



The Czech Republic, the Euro-Atlantic, and the Indo-Pacific: A New Geostrategic Alignment

Summary

- As a concept of collective defense of shared values, the “Indo-Pacific” is in many respects analogous to the “Euro-Atlantic,” formed after World War Two in response to the expansionism of the Soviet Union. Now, after several decades of accelerated globalization following the Cold War, these two macro-regions are closely linked with each other, and with the rest of the world, especially on economic security issues.
- At the same time, however, there are significant differences between the Indo-Pacific and the Euro-Atlantic that produce divergent solutions to shared problems, such as economic integration and defense alliances.
- With more than half of the world's population and nearly two-thirds of the global GDP in the Indo-Pacific, the macro-region represents significant potential for the Czech Republic in areas of economic, scientific, cultural, and other cooperation.
- At the same time, the Indo-Pacific is home to several areas of chronic tension that, if escalated, could destabilize the current highly globalized world community. The common denominator of many of these risk factors is the growing assertiveness of the People's Republic of China (PRC), which has gained further momentum since the rise to power of General Secretary Xi Jinping in 2012.
- The Russian invasion of Ukraine highlighted the problem of over-dependence in supply chains and serves as a clear warning against similar scenarios in the Indo-Pacific.
- For the European Union and the Czech Republic, maintaining stability and prosperity in the region is a priority, not only for the sake of cooperation and solidarity with regional partners, but also to protect their own strategic interests, including economic ones. Thus, more than 30 years after the Cold War, the Czech Republic's area of concern is expanding from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific.

Introduction

The “Indo-Pacific” is a key concept in today’s rapidly-changing geopolitical landscape, gradually displacing “Asia-Pacific,” the conceptual framework that dominated geostrategic thinking in the region after the end of the Cold War. The latter implied an effort to integrate the People’s Republic of China (PRC) into a cooperative arrangement in the Pacific. The Indo-Pacific, by contrast, defines Asia with its coastal belt surrounded by two oceans and implicitly leaves out continental Asia (“Eurasia”) – mainly Russia and China – from the equation. Ultimately, this is a geostrategic response to the backsliding of the world into two great blocs – the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific on the one hand, and Eurasia on the other, with the “Global South” (formerly the “Third World”) in between.

With the geopolitical center of gravity shifting to the East, the concept of the Indo-Pacific represents a similar vision to that of the Euro-Atlantic community in post-World War Two Europe: A collective defense of shared democratic values and open societies against the expansionism of authoritarian regimes. The preservation of a “free and open Indo-Pacific” is in the inherent interest of like-minded (if geographically distant) countries, and thus, must remain high on the agenda for the Czech Republic and the entire EU.

The global significance of the Indo-Pacific

As a concept, the Indo-Pacific has its origins in marine biology, defined as the biogeographic region of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, along with the adjacent marginal seas. In the 1920s, the German geographer and strategist Karl Haushofer combined the perspectives of oceanography, ethnography, and philology to delineate the Indo-Pacific as a holistic space with overlapping socio-political dimensions.¹ The Indo-Pacific region extends from East Africa through the Indian Ocean, Australia, and Oceania, and encompasses two-thirds of the world’s ocean area but only a quarter of the Earth’s landmass. Yet, more than half of the world’s population is currently concentrated in this region. Indo-Pacific countries generate 60 percent of global GDP and two-thirds of economic growth, thanks in part to three of the four largest non-EU economies – China, India and Japan.²

¹ Li, Hansong. (2022). "The "Indo-Pacific": Intellectual Origins and International Visions in Global Contexts." *Modern Intellectual History*, 19 (3), 807-833. Doi:10.1017/S1479244321000214.

² European Commission (2021). "The EU strategy for cooperation in Indo-Pacific." Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

In the sphere of geopolitics and international relations, the “Indo-Pacific” concept has gained momentum particularly in recent years. Former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe had long stressed the need for a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” (FOIP), especially in response to PRC provocations in the territorial waters of Japan and other countries in the region dependent on international shipping.³ The importance of the Indo-Pacific was further underscored by the 2017 US National Security Strategy.⁴ A number of actors have subsequently joined in with their strategic conceptualization of the region, including the European Union (2021),⁵ France (2022),⁶ and the Czech Republic (2022).⁷

For Europe, the Indo-Pacific is unquestionably a promising region with significant socio-economic potential. The Indo-Pacific region and Europe account for more than 70 percent of global trade in goods and services and more than 60 percent of foreign direct investment, according to an EU report.⁸ Trade between Indo-Pacific countries and Europe is higher than between any other geographic region globally, with annual trade volume reaching €1.5 trillion in 2019.

Apart from economic opportunities, the Indo-Pacific is also rife with potential for escalating international tensions. In addition to persistent problems such as piracy, terrorism, and illegal trade (in drugs, precious stones and timber, and protected flora and fauna, among other items), human trafficking, unreported and unregulated fishing, and the potentially catastrophic effects of climate change, the Indo-Pacific is also home to seven of the world’s 10-largest defense budgets, including that of the PRC.⁹ A number of China's recent activities threaten the stability of the region and, by extension, the wider global community.

