Wnukowski, 2015). Cottey (2019) claims that European states have practiced both hard balancing and soft balancing towards China, especially in the context of the South China Sea disputes. As an example of hard balancing, he refers to the Freedom of Navigation (FONOP) operations led by the UK and France. Cottey also points out that in the 2010s the EU has aimed to strengthen political and economic ties with other Asian states other than China, and particularly with the ASEAN states, which he sees as a form of soft balancing. Indeed, the EU and ASEAN upgraded their relationship to a 'Strategic Partnership' in 2020, and the EU has improved trade relations with individual ASEAN states by signing new Free Trade Agreements.

Rubiolo (2020) claims that as China has become more aggressive in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea, some ASEAN states have responded by improving their military capabilities and by siding strategically with the US. Due to this dynamic, he argues that the regions politics is best explained by the balance of power approach. However, as ASEAN states are economically dependent on China and strategically dependent on the US, according to Rubiolo this leaves ASEAN states in a situation where balancing is challenging, as moving towards one great power will harm relations with the other.

The balance of power theory, while useful in understanding the Indo-Pacific, is nevertheless insufficient. Whereas the EU is in a position where it might be able to balance against China's assertive behavior to some degree, the same is less true of ASEAN. The EU is approximately the same size economically as China, whereas ASEAN is still far behind the two, meaning that the EU is more capable of competing and balancing against China economically if necessary. This imbalance leaves ASEAN with less options than the EU. Tung (2022) argues that "regional states still attempt to avoid being entangled in the U.S.-China competition by sticking to their non-alignment strategy and seeking regional multilateral cooperation" (p. 26). Wirth & Jenne (2022) also suggests that less powerful states in the Indo-Pacific are avoiding picking sides in the Sino-US rivalry, as doing so has high political and economic risks. Indeed, as ASEAN seems to be stuck between a rock and a hard place so to speak, confrontational acts that could be considered as balancing are not particularly appealing for ASEAN. Perhaps it would be more accurate to describe ASEAN's behavior as hedging.

Hedging, once again, is a challenging concept, as scholars often have difficulty differentiating it from balancing or bandwagoning (Ciorciari & Haacke, 2019). As noted earlier, hedging refers to security or alignment strategies that mix cooperative and competitive elements. Such an understanding is of course quite vague, as states usually engage in some form of cooperation even when balancing against each other. The literature is also somewhat unclear of what type of behavior constitutes as hedging. Ciorciari & Haacke (2019) claim that hedging is often understood as behavior where a potential rival is engaged with economically and diplomatically, while adopting different forms of security policies to provide insurance. The line between balancing and hedging is thin, but the main difference perhaps is that in balancing behavior the confrontational or competitive elements are much more prominent, and cooperation is mostly done out of necessity. In hedging, the confrontational and cooperative elements are much more in balance, and the hedging actor might even proactively search for cooperation with a potential rival. While hedging is a concept that perhaps builds upon realist thought, it can also be considered as a middle ground between realist and liberalist tradition. So, one's understanding of hedging might also be dependent on the school of thought that one subscribes to.

While realism certainly provides useful analytical tools for understanding the politics of the Indo-Pacific, it falls thoroughly short. The greatest weakness of realism, not only in explaining the Indo-Pacific, but global politics overall, is their lack of focus on economic power. In an age, where states might face extremely strong backlash for utilizing military measures as foreign policy tools, especially against other developed states, it is necessary to pay much more attention to other forms of power, which are more commonly used. Criticizing realists is difficult in the sense that there is quite a wide variety of thinkers within the school, meaning that even realists might have quite fundamental differences with one another. However, it is widely accepted that realists, and even neorealists see military power as their main focus, whereas economic power is subservient to it. While some realist theories and thoughts, such as balance of power, can be applied to economic power, there seems to be quite little interest to do so. As such, realist thought on economic power seems to be somewhat underdeveloped. The Indo-Pacific is a region where security and economics are understood to be closely linked. Indeed, China is often blamed for using economic power to influence and coerce other countries into accepting its foreign policy (Tung, 2022). Other states thus, must be able to respond to this threat through economic power. However, "merely focusing on the projection of military power, while useful on its own terms, has nevertheless

impoverished our understanding of the productive role other forms of power play in world politics" (Bilgin & Elis, 2008). As realism is not entirely effective in explaining the economic aspect of aspect of international relations and how economy is connected to power and security, realism is insufficient for explaining security in the Indo-Pacific.

## 3.2 Neoliberalism and the Indo-Pacific

The balancing approach provides us with a useful tool for analyzing hard power approaches. To comprehensively compare the EU's and ASEAN's approaches to security, we must also have tools for analyzing economics and institutions and their relation to security. Starting with institutions Keohane & Martin (1995) claim that there are at least five different benefits to institutions. These are:

1. Providing information
2. Reducing transaction cost
3. Making agreements more credible
4. Establishing focal points for cooperation
5. Facilitating reciprocity

Scholars often describe the great power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific as a security dilemma or a 'Thucydides trap', (Beeson & Murray, 2020; Wirth & Jenne, 2022). In such situations, the tensions between two states might keep rising steadily, and once the tensions reach a sufficient level, the risk of miscalculations and escalations will be high. Neoliberals or liberal institutionalist believe that institutions might be able to decrease the risk of miscalculations and might be able to check the tensions from rising too high. Keohane & Martins list is a simple yet effective way of understanding how institutions might lessen the risk of conflict.

