



Equilateral Dependence, Scalene Perspectives and Isosceles Ideas: The US-EU-China “Strategic Triangle” and Transatlantic Policy^{*}

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The United States (US), European Union (EU) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) are sometimes viewed as a “strategic triangle”, with economic, political, and security dimensions. Within the triangle, debate persists regarding whether Western powers can and should build on shared core values to achieve mutually beneficial strategic outcomes. Deep interdependence among all three sides makes it difficult for a given side to directly oppose another on central economic, political and security issues. Moreover, every side possesses different preferences on various strategic issues. In other words, both the triangle’s size and complexity make direct

* The views expressed here are those of the authors alone.

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coordination on major issues difficult for any two sides. As such, transatlantic coordination designed to achieve mutually beneficial outcomes within the triangle will likely be limited to peripheral issues such as non-traditional security challenges. Less direct engagement could encourage constructive Chinese participation on certain international security issues.

I. EQUILATERAL DEPENDENCE: ECONOMICS, POLITICS AND SECURITY

David Shambaugh first articulated a “strategic triangle” to describe contemporary United States-Europe-China strategic relations in 2005.¹ At the time, the rift between Washington and Brussels over lifting the EU’s arms embargo to China exemplified transatlantic differences in perceptions, politics and policies concerning China and Asia-Pacific security issues. Then and now, evolving trilateral relations between US, EU and China exist not as an isolated triangle but as a major link in a perpetually changing network of international relationships. While it is just one of many crucial trilateral relationships in contemporary international politics, the US-EU-China strategic triangle is perhaps the largest and most significant – yet has received relatively little systematic attention.²

The triangle’s enduring share of world economic, political and military power demonstrates its significance.³ As a recent report by the Centre for European Policy Studies forecasts, in 2030 the US, EU and China, referred to as the “G3”, are likely to hold a combined 55 percent stake in the world economy, a figure closely approximately their present share.⁴ In addition, the triangle has persistently accounted for more than half of the world’s defense spending, and its members wield immense international political power.

Given China’s partial economic and military – but not political – convergence with the West, as well as the instability arguably generated by tripolar international systems in modern history, it is important to study trilateral relations among the US, Europe and China.⁵ As others have pointed out, the emergence of the triangle has, together with globalization, partially transformed the post-

Cold War international system into a multinodal order: Global prosperity across a range of sectors relies heavily on cooperative relations among the three sides, even though each side has its own leverage to check actions of the other two.⁶ For organizational purposes, we briefly survey the triangle in terms of economics, politics and security.

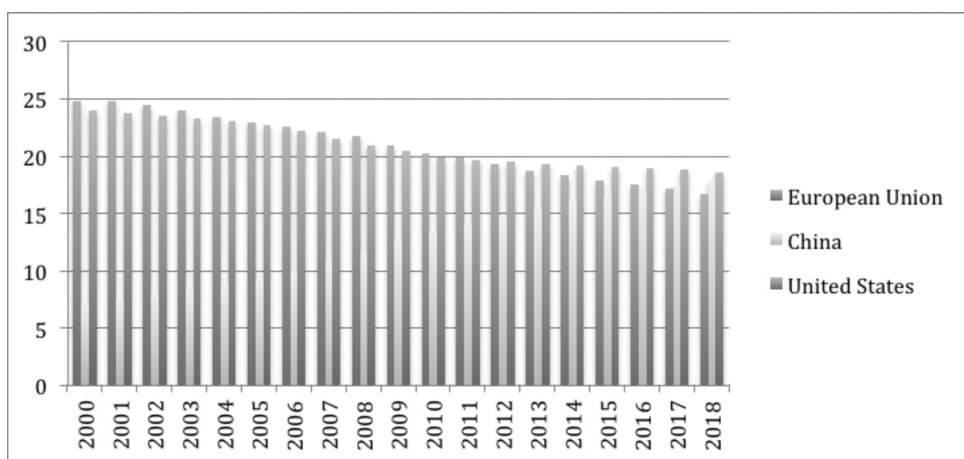
Economic

As Table 1 illustrates, the US-EU-China triumvirate has constituted over half of the world economy throughout the 21st century. Since 2000, the combined economic size of the US, EU and China has constantly accounted for more than 50 percent of the world economy. By 2030, the US-EU-China triangle will likely account for a larger portion of world scientific output and R&D spending, suggesting that this proportion may grow further.⁷

Figuratively speaking, however, while the triangle's surface area has remained relatively constant, its shape continues to evolve from a steep isosceles triangle towards a more evenly distributed equilateral triangle. The current distribution of nearly equal economic size between the three sides is historically unprecedented. The US National Intelligence Council (NIC) forecasts that China will become the world's largest economy by GDP in 2022 as measured by purchasing power parity, which it deems likely to be the strongest indicator of "fundamental economic strength", and "sometime near 2030" by market exchange rates.⁸ According to the International Monetary Fund (IMF), all three sides will approach economic parity in terms of gross GDP by 2020.