³ Hosoda, Takashi (2022). "The shifting nature of Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific.'" *Sinopsis.cz*. Available at: <https://sinopsis.cz/en/the-shifting-nature-of-japans-free-and-open-indo-pacific/>.

⁴ The White House (2017). "National Security Strategy of the United States of America." Available at: <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>.

⁵ European Commission (2021). "The EU strategy for cooperation in Indo-Pacific." Available at: https://www.eeas.europa.eu/sites/default/files/jointcommunication_2021_24_1_en.pdf.

⁶ Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs (2022). "France's Indo-Pacific Strategy." Available at: https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_dcp_a4_indopacifique_022022_v1-4_web_cle878143.pdf.

⁷ Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2022). "Czech Republic's Strategy for Cooperation with the Indo-Pacific." Available at: https://www.mzv.cz/file/4852335/Strategie_CR_k_Indo_Pacifiku.pdf.

⁸ European Parliament (2022). "Report on a strategy for the Indo-Pacific region on trade and investment." Available at: https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/A-9-2022-0170_CS.html.

⁹ Nan Tian et. al. (2023). "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2022." Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Available at: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/2304_fs_milex_2022.pdf.

The PRC's growing assertiveness and changing regional dynamics

In the early 1990s, the PRC began modernizing its military by reducing the number of soldiers and modernizing its technological base. This process accelerated after 2008, when the PRC's effective handling of the global financial crisis fueled a surge in its self-confidence on the international stage.

China's arms industry is driven by a revived economy, which has enabled the Chinese government to increase defense spending. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, the PRC's military budget reached \$292 billion USD in 2022, the second largest in the world after the United States (\$877 billion).¹⁰ Compared to earlier periods in the PRC's modern history, Chinese military strategists are paying more attention to reconnaissance capabilities, mobility, and the effective range of their military. This new vision has shifted resources toward the navy and air force, and as a result, the Chinese military is now able to project power and conduct combat operations far beyond its borders. It is also actively pursuing dominance in the newest battlefields – space and cyberspace.¹¹ For these reasons, the Indo-Pacific is now home to several potential flashpoints stemming from the PRC's claimed “core interests”.

Beijing is challenging Japanese control over the Senkaku Islands, in whose waters several clashes have occurred between vessels from both countries (and where fear of escalation is growing).¹² In the South China Sea, in violation of the legal norms of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), the PRC continues its expansionist policy and finds itself in a sovereignty dispute with the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan, and Vietnam.¹³ China is expanding its exclusive economic zone and military capabilities by creating artificial islands, building airports, and establishing military bases on the Paracel and Spratly Islands. The South China Sea is a key international transport corridor, through which

¹⁰ Nan Tian et. al. (2023). "Trends in World Military Expenditure, 2022." Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Available at: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2023-04/2304_fs_milex_2022.pdf.

¹¹ Nouwens, Meia (2022). "China's Military Modernisation: Will the People's Liberation Army complete its reforms?" *International Institute for Strategic Studies*. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/en/online-analysis/online-analysis/2022/12/strategic-survey-2022-chinas-military-modernisation/>.

¹² Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan. "Situation of the Senkaku Islands." Available at: https://www.mofa.go.jp/a_o/c_m1/senkaku/page1we_000010.html.

¹³ Center for Preventive Action (2022). "Territorial Disputes in the South China Sea." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/global-conflict-tracker/conflict/territorial-disputes-south-china-sea>.

up to a third of the world's trade passes.¹⁴ Any disruption to the security and balance of power there would have profound implications for governments, businesses, and individuals – including in remote regions.

Despite diplomatic talks, tensions also persist between China and India. In December 2022, their military forces clashed on the disputed border in the Tawang area of Arunachal Pradesh, in the eastern tip of India. Previous fighting in June 2020, in the Galwan Valley, was the first conflict between the two sides to claim casualties since 1975. At least 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers died in that exchange.¹⁵

China's relations with other neighboring states have also been adversely affected by the instrumentalization of the watersheds of the Tibetan Plateau, which flow into both oceans of the Indo-Pacific. There have been instances of the hydropower systems on the Mekong River weaponised as leverage against South and Southeast Asian states.¹⁶ In 2017, despite an existing agreement, China failed to share crucial river flow data with India, making it impossible for the Indian government and citizens to adequately prepare for floods on the Brahmaputra River.¹⁷

At the same time, China is the only major supporter of the North Korean regime, whose nuclear arms race is undermining regional stability.¹⁸ The continued development and testing of weapons of mass destruction, together with the growing range of intercontinental ballistic missiles, have long been a security threat in the Indo-Pacific. Provocative military exercises and missile tests near the South Korean and Japanese coasts directly threaten strategic allies of the EU and the Czech Republic. In addition, North Korea is the perpetrator of repeated cyberattacks targeting commercial, state, and security institutions in the region and beyond.