ASEAN has been the most prominent actor in building institutions in the Indo-Pacific and the EU has expressed its support to these ASEAN-led institutions. He & Li (2020, p, 7) argue that "One way to de-escalate the strategic rivalry between the United States and China is to make the Indo-Pacific an institutional construct able to facilitate interstate cooperation and thereby broader and deeper regionalism and multilateralism". Some see the failure of institutionalizing great power relations in the Asia-Pacific as a failure of middle powers to affect the security environment in the Indo-Pacific (Emmers, 2018). Indeed, institution-

building will most likely remain on the shoulders of middle powers, as the US and China are unlikely to be proactive in building security related institutions in the region, as there is a chance that strong institutions might de-legitimize their hard power approaches, which are a significant part of their influence. Also, the US and China might be pessimistic about finding solutions to their differences through multilateral institutions. However, if the EU becomes an active supporter of ASEAN-led institutions, there is a possibility for these institutions gaining enough weight through the support of multiple significant middle powers to pressure the great powers towards more active participation in multilateral institutions. Nevertheless, it seems clear that currently the security institutions of the region, such as ASEAN plus three, ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit are insufficient for dealing with the issues facing the Indo-Pacific. These platforms are mostly for increasing dialogue between actors and states, which by itself is indeed valuable as it makes it possible for these actors to provide each other with more information. Whether or not these ASEAN-led institutions are able to produce the four other positive effects listed by Keohane & Martin is questionable.

So, we can understand the EU's and ASEAN's military measures through balancing or hedging and we can understand their interest in institution-building by the benefits they bring according to Keohane & Martin. The final aspect that requires attention is the role of economy and its relationship with power and security in the Indo-Pacific. It is widely seen that in the Indo-Pacific region, coercive economic practices, economic statecraft and geoeconomics have become more prominent, mainly by China. Especially China's Belt and Road Initiative has been seen as a significant strategic endeavor, with He (2020) claiming that China's security interests have shifted to support the success of BRI and that

> "These changes are likely to become manifest in an increasingly large role for the Chinese military in protecting China's developmental interest, a stronger Chinese military presence beyond Asia, a more active Chinese role in security issues in the BRI regions, growing Chinese military activities in the domain of non-traditional security outside China, and enhanced military-to-military partnerships between China and many other countries." (p. 187).

This behavior, without a doubt, holds the potential for impacting the living standards of the EU and ASEAN citizens as well as limiting the policy options of the member states. So, according to Ullmans definition of a security threat, this behavior constitutes as such. Even if we discount the military domain completely, China's economic measures, such as refusing to

sell rare earth minerals to Japan after a Chinese fishing trawler was detained in 2010 or China sanctioning South Korea in 2019 after it deployed the THAAD defense system, are clear threats in accord to Ullmans definition. Furthermore, Asia continues to suffer from a massive infrastructure investment gap (Ra & Li, 2018), so BRI investments have been a tempting option for many states, even if the quality of many BRI projects have been brought into question. But there haven't been proper alternatives, which means that China has been able to leverage the situation and increases its influence. Such influence could potentially be used to pressure states to accept China's foreign policy goals, similarly as China used coercive economic practices against Japan and South Korea.

Unfortunately, when it comes to economy and how it relates to power and security, the realists, as well as the neoliberals, falls short. "It is widely accepted—even by neoliberals—that realism has great explanatory power in national security affairs. However, international political economy would appear to be neoliberalism's preserve" (Grieco, 1988, p. 503-504). Whereas traditional realists barely focused on economic matters, neorealists did recognize that economy was a significant part of a states power, but they too considered economic power to be somewhat secondary to military might. However, neoliberals also fall short on explaining the relationship between economy, power, and security, especially when economic power is used in a coercive manner. Neoliberals commonly consider that economic interdependence de-incentivizes states towards conflict and in turn motivates states towards higher degree of institutionalization to foster economic relations. The logic does seem efficient at explaining why conflicts, at least between developed states have become fairly rare, but neoliberals do not have strong explanations for situations where the vital interests of actors' clash (Jervis, 1999).

Similarly, to hedging, which falls somewhere between these two, the complex interdependence theory developed by Keohane and Nye (1977) falls between realist and neoliberal thought. The theory, in its simplest form, posits that states are often mutually dependent on each other for their well-being, albeit to a varying degree. This dependence is most visible between actors that trade a lot between each other, especially if they trade goods that might be considered strategic or critical goods, such as energy resources. Interdependence is not limited to economic activities, but the explanatory power of the complex interdependence theory is arguably greatest when it comes to economic power. Interdependence refers to "reciprocal effects among countries" (p. 7), meaning that countries not using their destructive capabilities against each other is another example of

interdependence. Interdependence, according to Keohane and Nye, does not necessarily mean that there will be less conflict, but rather that conflict will simply take on new forms. They criticize balance of power theories for focusing too much on military power and lacking explanations for economic power, as they seem to believe that the new forms of conflict are fought primarily on the economic arena. Keohane & Nye present the idea of *asymmetrical interdependence*, which refers to a situation where two states are not equally dependent on each other but rather the situation favors one of the states. This situation can be leveraged to pressure the other state. So, diversifying one's supply chains or increasing production of critical goods can be seen as a move to affect the power balance of the relationship and thus, can be seen as acts that increases one's security.

The complex interdependence theory does not only explain such competitive dynamics, however. As said, the theory can be considered to be in the middle of realism and neoliberalism. Examining interdependence from a more neoliberal perspective, it can be considered that aiming for a higher degree of interdependence with a rival can be an act that increases security. After all, once actors are highly interdependent it means that conflict will be costly for both parties. Also, reaching a high degree of interdependence requires cooperation and interconnectedness between the countries in the first place, which can provide actors with chances to build mutual trust and to develop institutions that further foster international trade.