While economic parity purely in terms of size is prerequisite for equilateral dependence, deep trade relationships among all three sides preclude completely independent policies for any side of the triangle. All three sides claim the other two as their largest, most important trading partners. Never in modern history have the world's most predominant polities relied on each other this deeply for economic prosperity. For instance, the US depends on the EU and China for roughly a third of its international trade. Meanwhile, European Commission trade statistics document that in 2012 the EU relied on the US and China (US\$536.2 billion) for nearly

Table 1 The Strategic Triangle's Share of the World Economy over Time
(GDP based on purchasing-power-parity share of world total by percentage)⁹



27 percent of its total trade. Similarly, trade with the US and EU presently accounts for over a quarter of all Chinese trading in goods and services.¹⁰

Despite persistent comparative advantages that facilitate these robust trade relationships, fundamentally different economic structures and trade portfolios generate inevitable frictions on all sides. Most recently, deteriorating market conditions in the Eurozone present a double-edged sword for China: they produce negative effects for China's export-centric economy, but also provide opportunities for Chinese pressure on the prevailing international monetary system.¹¹ Chinese FDI in Europe increased by nearly 300 percent from 2009 to 2010.¹² 90 percent of EU and Chinese trade is seaborne; both rely in particular on the Strait of Malacca and the South China Sea, and blockage of maritime routes would impact their production and supply lines.

Political

The strategic triangle arguably contains the majority of political power in international society. It accounts for four of the five United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent member seats. While political influence is difficult to measure systematically

and only one veto is needed to overrule proposed UNSC resolutions, this is nevertheless a very imperfect indicator of the strategic triangle's broad political salience in international affairs.

The economic, military and political weight of the US-EU-China strategic triangle, as well as robust interdependency across these dimensions, will persist well into the 21st century. As such, it is costly for any side or sides to directly oppose another on major issues across these fields. In the Asia-Pacific, for example, active confrontation over intense security or political issues, such as Chinese feature and maritime claims disputes in the East and South China Seas, could disrupt trilateral relations in other dimensions of the triangle. While disagreements among sides in any of the three arenas are common, the triangle's sheer mass, and its equilateral nature in terms of interdependence among its sides, helps discourage actual hostilities.

Given the costs of opposing another side on a major issue, a given side might conceivably be tempted to unite with another side to tip the scales and secure strategic interests via exploitation of the third side. Yet increasingly equilateral dependence is likely to support "A+B+C" approaches over "A+B vs. C" approaches.¹³ Additionally, unlike its growing equilateralism in terms of economic, military and political capabilities and resources, the strategic triangle is scalene regarding each side's perceptions. That is, each side possesses disparate self-interests and views on the strategic triangle and its role therein, particularly vis-à-vis Asia-Pacific security.

Military

Triangular patterns are likewise emerging in the security realm, where economic size is essential for funding military might. Historically, defense spending has been less evenly distributed among the US, EU and China than economic size in terms of gross

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domestic product (GDP), but this too is changing. While still by far the world's largest, US defense expenditures are decreasing as a proportion of worldwide defense spending. President Obama's proposal to reduce military spending to 3.7 percent of GDP by 2018 would bring this ratio to its lowest level since the September 11 attacks.¹⁴ Meanwhile, many European capitals are also cutting national defense spending. In 2012, Asia's aggregate military spending surpassed Europe's for the first time.¹⁵ China's US\$144.2 billion military budget in 2015 represents a 10.1 percent increase from the previous year.¹⁶

Table 2 The Strategic Triangle's Share of World Defense Spending over Time
(constant US 2011 dollars)¹⁷

Side	1990	2000	2012
US	34.60%	35.19%	38.69%
EU	21.52%	25.73%	16.46%
China	1.30%	3.31%	9.08%
Total	57.42%	64.23%	64.23%

Nevertheless, the West-East reorientation of global military spending has not yet fundamentally altered the US-EU-China strategic triangle's collective weight. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), since 1990, the three sides have collectively accounted for between half and two-thirds of world military spending. The United States has accounted for thirty to forty percent of world defense spending since the Cold War era, while China's share of world military spending was extremely low until the 21st century. Nonetheless, as Table 2 demonstrates, military spending within the triangle is becoming more evenly distributed as China increases its defense spending and Western states gradually limit theirs. The result is increasingly balanced defense spending within the triangle.