Analyzing multiple sectors of security in a single study is challenging, as there are no satisfactory theoretical approaches that are able to provide explanations for multiple sectors at once. That is why, it has been necessary to cover and to adopt multiple different theories, which effectively explain different sectors, in this case military, economy and institutions. To summarize the theoretical approaches that will be used to study the three sectors chosen for this study, we have the balance of power theory, which will mainly be used to examine the military sector. Hedging will be used to supplement, where balance of power falls short. Then we will use complex interdependence theory to examine the economic sector and its relationship to security. And finally, the role of institutions in regard to security will be examined through neoliberal approach, which more specifically is based on the five ways Keohane & Martin argue that institutions produce benefits.

# 4. Methodology

The chosen methodology for this study is a comparative and qualitative content analysis. The aim of the analysis is to identify the differences and similarities in how the EU and ASEAN use military, economy, and institutions in the Indo-Pacific to protect their security interests. The official views of these two actors are primarily communicated through different kinds of documents and statements. Official documents will be used as the main source material, but statements and reports are used as well.

Hsieh & Shannon (2005) have identified three different approaches to content analysis. These three approaches are conventional, summative, and directed. In the conventional approach, the focus of the analysis is based on the qualities of the text, whereas in the summative approach the focus is the frequency of certain keywords or other content. In the directed approach, the analysis is guided by or based on theory or pre-existing research. I have chosen the directed approach, as the previous research literature on the security of the Indo-Pacific clearly identifies military, economic issues, and institutions as central to the region. Furthermore, realist and neoliberal perspectives offer strong analytical tools for examining and explaining the relationship between these three categories and international security, therefore enhancing the credibility of the analysis by contextualizing the findings. So, the analysis focuses on three categories: (1) Military, (2) Economy, and (3) Institutions. However, these themes were examined only if they had a potential security element, and to identify such elements, the analytical tools of realism and neoliberalism were used. As the study is comparative, these categories were used twice, once with the EU's material and once with ASEAN's material.

Even with these analytical tools, identifying whether economic and institutional measures have a security element is difficult and requires a great deal of interpretation. For military measures it can safely be assumed that all of them include a security element. Economic measures could be considered to involve a security element, if they produce relational gains for the actor, compared to their main economic threat, which is China. Or in other words, if the measures change the asymmetrical interdependence between the actor and China, to the benefit of the actor. Alternatively, an economic measure could involve a security element if it significantly aims to increase the interdependence between China and the actor, as a higher degree of interdependence can be considered to disincentivize towards armed conflict. This logic is based on the complex interdependence theory and on realist and neoliberal interpretation of the theory.

Two types of documents or material was chosen for this study. Firstly, documents that are directly related to the Indo-Pacific region, such as the Indo-Pacific strategy documents of the EU and ASEAN or The European Parliaments' Report on the EU and Security Challenges in the Indo-Pacific were examined. There is not much of this type of material, as the Indo-Pacific is a relatively new concept. The second type of material, that 'supports' the first type, are central foreign policy strategy documents of the EU and ASEAN. Examples of the second type of material include the EU's Strategic Compass and ASEAN's Political Security Community Blueprint 2025. The chosen documents are from the years 2015-2022. Such a wide time period was chosen in order to include the Community Blueprints of ASEAN, which were released in 2015. As ASEAN has a limited number of public documents, it was necessary to include the Blueprints to gain an understanding of how ASEAN's Indo-Pacific approach fits into its wider foreign policy objectives. So the material consists of documents specifically made for Indo-Pacific and of documents outlining the overall foreign policies of the EU and ASEAN.

# 5. Results & Discussion

## The EU's military approach

While the EU is not usually considered as a particularly significant military actor, EU's Indo-Pacific strategy holds surprisingly strong military elements. These elements are of course focused on naval power, as the Indo-Pacific is primarily a maritime region. There are three main categories, to which EU's military approach can be divided. These are enhanced naval presence, maritime security capacity-building and broadening partnerships. (EEAS, 2021)

The EU will aim to increase its naval presence in the region, which by itself is a significant statement as it implies a degree of power projection not previously seen by the EU, especially in a region so distant from Europe. The increased naval presence will include more joint exercises and port calls with Indo-Pacific partners. The protection of freedom of navigation is listed as one of the main goals for these actions, which most likely is a reference to the issues in the South China Sea, as it is the only subregion of the Indo-Pacific, that is dealing with significant freedom of navigation issues due to China's assertive actions. Indeed, in the EU's

Strategic Compass, China is described as a necessary partner but "there is also a growing reaction to its increasingly assertive regional behavior."(EEAS, 2022) Furthermore, in a recent report by the European Parliament China's actions were described as "increasingly assertive and expansionist" and China was blamed for hampering the freedom of navigation in the South China Sea (European Parliament, 2022). Freedom of navigation operations would be a natural continuation of France's Jeanne d'Arc naval exercises, which were used to protect freedom of navigation in the South China Sea in 2017 and 2018 (Cottey, 2018). The EU could, according to the parliaments report, seek ways utilize France's existing bases in the Asia-Pacific for further employments.

However, so far there is little evidence that the EU will significantly increase its presence in the South China Sea of the Asia-Pacific. The EU is aiming to base its future engagement with the Indo-Pacific region on already existing initiatives, such as the Coordinated Maritime Presence (CMP), which is meant to "Ensure a European naval presence in the Indo-Pacific" and "Enhance the EU's role as a global maritime security provider" (EEAS, 2022b). Through the CMP, the EU can create 'maritime areas of interests' (MAI), where the navies of the EU states would enhance coordination with one another (Nováky, 2022). So far, only the Gulf of Guinea has been appointed as a MAI, but the EU will "assess the opportunity of establishing Maritime Areas of Interest in the Indo-Pacific". The South China Sea might be an option for a future MAI, but so far there has been no clear reference to do so.

Many of the EU's maritime security initiatives are aimed at piracy or other criminal activities, such as CRIMARIO and Operation Atlanta. Operation Atlanta started in 2008 and it was the EU's first official naval operation. The EU seems to use such projects as platforms for cooperation and naval exercises. For example, The EU and Indonesia recently conducted their first naval exercise together and the EU utilized capabilities that were created for Operation Atlanta and CRIMARIO in the exercise (EEAS, 2022c). In a somewhat similar manner, the EU and Vietnam signed a 'Framework for participation agreement' in 2019, which is supposed to increase cooperation between the parties in crisis management (EU, 2019).

It seems that so far, two conclusions regarding the EU's military engagement in the Indo-Pacific can be made. Firstly, the EU has a stronger focus on the western side of the Indo-Pacific, whereas very few examples of engagement in the Asia-Pacific can be found. CRIMARIO and Operation Atlanta for example, are focused on the Arabian sea and the

Indian. Perhaps the only initiative focusing more on the eastern side of the Indo-Pacific is the 'Enhanced EU Security Cooperation in and with Asia' (ESIWA). ESIWA was initiated in 2018 but so far it seems to lack direction and ambition. The EU claims it will "step up activities with partners under the project Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia", but no further information has been given.

The second conclusion that can be made, is that so far, the EU's military engagement with the region is strongly focused on capacity-building, trust-building and on lesser issues. No evidence of the EU aiming to hard balance against China is found. However, the EU's military cooperation with multiple middle powers can certainly be considered as limited hard balancing. While the EU's projects have clearly defined goals, that do not have anything to do with China, but are rather focused on countering smaller issues such as criminal activity, the increased presence and cooperation of the EU can already work as a deterrent towards China. The aim to increase freedom of navigation operations on the other hand, can be seen as quite a direct measure towards China. Also interesting in the EU's approach is that much more attention is given to cooperation with regional middle powers, whereas cooperation with the US is given minimal attention.

### The EU's economic approach

"The Connectivity field is a good example of geo-economics and geo-politics merging into one and we need to treat it as such as such" (Borrell, 2021). This quote by Josep Borrell, the High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy reveals some of the security considerations that are present in the EU's economic measures targeted towards the Indo-Pacific. Connectivity is one of the main aspects of such measures, which the EU has divided into four different categories. These are transport, energy, digital and human dimension. Out of these categories, transport is the one that the EU seems to be most concerned about in terms of security. For example, in the Indo-Pacific strategy it is written that "In light of the fundamental role of the transport sector in securing resilient supply chains and promoting a green socio-economic recovery, a key objective of the EU will be to ensure the resilience of the Indo-Pacific region's transport systems against future crises." The role of vital waterways to EU trade, such as Malacca Strait, the South China Sea, and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait is also pointed out. It is not however specified how the EU aims to improve the

transport sector. Instead, more holistic measures are mentioned that are aimed at improving the stability of trade and supply and value chains. These measures include (1) diversifying trade and investment ties, (2) protection against economic coercion and (3) developing cooperation on strategic sectors and strategic dependencies.

The EU released a joint communication in 2018 titled "Connecting Europe and Asia — Building Blocks for an EU Strategy", sometimes referred to as the "connectivity strategy". (EEAS, 2019). The strategy however, barely covered the Indo-Pacific. In the strategy the words Indo-Pacific, Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific were not mentioned even once. The approach nevertheless was adopted and developed once the EU started focusing more on the Indo-Pacific. In an EU-ASEAN joint ministerial statement on connectivity the need for high quality infrastructure investment was highlighted and the EU's role in "supporting infrastructure investment in numerous ASEAN member states" was recognized (European Council, 2020). Also, in the European Parliaments report on the security challenges in the Indo-Pacific EU's role in building "critical infrastructure" in the Indo-Pacific was noted and it was contrasted with China's debt diplomacy, economic expansion and attempts to "gain political influence through its economic interests". Indeed, as many Asian countries have insufficient resources for investing on high quality infrastructure, it has opened possibilities for China to leverage these situations. The EU can provide much needed alternatives for Chinese investments (Mohan, 2020) and the Connectivity strategy has indeed sometimes been seen as a competitor to China's BRI (Widmann, 2021). Considering that the EU is already the number one foreign investor and development assistance provider in the Indo-Pacific (EEAS, 2021) and also provides ASEAN countries with almost twice as much foreign direct investment than China (ASEAN, 2020), it is clear that the EU already has a very strong economic presence in the region.

The EU's approach to connectivity and infrastructure investments in the Indo-Pacific might be an important step towards diversifying trade and protecting developing countries from China's debt diplomacy by providing funding on necessary projects. Especially funding infrastructure projects that help countries with high levels or potentially high levels of manufacturing to connect better to supply and value chains can, in the long run, lessen the EU's dependency on Chinese manufacturing by increasing imports from other destinations. This dependency on Chinese manufacturing was made especially clear during the COVID-19 'mask diplomacy' debacle, where the EU was dependent on medical goods produced in China.