II. SCALENE PERSPECTIVES: APPROACHES TO ASIA-PACIFIC SECURITY

Their collective heft notwithstanding, each side of the triangle possesses unique perspectives on the world, its respective positions and roles therein, and regarding the strategic triangle itself. Moreover, each side often finds itself mired in internal concerns that produce undesired consequences for its external policies, including those occurring within the triangle. In general, disparate perspectives make it difficult for any two sides to completely align security, economic or political strategies and policies to achieve a mutually desired result vis-à-vis the third side. Specifically, no two sides agree on what kind of role the strategic triangle should assume in Asia-Pacific security.

US: Main Proponent of Transatlantic Alignment in the Triangle

As US government officials emphasize, the United States “never left Asia”; instead, it temporarily shifted substantial security resources to other regions of the world, particularly following September 11. As defined by the US Pacific Command (PACOM), the Asia-Pacific’s 36 nations contain 50 percent of the world’s population, several of the world’s largest economies and militaries, and five US treaty allies.¹⁸ Washington’s strategic rebalancing toward the Asia-Pacific is gradually manifesting across economic, political and security dimensions, highlighted by developments such as ongoing Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) negotiations and the evolving Joint Concept for Access and Maneuver in the Global Commons (JAM-GC).¹⁹ While America would like to see Europe dedicate more complementary security resources to the Asia-Pacific, it would equally welcome policy and ideological solidarity there regarding key issues. The latter seems much more plausible – particularly in light of Russian assertiveness under Vladimir Putin, the ongoing situation in Ukraine, Syrian refugee challenges, and terrorist threats, particularly from the Islamic State (IS), all of which have severely undermined calls for a greater European security presence beyond the European continent.²⁰

While rebalancing has been misperceived by some as marshaling gradual American exit from Europe, others point out that (1)

high security and strategic prioritization of East Asia is not unprecedented in American history, and (2) refocusing US strategy does necessitate a 1:1 tradeoff wherein the majority of American contributions to European defense must be sacrificed. Indeed, 50,000 US troops will remain stationed throughout Europe for the foreseeable future.

Individually, the United States continues to strengthen strategic partnerships with states including Australia, Indonesia, Japan, the Philippines, Singapore, South Korea, Thailand, and Vietnam to support a multi-stakeholder, rules-based regional order amid China's comprehensive regional ascension. The United States and its leadership are eager for its transatlantic allies to strengthen their Asia-Pacific presence with additional security and political assets.²¹ Perceptions of shared concerns over Beijing's trade policies, defense spending, and foreign policies aside, having EU support in the Asia-Pacific would further help discourage Cold War analogies when describing contemporary Asia-Pacific security.²² More European participation in the ideological and institutional framework of Asia-Pacific security would, from Washington's perspective, incentivize China to eschew assertive, unilateral behavior in favor of more multilateral security policies.

Besides transatlantic dialogues, American Asia-Pacific allies and partners are also eager for a greater European presence in Asia-Pacific security.²³ For instance, Japan appreciates official NATO statements on various security developments in the region, while Australia, New Zealand and South Korea have signed Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programmes (IPCPs) with NATO in recent years. Referring to the European powers, in late 2012 Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe remarked, "The sea-faring democracies in Japan's part of the world would be much better off with their renewed presence."²⁴ NATO and China have no formal agreements to date, but maintain strategic contact.

EU: A Less-Certain Actor

Reorienting eastward is more complicated for Brussels and the EU member states it represents.²⁵ For one, European capitals are preoccupied with formidable domestic economic challenges, as

well as a related, continent-wide “defense crisis”. These challenges in maintaining capabilities are exacerbated by pressing security challenges emanating from IS, as well as Russia and proxies in Ukraine. These impede European actors from projecting meaningful security influence to more distant regions. To date, European defense cooperation has assumed the form of regional defense clusters rather than EU-wide cooperation, which limits Europe’s ability to coordinate policy regarding defense matters.²⁶

Besides domestic preoccupations, Europeans envision their role in the Asia-Pacific quite differently. Some scholars believe that Europe’s security policies towards China must not undermine the transatlantic relationship.²⁷ At the same time, Europe arguably commands leverage within the transatlantic relationship in the context of Chinese security policies, since both the US and EU are aware of the potential value added by increased unity across Asia-Pacific security policies.²⁸ Moreover, European policymakers largely perceive the US rebalancing to Asia as necessitating a revamped European defense push closer to home, since their transatlantic ally will be transferring resources from Europe towards Asia, as highlighted by recent European-led campaigns in Libya and Mali. It seems unlikely that Europe will collectively dedicate substantial material defense resources to the Asia-Pacific.

It might therefore be unhelpful for the US to request the EU to contribute more actively to Asia-Pacific allied partnerships involving the US and its Pacific allies. Europe has minimal direct security interests and commitments in the Asia-Pacific. At the individual level, it makes little sense for EU member states to reorient scarce defense resources to the distant region. Moreover, EU-China ties are arguably at their highest point in recent history. 2013 marked the tenth anniversary of the EU-China Strategic Partnership.²⁹ It is difficult to imagine the EU conspicuously entering the Asia-Pacific as an American military ally, thereby challenging Chinese claims and jeopardizing robust EU-China economic cooperation on which Europe increasingly relies. One commentator has even termed Europe’s presence in 21st-century Asia-Pacific as the “European pivot”, which, unlike the multidimensional US rebalancing strategy, is rooted firmly in comprehensive economic engagement.³⁰

Still, many European countries have been involved in Asia-Pacific security since the 19th century. While Europe is typically viewed as a latecomer to the region in modern times, European presence there is mature in many respects, having recently played a role in the Philippines, Afghanistan, and Myanmar, as well as anti-piracy and disaster relief operations in the region for extended periods.³¹ European leaders increasingly recognize the Asia-Pacific's impact on the international system. In March 2013, at a South Korea-EU Summit in Seoul, EU Council President Herman Van Rompuy stated, "as regards East Asia more broadly, the EU has huge trade and security interests in the region and therefore wants to deepen its engagement."³² Moreover, many European policymakers perceive the EU as attaching greater emphasis to multilateralism than the US, likely due to both the EU's multistate structure and America's prominent role in the provision of global public security goods for nearly seven decades.

While European engagement in the Asia-Pacific is largely economic, the EU is gradually clarifying its security interests there. The EU Council is set to release important documents on the future of European internal and external security in 2014, including its Maritime Security Strategy, which might provide direction concerning EU Asia-Pacific naval engagement.³³ All countries in the EU ultimately have a vested interest in stability of East Asia's maritime commons: China, Korea and Japan are the EU's second-, sixth-, and eighth-largest trading partners; any prolonged disruption of trade in East Asia would have significant socioeconomic ramifications for EU states.³⁴ Moreover, major Eurozone deindustrialization has imposed dependence on imported manufactures. Any significant Asia-Pacific maritime contingency could disrupt markets that supply crucial products to Europe.³⁵

China: Strong Incentives against Transatlantic Presence in the Asia-Pacific

China views its relations with the US and EU as two of its most important foreign policy challenges during the 21st century. However, the Asia-Pacific hosts the least stable area of relations within the strategic triangle. China, while broadly supporting

international institutions to an unprecedented degree, applies foreign policy theory and practice to the Asia-Pacific quite differently than in other regions of the world. Moreover the Asia-Pacific is the only region in the world where key interests of any two sides clash directly: those of China and the United States.

Beijing and Washington, moreover, each possess divergent perspectives on legitimacy of the other's interests there. Chinese officials, analysts, and citizens commonly view American Asia-Pacific rebalancing as a direct, malicious attempt to constrain China's resurgence as the region's principal power. Beijing would therefore undoubtedly oppose any EU attempts to enter Asia-Pacific security dialogues beyond the level of attending forums and offering non-binding advice. European integration into American-led security initiatives, as well as partnerships with other Asia-Pacific states allied with the US, would likely be perceived by China as part of larger schemata to promote "Western" values and contain China in its own neighborhood.

Scalene ideas about the strategic triangle's proper manifestation in the Asia-Pacific region make it difficult for any two sides to work in complete unison to pursue policy aims vis-à-vis the third side. Nonetheless, all sides recognize that outcomes in the Asia-Pacific, arguably the world's most military dynamic region with the most at stake in terms of economic and political stability, will resonate elsewhere.