In addition to lessening the EU's dependency on China, a well-focused investment strategy can counter China's aims to increase its influence through economic coercion. The EU's approach, however, is not limited to connectivity and investment. The EU has also been very active in negotiating Trade Agreements with Indo-Pacific partners. For example, trade agreements have been signed with Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Singapore, and the EU has expressed its interest in continuing negotiations on a region-to-region trade agreement with ASEAN. Such agreements are a concrete example of EU diversifying its trade relations.

These measures combined with the rhetoric towards China reveal that the EU is concerned of its dependence on trade with China. In the context of the complex interdependence theory, it seems that the EU has identified weaknesses that could be interpreted as an asymmetrical relationship in favor of China. In the case of significant political disagreements China could leverage this relationship, thus limiting the EU's foreign policy options or leaving the EU market without certain goods, thus possibly worsening the living standards of EU citizens. By investing in infrastructure in other Indo-Pacific countries and pursuing trade agreements, the EU can increase its trade with other states and thus balance the asymmetrical relationship with China, which indeed seems to be one of the goals EU has regarding the Indo-Pacific region. This goal, however, is not limited to the Indo-Pacific, but the region plays a significant role in the interdependency dynamic between the two actors.

### The EU's institutional approach

In its Indo-Pacific strategy, EU highlights the value of multilateralism and regional organizations in the Indo-Pacific. However, quite little attention is given to institutions and organizations in the EU's documents. Also, very little details and reasoning is given on the value of institutions and organizations, showing that the EU has a much stronger focus on other security measures in the Indo-Pacific.

A large portion of the EU's institutional measures aimed at the Indo-Pacific are related to financing. As the Indo-Pacific suffers from insufficient amount of infrastructure investment, helping to raise capital in the region can help to improve the infrastructure and thus improve connectivity with the EU, which is one of its main goals. The EU will cooperate with international financial institutions to mobilize investment (EEAS, 2021). Considering that the

EU can provide the most added value through its economic engagement with the region, having a strong focus on financial institutions is a natural approach.

Perhaps more related to security, the EU also supports the ASEAN-led, multilateral security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. EU expresses its wish to play a stronger role in the relevant institutions and organizations, such as the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus, ASEAN Regional Forum and the East Asia Summit and calls for ASEAN to involve the EU better in these platforms (European Parliament, 2022).

However, no specific reasons are given for the EU's wish to increase its involvement in these institutions and organizations. The most likely reason for the seeming lack of focus on institutions on the EU's part, is that it is an area where the EU can only produce little added value. As ASEAN has already been proactive in building regional organizations, the EU is not particularly needed for institution-building. Furthermore, as the EU is a nonregional power, it makes no sense for the EU to aim for a leadership position in the regional architecture. Rather, as the EU and ASEAN hold very similar goals in the Indo-Pacific, the EU can simply support the existing ASEAN-led organizations. While the EU may not be particularly focused or proactive in regard to the regional institutions in the Indo-Pacific, by enhancing participation in the ASEAN-led structures, the EU, as a significant middle power can provide these structures with more 'weight' and more legitimacy. This added weight might also provide greater incentives for the great powers to participate in multilateral security institutions.

### ASEAN's military approach

Unsurprisingly, there is far less evidence of ASEAN military activity aimed at improving its security in the Indo-Pacific. In the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific document there is a section on maritime cooperation, in which it is recognized that there are geopolitical challenges facing the region, such as "unresolved maritime disputes that have the potential for open conflict" (ASEAN, 2019). However, very little reference is made as to how ASEAN aims to deal with these issues. Only two relevant but vague points are made. These are "cooperation for peaceful settlement of disputes" and "promoting maritime safety and security, and freedom of navigation and overflight".

The absence of evidence in this case, is not entirely due to a lack of action or direction. At least partly, it is a reflection on the lack of documentation and statements released by

ASEAN. ASEAN has, for example, held naval exercises with both the US and China in the recent years, which points to a hedging strategy by ASEAN. Nevertheless, ASEAN's military approach is well described by the following outtake from the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific: "the rise of material powers, i.e. economic and military, requires avoiding the deepening of mistrust, miscalculation, and patterns of behavior based on a zero-sum game."

ASEAN has clearly paid much more attention to nontraditional security threats (Liliansa, 2021), whereas the response to traditional threats has been left up to the individual member states. While ASEAN highlights maritime security and especially maritime cooperation in many of its documents and statements, the military element in these texts is very weak, mostly referring to cooperation on nontraditional security issues. As such, realist logic seems to fall short on explaining ASEAN's military approach or the lack of such in the Indo-Pacific and neoliberalism seems to provide stronger explanatory power, since cooperation on shared issues is highlighted time and time again. There is also no evidence that ASEAN is aiming to change this pattern.

The most likely explanation for the lack of military approach, is that military issues are strictly under the jurisdiction of the member states and so the political union has no capacity to perform on this area. Indeed, many scholars argue that the ASEAN states engaged in territorial disputes in the South China Sea are balancing against China, either by increasing military cooperation with the US or by increasing their own military capabilities (Tung, 2022; Rubiolo, 2020; Karim, 2013). Whereas neoliberalism has stronger explanatory power on ASEAN's approach, realism might better explain the approach of individual member states.