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III. ISOSCELES IDEAS: MODEST TRANSATLANTIC SOLIDARITY

Vastly different perspectives on transatlantic strategy in Asia aside, both the United States and Europe broadly desire to uphold and strengthen an international order that helps manage international relations across economic, security and political planes based on widely accepted norms and dialogues established and supported multilaterally since World War II. While certainly

imperfect in practice, a consistent set of rules limits uncertainty and constrains states' ability to disrupt stability in any of these fields by acting unilaterally. This applies to all regions, including the Asia-Pacific. Of course, while the United States and Europe view regional integration as an important pillar of governance, it would be oversimplified to suggest that they are equally committed to promoting such ideas in the Asia-Pacific.

Specifically, both sides support democracy, human rights, rule of law, and market economy norms. EU countries have, in conjunction with the US, arguably made the greatest contributions to the prevailing international order and dispute-resolving mechanisms that it employs. The United States and Europe also share strong interests in international system maintenance and defense of the norms that support it, including freedom of navigation and resource management. The United States and Europe may agree in principle that force, or the threat to use force, cannot be allowed to alter the status quo, yet from their perspective China is preparing to do precisely that, as well as to alter laws and norms to its benefit.

Many argue that Europe's continued strength is necessary for upholding the liberal democratic order.³⁶ European and American interests could both be undermined over the longer term if China engages in "legal warfare" and builds a coalition of allies to pressure the United Nations (UN) to alter the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) over time. Top EU leaders have emphasized both the need to act with solidarity and to manage existing but endangered security institutions to accommodate rising powers such as China.³⁷

However, while macro-level strategic recognition of the Asia-Pacific's significance has occurred in Europe, convincing European citizens that they all have a "dog in the fight" vis-à-vis Asia-Pacific – and specifically Chinese – security issues is less straightforward. EU members with distinct national interests have understandably been slower to prioritize Asia-Pacific security. However, popular opinion concerning China's military and economic rise amongst EU populaces has been deteriorating steadily since 2005, reflecting growing wariness of economic and political challenges created by China's international emergence. European leaders have also come

to understand the challenges of simultaneous economic and security engagement with China. In 2008, for instance, Beijing cancelled the China-EU summit once it was revealed that then French President Nicolas Sarkozy was scheduled to meet with the Dalai Lama.³⁸

Europe might gain credibility in Asia, and within international society more generally, by pursuing adaptive and flexible ways to contribute to Asia-Pacific security without expending major defense resources. In particular, expending global leadership capital on integration and multilateralism can increasingly encourage Asia-Pacific states to strengthen their own regional frameworks based on robust, transparent norms. The EU-ASEAN Nuremburg Declaration on an Enhanced Partnership from 2007 offers a modest example of the positive impact of European soft power provision in the Asia-Pacific, and specifically Southeast Asia, which has contributed to economic, political, social and security progress.³⁹

The alternative to more focused engagement towards Asia-Pacific security is the status quo, in which European defense policy, increasingly perceived as poorly organized and fractured across technology, planning and operational lines, effectively eschews greater regional engagement. For instance, long-standing doubts as to whether NATO can remain an effective security organization in the post-Cold War era have intensified as European defense budgets decline.⁴⁰ Present and future Asia-Pacific security developments will continue to challenge the international security architecture built upon multilateralism that Europe was instrumental in constructing. While concrete resource commitments might be impractical for the time being, neglecting policy solidarity among EU members vis-à-vis the Asia-Pacific because of perceived resource and distance limitations may damage the continent's international credibility and compromise its role as a leader in global security.

Moreover, while formal ideological consensus among European states on various Asia-Pacific security issues is not likely to instantly impact security in the region, it might catalyze broader solidarity within Europe regarding defense issues. Europe could view Asia-Pacific security policy not as an unnecessary burden, but as a modest platform for building towards its larger goal of unity regarding the issue of continental European defense. Displaying

solidarity in the Asia-Pacific and other regions could strengthen European political credibility. These benefits could be achieved without substantial material commitments of defense resources from Europe, and would likely be “repaid” by the United States in regions closer to Europe.