### ASEAN's economic approach

In ASEAN's Indo-Pacific strategy four main areas of cooperation are listed. Two of these are connectivity and economic cooperation. It is said that to improve the connection between Indian Ocean and Asia-Pacific, more infrastructure investments are required. In the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity, it is also written that for ASEAN to reach its connectivity agenda by 2025, the amount of investments need to "more than double from historical levels" (ASEAN, 2016). In the master plan connectivity is divided into five categories, which are sustainable infrastructure, digital innovation, seamless logistics, regulatory excellence, and people mobility. When considering the regional element of the Indo-Pacific, it can be said that infrastructure and logistics are the most significant categories. In the case of logistics

ASEAN has listed its goals as strengthening "ASEAN competitiveness through enhanced trade routes and logistics" as well as to enhancing "supply chain efficiency through addressing key chokepoints". For infrastructure ASEAN especially highlights connectivity between member states as it is thought that higher economic integration could lead to "better realization of economies of scale" and that this could improve ASEAN's standing in the Global Value Chains (GVC). Indeed, one of ASEAN's main interests in the Indo-Pacific seems to be improving its connection to supply chains and value chains, as is written in the ASEAN Economic Community Blueprint 2025, ASEAN aims to "promote programmes that enhance ASEAN participation in global and regional value chains and production networks" (ASEAN, 2015a).

However, in ASEAN's official documents and statements, no clear connection between such economic measures and security is made. Whereas for the EU Connectivity is presented as having a clear geopolitical component and some of its policies are contrasted with China's, for ASEAN such policies are painted in the light of economic growth and "competitiveness, inclusiveness, and a greater sense of community" (ASEAN, 2019).

However, scholars have claimed that due to high trade dependence on China, many states in the Indo-Pacific region are unable to defy China's foreign policy interests (Tung, 2022), which would possibly constitute as a security issue. Nevertheless, as long as ASEAN and China do not have any overwhelming policy disagreements, ASEAN can simply continue benefitting from its economic relations with China. Also, ASEAN's and the EU's situation are largely different in the sense that the EU has an economy roughly the same size as China, whereas ASEAN's economy is much smaller, leaving ASEAN with less policy options.

The complete lack of confrontational or geopolitically competitive measures suggests that the realist view of complex interdependence is insufficient at explaining ASEAN's economic approach. However, it might also be the case that as China's and ASEAN's interdependence is extremely asymmetrical, ASEAN is simply unable to adopt measures that China might consider confrontational. ASEAN's economic approach to the Indo-Pacific is perhaps better explained by neoliberal tradition, as its main goals are to improve interconnectedness and to improve its economic competitiveness in a highly interdependent global system. Indeed, there has been speculation that some of ASEAN's measures, such as joining the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, are strategic moves that aim to promote the 'ASEAN way' of economic integration (Xi, 2021). For now, it seems clear due to underwhelming

material capabilities compared with the great powers, ASEAN wants to avoid further competition in these areas, and instead focus on economic growth, stability, and institutional cooperation.

### ASEAN's institutional approach

"ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific envisages ASEAN Centrality as the underlying principle for promoting cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, with ASEAN-led mechanisms" (ASEAN, 2019). So far, ASEAN has developed multiple regional institutions and mechanisms for different purposes and strengthening these is listed as a major objective in the ASEAN outlook on the Indo-Pacific. Particularly East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) and ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) are raised as significant mechanisms that ASEAN aims to develop further.

In the Outlook on the Indo-Pacific, these mechanisms are discussed quite briefly, but the words "ASEAN Centrality" and "ASEAN-led" are mentioned multiple times is association with these mechanisms, highlighting the fact that ASEAN itself considers its influence in the Indo-Pacific to be largely dependent on these mechanisms and that ASEAN believes that these institutions are or can be effective in stabilizing the geopolitical tensions of the region. ASEAN wants to use these mechanisms for dialogue, strategic discussion, implementation, and practical cooperation. ASEAN's aims regarding these mechanism and institutions, is better specified in the ASEAN Political Security Community Blueprint 2025.

In the blueprint, it is written that ASEAN's overall institutional capacity as well as ASEAN's institutional presence at the regional and international levels should be improved and increased (ASEAN, 2015b). This includes strengthening ASEAN itself, but also all the forums, mechanisms, and institutions that ASEAN can use to enhance its own vision and centrality. Mostly the same mechanisms are mentioned as in the Indo-Pacific outlook, with the further addition of ASEAN Plus Three (APT), which is a cooperation platform between ASEAN, China, Japan, and South Korea. The platform is used for security, economic and social cooperation. In the security area, it focuses mostly on non-traditional security issues. APT was described as "a main vehicle in realising the long-term goal of an East Asia community with ASEAN as the driving force in the evolving regional architecture."

Very similar things are written of East Asia Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defense Ministers Meeting Plus in the Blueprint. It seems though, that other than furthering

discussion and dialogue between actors, ASEAN seems to be unsure of what to do with these mechanisms, as very little is written about specific and concrete goals. Additionally, these mechanisms greatly overlap with one another as many of them have somewhat same members, same working mechanisms and same goals. This is not to say that the mechanisms are inadequate, but if ASEAN wishes to increase its centrality in the Indo-Pacific, it is necessary to have clearer vision for these platforms, instead of using them only as informal dialogue platforms where leaders can hold speeches once in a while.

There are, however, few more concrete aims mentioned, which signal a commitment to a higher degree of institutionalization. The most notable is the development of ARF and preventative diplomacy. It is written that ASEAN wishes to "strengthen the ARF as an important forum for identifying and addressing existing and emerging security challenges, through enhanced confidence-building measures and concrete steps towards preventive diplomacy". The ARF adopted a work plan on preventative diplomacy in 2011 in which three stages are listed. These stages are (1) promotion of confidence-building measures, (2) development of preventative diplomacy mechanisms, and (3) development of conflict-resolution mechanisms. The aim is to "develop more predictable and constructive pattern of relations for the Asia-Pacific" (ASEAN Regional Forum, 2011).