Various unilateral security initiatives by EU members suggest that foundations exist for building solidarity in the EU regarding Asia-Pacific security. For example, following its military withdrawal east of Egypt beginning in 1967, Britain’s subsequent membership in the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) signed in 1971 has resulted in a consistent, albeit limited, British presence in various Asian regions, particularly the South China Sea.⁴¹ Most recently, the UK and Japan signed agreements on defense intelligence sharing related to various equipment such as chemical suits, and perhaps eventual cooperation on cyber security.⁴² Royal United Service Institute (RUSI) opened a satellite office in Tokyo in 2012. Meanwhile, France maintains its longstanding security presence in the Asia-Pacific by the stationing of military forces in French Polynesia and New Caledonia, though it has recently announced that resources will gradually shift to the latter, where it has an active air force base. Camp de la Paix in Abu Dhabi anchors a quartet of modest French military bases in the Middle East and Indian Ocean Region (IOR) that constitute its security presence in West Asia.⁴³ French Minister of Defense Jean-Yves Le Drian’s speech at the 2012 Shangri-La Dialogue affirmed Paris’s approval of Washington’s security rebalancing towards Asia and steadfast commitment to the security of the region.⁴⁴

Modest signals of greater European interest in Asia-Pacific security continue to emerge. NATO and Japan signed intelligence sharing arrangements with Japan involving “crisis management, peace-support operations and anti-piracy missions” when NATO’s Secretary General visited the Asia-Pacific nation in April 2013, and held talks with Australian and New Zealand defense officials during the same trip.⁴⁵ In May 2013, First Vice-President of the European Commission and High Representative of the Union for Foreign Affairs & Security Policy Catherine Ashton’s speech at the Shangri-La Dialogue marked the first time Europe has dispatched a

continent-level representative to the regional track one discussions.⁴⁶ The 12th installment of the Shangri-La Dialogues in 2013 was also the first time that NATO sent a representative. The UK, France, Germany, and Sweden all sent defense leaders to the 12th Shangri-La Dialogue, highlighting an enhanced European presence.

Ultimately, both sides of the Atlantic might benefit by coordinating their Asia-Pacific security investments to the extent that both sides' interests align. It may be unrealistic to expect significant EU contributions of traditional security assets in regions distant from continental Europe. Given this reality, and the fact that present-day Asia-Pacific security outcomes may eventually serve as harbingers for future international

governance in other regions, including the global commons, both sides of the Atlantic would do well to explore new avenues for united security policies in the Asia-Pacific.

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IV. A PROGRESSIVE TRANSATLANTIC APPROACH

Broad transatlantic conceptual solidarity about international security architecture that does not challenge China's vital interests can help include Beijing in efforts to bolster existing security institutions. China's recent contributions to maritime anti-piracy in the Gulf of Aden, and transatlantic support thereof, provide a useful example of how the EU and US can harness Chinese security assets productively despite protracted tensions in the Asia-Pacific. It also suggests how the EU can influence Asia-Pacific security and promote transatlantic objectives without disrupting important relationships in the strategic triangle, particularly in the field of non-traditional security.

Indeed, Europe may sometimes be able to positively engage China and other Asia-Pacific states without actually entering the region. For example, transatlantic strategic engagement with China

also occurs throughout the maritime commons. Recent evidence from anti-piracy experiences off the Horn of Africa demonstrates the benefits that can be produced by aligning US and EU security policy with respect to China. Results to date suggest that Europe is an important link in the triangle's military dimension. EU NAVFOR (Atlanta), US-commanded Combined Task Force (CTF)-151 and NATO's Operation Ocean Shield are multilateral EU- and US-led anti-piracy initiatives, all of which have engaged in shipboard cooperation activities with the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN). Beijing has been hesitant to work directly with a US-led force, but has been much more open to broader multilateral anti-piracy coordination efforts that incorporate EU NAVFOR and other European naval forces.⁴⁷ Given the plethora of non-traditional security challenges in the Asia-Pacific, including disaster relief and humanitarian assistance (HADR), maritime piracy and other forms of sub-state crime, it is not difficult to imagine enhanced European leadership backed by American hard assets that collectively aligns each side's security behavior more closely.

In this regard, there is much that Washington can learn from Europe to enhance America's Asia-Pacific presence. While Europe may not devote nearly as many resources to China-related analysis, policy, and engagement as the United States, Washington needs to bring more stakeholders to the table to achieve better results, particularly vis-à-vis China. Multilateral naval coordination in the Gulf of Aden mentioned above represents a successful case in which the United States and China were able to cooperate more effectively as a result of Europe's presence. The Shared Awareness and Deconfliction (SHADE) mechanism, jointly chaired by US and EU naval personnel, coordinates anti-piracy operations of Western and non-Western anti-piracy forces, including "independent deployers" such as China.⁴⁸ China is clearly more comfortable contributing to global governance in a multilateral setting rather than one commanded primarily by US forces.