This approach was later reiterated in the 2019 Concept Paper on moving towards Preventive Diplomacy (ASEAN Regional Forum, 2019). In the concept paper the first stage is characterized by learning, sharing, and understanding. Especially the importance of join military exercises and sharing of military information highlighted for this stage. The second stage is characterized by exploring and developing preventive diplomacy tools. The development of this stage seems to be limited, but the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC), which is a legally binding code meant to govern interstate relations, is mentioned as one achievement towards the second stage. The third stage is yet to be properly developed.

ASEAN has been very active in developing different mechanisms, platforms and institutions but the progress towards institutionalizing state relations in the Indo-Pacific has remained limited. As Emmers (2018) claims, the cooperative processes in the Asia-Pacific have remained under-institutionalized, opening the way for great power competition becoming the driving dynamic in the regional politics. ASEAN has done a decent job at fulfilling the five ways that Keohane & Martin (1995) claim that institutions can provide benefits. The mechanisms provide actors with information on each other's action by holding high-level

meetings regularly, which already reduces transaction costs of cooperation. Agreements also become more credible, especially if they are done through larger regional mechanisms, with more participants, instead of the smaller regional platforms. ASEAN has been constituent with the focal points for cooperation throughout all of the ASEAN-led mechanisms, which can be seen as positive or negative. It is positive in the sense that the mechanisms might enhance each other, by tackling same or similar issues with different although often overlapping set of actors. Whereas in one mechanism, there might be a situation where cooperation cannot be advanced due to the disagreements of certain actors, such cooperation may be advanced in another platform. On the other hand, overlapping institutions might lead ineffective usage of resources and it might lead to confusion as to the role of each institution. Furthermore, ASEAN's long-term consistency throughout different mechanisms could also be interpreted as lack of innovation and as being stagnant.

With the adoption of the Indo-Pacific concept, the way the region is understood has changed, and this has led to new opportunities as well as to new challenges. None of the ASEAN-led mechanisms were originally aimed at addressing issues of the Indo-Pacific, instead most of them were focused on the Asia-Pacific. Whereas most actors in the region have moved on to the Indo-Pacific concept, China, which is a significant participant in many of the ASEAN-led institutions has refused to adopt the concept, still preferring the more traditional Asia-Pacific concept. The differing conceptualization of the region might lead to difficulty in further developing the ASEAN-led mechanisms. As ASEAN Centrality is largely based on the fact that it can cooperate with both great powers, if ASEAN is unable to accommodate China's views in institutional cooperation, it might undermine the degree towards which ASEAN can remain central to the region. On the other hand, China is pressured to cooperate in these platforms as failing to do so might turn ASEAN closer towards the United States, which would leave China in an unfavorable position.

## 6. Conclusion

The aim of this study was to compare the security approach of the EU and ASEAN towards the Indo-Pacific region. The Indo-Pacific represents a new way to understand the maritime regions of Asia, which have become the central stage for global politics. This new

geopolitical concept formed especially due to the increased importance of the trade routes and supply chains based in the Indian Ocean and the Asia-Pacific, but also due to the overall interconnectedness of the seas. The region faces many issues, which have the potential to produce destabilizing effects to international politics and economics. The most worrying issues are great power competition, territorial disputes and increased geopolitical tensions.

To answer the many security issues rising from the Indo-Pacific, many regional and nonregional powers have formed Indo-Pacific strategies in the recent years, including many significant middle powers. Among these middle powers the EU and ASEAN are especially interesting, as neither one is a 'traditional' security actor. However, both have the potential to be significant players in the Indo-Pacific and ASEAN could perhaps already be considered to be one of the most important actors in the region due to its centrality in the regional security architecture. The EU has also expressed its interest in becoming an Indo-Pacific security actor and both actors have also expressed interest in cooperating with one another.

In order to cooperate efficiently, their respective approaches must be somewhat compatible, and this study aimed to provide further information on this compatibility. Furthermore, the EU's and ASEAN's overall security approaches have barely been studied, but rather most studies have focused on one specific area of security or one type of measures. Such studies, while useful, are insufficient at explaining the security approaches of different actors in the Indo-Pacific, as most actors are using many different kinds of measures in tandem, resulting in complex approaches. Most actors have also included clear competitive and cooperative elements in their strategies. Due to the plurality of measures as well as the inclusion of competitive and cooperative elements, studying the overall security approaches of different actors becomes difficult, especially from the standpoint of International Relations Theory.

The theoretical framework for this study was drawn from realist and neoliberal schools. Many scholars have argued that single theory frameworks are insufficient for explaining Asian politics (He, 2008) and Sheldon (1995) argued that Southeast Asian politics are best explained by synthesizing neoliberal and realist approaches. In this study, further evidence was shown for why this is the case. The Indo-Pacific region is home to increasing military competition, but there is also a plethora of multilateral institutions, fostering cooperation in a multitude of sectors. Furthermore, on the economic sector, both cooperation in the form of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership as well as economic coercion through China's debt diplomacy and aggressive use of sanctions are present. These examples

showcase why Asian politics cannot be neatly explained by single theory frameworks. While single theory frameworks are insufficient, synthesizing multiple theories instead has the issue of intellectual coherence. How realism and neoliberalism interact with each other and how to utilize the strengths of each other without overly harming the coherence of the theories should be further examined. The synthesis has the potential to provide for more realistic descriptions of international relations, which arguably have been harmed by strict and inflexible theoretical approaches not suitable for describing the chaotic nature of these relations. Especially how high degrees of economic interdependence and differing geopolitical interests affect each other should be given more attention.

The method used for the study was a directed content analysis, where the Indo-Pacific strategy documents were the central focus. Other central strategy documents were also used to provide additional information, such as the EU's strategic compass and ASEAN's Political Security Community Blueprint 2025. The amount of material was quite limited, as both actors have so far released only a small number of official documents that could be relevant for security in the Indo-Pacific, but it was sufficient for the aims of the study. The analysis was directed by realist and neoliberal insight as well as the division of security to three focus areas or 'sectors', which was loosely based on Buzan's thoughts. Buzan divided security into five sectors, military, economic, political, environmental, and societal. Buzan's political sector was in this case replaced with an 'institutional sector' as focuses better on an important aspect of security in the Indo-Pacific.

In the analysis it was found that the EU and ASEAN, while having many of the same aspects and focus areas in their respective Indo-Pacific strategies, have clearly focused on different areas to a different degree. The EU has presented quite clear plans on its military engagement with the Indo-Pacific region. For example, the EU will aim to increase naval deployments as well as to further develop existing initiatives such as CRIMARIO and project ATLANTA, which can be used for capacity-building. The EU also has outlined economic measures, which include further investment in the region and improving connectivity between the EU and the Indo-Pacific. These measures are quite clearly contrasted with China's coercive economic measures, which the EU referred to as 'debt diplomacy'. Providing investments for high quality infrastructure might not directly seem like a measure intended to improve security, and without a doubt such measures have multiple purposes. Nevertheless, such economic engagement with the region is probably where the EU can add the most value in terms of security. Also, as the EU's biggest concern is the stability of trade routes and supply

chains, better infrastructure in the region can improve the resilience of these routes and chains. Furthermore, such economic measures might make it more difficult for EU's main rival and competitor, China, to increase its influence by leveraging its economy.

Trade routes and supply chains are a central concern for ASEAN as well, and the importance of better infrastructure was highlighted in multiple ASEAN documents. While the EU's and ASEAN's cooperation on connectivity, trade routes, and supply chains is most likely to be limited in investor-recipient type of relationship, both actors stand to gain from it, especially in the long-term. For ASEAN, the benefits from improving its infrastructure and its standing in the global supply chains are obvious. Currently, ASEAN is considered to be economically heavily dependent on China, which limits the policy options available to ASEAN states. If China were to sanction individual ASEAN states due to some geopolitical issues, such an action could be devastating for the ASEAN states. By connecting itself better with global supply chains, ASEAN can increase trade with other actors, which could lead to overall economic growth as well as balance the asymmetrical interdependence between ASEAN and China. For the EU, such cooperation might eventually lead to opportunities to diversify its trade relations, which was mentioned as one of the EU's goals.

Whereas the EU's approach is perhaps surprisingly focused on material power, ASEAN's approach is quite lacking when it comes to material power. Instead, ASEAN is heavily focused on retaining its centrality in the Indo-Pacific region through institutional leadership. While it is difficult to evaluate how effective these ASEAN-led institutions have been so far, and how effective they might be in the future as the great power rivalry seems to be intensifying, ASEAN seems to have a fairly good idea on how it wishes to develop some of the regional institutions, especially the ARF. However, many of the ASEAN-led institutions seem to be somewhat stagnant as there haven't been any particularly significant developments in the past decade or so. Even if ASEAN wishes to develop the regional institutions further, it is unclear whether ASEAN has enough political capital or weight to lead such a process. The EU's participation in the ASEAN-led structures could provide the lacking weight and further legitimize the principle of ASEAN Centrality. The EU also can benefit from assuming a support role, as ASEAN's security interests are close to its own. By supporting ASEAN-led structures, the EU can work towards minimizing the instability of the region, with minimal effort.

If we consider realism and neoliberalism as a spectrum, both the EU and ASEAN would be close to the middle in regard to their approaches to the Indo-Pacific. However, the EU's approach is clearly more confrontational and holds stronger realist elements than ASEAN. For example, the EU has a surprisingly strong focus on economic and military power. As ASEAN on the other hand is strongly focused on institutional cooperation as well as economic integration, its approach leans to the neoliberal side of the spectrum. The difference between the two actors might be explained by the difference in material capabilities or by difference in institutional capacity. As the EU is more integrated than ASEAN, it is capable of performing as a military actor to some degree, whereas for ASEAN this is not the case. If ASEAN states were examined individually, it would be likely that their approach to the Indo-Pacific would lean more towards the realist side of the spectrum.

While, the EU's and ASEAN's approaches focus on different areas, their overall security interests in the Indo-Pacific are very similar. Both actors especially wish to avoid the intensification of tensions between the great powers. Both actors also have unique roles to play in the Indo-Pacific setting, ASEAN as a leader in the regional institutions and the EU as the only economic power comparable to the great powers. The EU and ASEAN can leverage their unique positions to reign in the great power competition and to bring stability to the Indo-Pacific region. Cooperating with one another can further enhance these unique positions. However, the cooperation between the two actors must be practical and meaningful. Enhancing dialogue and cooperating on secondary issues might not produce sufficient effects in the face of the intensifying geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific. Instead, cooperation should be focused on limiting tensions, providing incentives for the great powers to cooperate and on disincentivizing aggressive behavior. Whether the EU and ASEAN are able to produce such effects remains to be seen.

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