The Gulf of Aden experience reflects a broader reality: It may be easier for European states to agree on security-related issues that are further from home and have the same broad effects on each EU member's security. In the case of Somali piracy, it was clearly

in every EU state's interest to counter piracy because the political and resource costs were relatively low compared to the economic benefits of securing the Gulf of Aden and other waterways on which EU states rely heavily for international trade and shipping.

Non-traditional security threats like piracy further serve as a reminder that transatlantic unity should not be designed to suppress China's continued rise. Rather, it should ensure that Beijing clearly understands that both America and the EU welcome greater Chinese contributions to both Asia-Pacific and global commons security, while also clarifying which issues Europe and America value jointly, so as to ensure that the institutions needed for longer-term cooperation among key stakeholders in the international system are preserved and fortified. More broadly, it suggests that China too is ultimately willing to work with Western states to overcome persistent obstacles – not necessarily limited to distant non-traditional security challenges – in order to secure broader, longer-term prosperity.⁴⁹ Thus, if they are able to project greater unity on the above issues, it is crucial that Europe and the United States jointly craft measured policies with an underlying theme of cooperation.

By contrast, neglecting to capitalize on shared security interests in the Asia-Pacific makes it easier for China to play Europe and the United States off each other. Like Washington, Beijing primarily engages European states and the United States bilaterally. In dealing with the EU, China often claims ignorance by stating it does not understand how the EU functions. This allows Beijing to “deal directly with big European capitals”, “bypassing Brussels”, in order to work bilaterally where it yields more leverage than if it were to engage Europe as a unified polity.⁵⁰ At least in this regard, transatlantic solidarity empowers Europe and the United States and lowers the probability that other states can “divide and conquer” them individually.

Moreover, pursuing a categorical transatlantic “division of labor” across the Atlantic and Pacific seems unhealthy for both sides. Accepting such absolute segregation would stifle learning opportunities and undermine the transatlantic relationship's dynamism. Instead, the EU and US stay actively informed of

security developments in all regions where transatlantic allies are involved, and craft and implement concerted, well-informed policies. These activities should help balance, not disrupt, strategic triangle stability. Unified European security policy and economic relations between individual European states and China can proceed on separate tracks. In other words, greater transatlantic security alignment, particularly in non-traditional fields peripheral to vital Chinese interests, does not necessarily preclude autonomy in other dimensions of the strategic triangle.

Ultimately, the question must be asked: can Europe afford not to have a strategic voice in the Asia-Pacific? The world's fastest-growing, most dynamic region with its many flashpoints has already begun to critically influence 21st-century international security. In fact, according to the NIC, "As global economic power has shifted to Asia, the Indo-Pacific is emerging as the dominant international waterway of the 21st century, as the Mediterranean was in the ancient world and the Atlantic in the 20th century."⁵¹ Events there are challenging "rules of the game" that Europeans have played a central role in establishing. European states are small compared to the United States, China and in many cases even Japan; a unified Europe is a powerful and influential Europe even if it uses only dialogue and not many material resources. And while they possess disparate opinions and capabilities concerning various Asia-Pacific strategic issues, Europe and the United States can both accomplish more by recalibrating their strategies to better complement each other.

V. CONCLUSION

The combined security, economic and political weight of the US, EU and China continues to constitute a bulwark of international society in the post-Cold War era. The sheer size of each side of this strategic triangle suffuses economic, military, and political dimensions, and suggests that the actions of one side can produce major consequences for the other two. Collectively, the way that the three sides interact will largely determine the development path of international society across these central planes in the coming

decades.⁵²

The US-EU-China strategic triangle is far more than a static, two-dimensional geometric figure. It is a complex network of economic, social, political and security relationships. Nor is this tripartite relationship isolated. Like all international relationships, it is intertwined with international society. The triangle's multidimensional nature suggests that cooperation among the three sides will be constantly limited given the increasing rate of competing interests; two of the sides are theoretically more able to advance their preferences for international security frameworks against the other; and interdependence will lower the barriers to broad cooperation while curbing the degree to which the US and EU are able to make China more conformant with Western-centric international norms through traditional channels.

Since economic reforms began in 1978, China has become far more involved internationally.⁵³ Desire to integrate China into the international system as a status quo power has guided American and European policy towards China since its economic reforms began in 1978. Key norms include those with respect to human rights, rule of law, nuclear nonproliferation, and trade. However, American and European reactions to the Asia-Pacific's, and specifically China's, rise have manifested quite differently.

The strategic triangle's economic dimension is now global. There is a broad consensus among analysts on both sides of the Atlantic that policies towards China's economic development should reinforce each other, despite their nuanced differences, in order to ensure that all three corners of the triangle engage fairly and support each other's sustained prosperity.⁵⁴ While transatlantic leaders may concur in principle, however, there is no consensus on what issue areas should receive priority, nor is there a concrete plan for tangible steps that America and Europe can take to cooperate vis-à-vis China. That said, both sides are in strong agreement: economic prosperity relies deeply on a cooperative China, which is already an indispensable trading partner for Europe and America.

Policy alignment among European capitals, and across the Atlantic, provides organization and helps clarify which issues are of greatest importance to Europe and America. On balance,

perhaps the greatest commonality between US and EU 21st-century security strategies is how neither side understands fully or engages systematically emerging powers such as China. Many often contend that the US and China truly have more commonalities than differences: If so, then it is even more true that Euro-American strategic differences in the Asia-Pacific, and vis-à-vis China, are also much smaller than shared interests. Despite the apparently

China's challenges to collective US and EU interests across the security spectrum can no longer be ignored.

limited potential for immediate gains in US-EU cooperation in the Asia-Pacific due to both sides' domestic responsibilities, China's challenges to collective US and EU interests across the security spectrum can no longer be ignored. Addressing these challenges cooperatively will produce a result greater than the sum of its parts. Given the contemporary manifestation of

security challenges throughout the world, domestic austerity does not have to preclude meaningful and effective cooperation among transatlantic nations vis-à-vis the Asia-Pacific and China.

That said, ideological solidarity alone will not automatically yield positive outcomes. This is especially salient as the Eurozone economies have stagnated following the global financial crisis in 2008, and investments in greater Asia-Pacific engagement must be extracted from shrinking resource pools. The EU is fighting for its influence both in Europe and abroad. This has been challenged by extreme financial and political volatility in several member states, which all possess distinct national interests and capabilities.

Ultimately, however, it is in every European state's best interest to coordinate future policies towards China with the US to some degree, despite temptations for member states to make decisions at the national level with short-term profits but potential longer-term pitfalls. As previously mentioned, the US would also benefit immensely from cooperating more effectively with Europe vis-à-vis China and the Asia-Pacific region at large.

Addressing low-sensitivity, non-traditional security threats more extensively together might be a valuable first step. Transatlantic

recalibration clearly has untapped potential in various dimensions of the US-Europe-China “strategic triangle”. Specifically, unified approaches to non-traditional security challenges that all sides of the triangle face are ideal platforms on which to engage China. Through Gulf of Aden experience, for instance, the US and EU have generated a basic model for respecting China’s independence while coordinating each side’s contributions in a unified direction. Applying such a concept to Asia-Pacific disaster relief, sub-state crime and piracy, and other latent non-traditional security threats not only facilitates European leadership, but could also encourage China to operate in line with the liberal international order closer to home.

Such activities would also ensure that the EU can increase its role in Asia-Pacific security smoothly and effectively. As Washington and Brussels begin to dedicate more resources towards security interests in East Asia, they must ensure that their future leaders first understand the domestic factors in China that will critically influence its actions. In many respects, the security challenges posed by the Asia-Pacific in general and China in particular are just beginning. As such, both short- and long-term transatlantic policy responses are needed – the former to address immediate concerns, the latter to establish the institutions and mechanisms to further long-term interests. An enduring approach requires a concerted focus on pooling resources to allow both Europe and America to further their understanding of the underpinnings of Chinese society that shape Beijing’s security strategy. Just as it is no longer rational to view Europe’s Asia-Pacific role as indirect, it is equally imperative to avoid considering China’s behavior in the global commons in isolation.

This is especially true in light of the reality that security interests for all states in the international system are interdependent to an unprecedented degree. Success in one area depends on conditions in others. As such, transatlantic successes in certain dimensions of Asia-Pacific security can create positive gains for some of the larger issues that currently defy productive cooperation.

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