Despite this, China is the leading importer of North Korean exports, Chinese companies use cheap labor from and in North Korea, and Chinese banks provide loans to Pyongyang. Beijing also serves as North Korea's political and diplomatic ally, resisting tough international

¹⁴ China Power (2017). "How Much Trade Transits the South China Sea?" Available at: <https://chinapower.csis.org/much-trade-transits-south-china-sea/>.

¹⁵ Miller, Manjari Chatterjee and Harris, Clare (2023). "China Routinely Underestimates India's Concerns About Its Border." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/china-routinely-underestimates-indias-concerns-about-its-border>.

¹⁶ Eyler, Brian (2020). "New Evidence: How China Turned Off the Tap on the Mekong River." *Stimson*. Available at: <https://www.stimson.org/2020/new-evidence-how-china-turned-off-the-mekong-tap/>.

¹⁷ Donnellon-May, Genevieve (2023). "Hydro-hegemon? Complexities of shared rivers between China and India". *The Interpreter*. Available at: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/hydro-hegemon-complexities-shared-rivers-between-china-india>.

¹⁸ Mastro, Oriana Skylar and Cho, Sungmin (2022). "North Korea Is Becoming an Asset for China." *Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies*. Available at: <https://fsi.stanford.edu/news/north-korea-becoming-asset-china>.

sanctions designed to curb the regime's nuclear program. Beyond economic cooperation, China has a mutual military defense treaty with North Korea, a single such arrangement for both countries.¹⁹

A seriously concerning flashpoint is Beijing's stance on the sovereignty of Taiwan, officially the Republic of China. This long-standing neuralgic point for party ideologues in Beijing has been further emphasized with the Russian invasion of Ukraine and the simultaneous deepening of bilateral ties between the PRC and the Russian Federation.

Sino-Russian convergence and the multipolar world order

On February 4, 2022, the opening day of the Winter Olympic Games in Beijing – and a mere three weeks before the invasion of Ukraine – Russian President Vladimir Putin and Secretary General Xi Jinping signed the "Joint Declaration of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on International Relations and Sustainable Development in the New Era."²⁰ The document is divided into four parts, which address the issues of democracy and human rights; sustainable development (mainly in terms of economic development); security; and building an international order based on multilateralism. These frameworks include other specific themes that can be read as an acknowledgement of the current political practice of both countries and the convergence of the two regimes.

Both countries' influences in the security domain intersect in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), established in 2001 as a forum for promoting multilateral cooperation among its member states. By combating the "Three Evils" of terrorism, extremism, and separatism, China has sought to portray itself as a responsible and reliable partner in addressing security challenges.²¹ However, this trinity has also served the CCP in implementing highly repressive policies in the Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region.²² Over time, the CCP

¹⁹ Albert, Eleanor (2019). "The China-North Korea Relationship." *Council on Foreign Relations*. Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-north-korea-relationship>.

²⁰ Kremlin (2022). "Joint Statement of the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on International Relations Entering a New Era and Global Sustainable Development." Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20230209161522/http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5770>.

²¹ Duan Fengyuan (2019). "Story of SCO: Fighting against 'three evils'". *CGTN*. Available at: <https://news.cgtn.com/news/2019-06-13/Story-of-SCO-Fighting-against-three-evils--Hu3myXJUti/index.html>.

²² HRW (2021). "Break Their Lineage, Break Their Roots". *Human Rights Watch*. Available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2021/04/19/break-their-lineage-break-their-roots/chinas-crimes-against-humanity-targeting>.

has utilized the platform to promote its security interests and enhance its regional clout. China's expanding influence within the SCO accelerated following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, highlighting the diminishing standing of the Russian Federation.²³

Soon after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, international attention focused on the many parallels between this Eastern European country and Taiwan. Despite proclamations of its preference for "peaceful reunification," China has made no secret that it reserves all available options to achieve its goal of reunification – including military force.²⁴ Beijing demonstrated the military option during and after a visit by US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi in July 2022.²⁵ The Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) Air Force and Navy have long violated Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone (ADIZ) and its territorial waters. Along with this, Taiwan permanently faces hybrid threats in cyber, psychological, and "cognitive" warfare.

Despite the relatively strong economic links²⁶ and, up until recently, people-to-people exchanges between the PRC and Taiwan,²⁷ Beijing has apparently failed to win the hearts of the Taiwanese people. In opinion polls, the Taiwanese have long opposed reunification but are equally concerned about the consequences of a hypothetical official declaration of independence, so most prefer to maintain the fragile status quo.²⁸ As the PLA's military activities around Taiwan show, this status quo is now challenged with Beijing's growing demands and claims.²⁹

²³ Webster, Joe (2022). "China cements its dominance in Central Asia". *Eurasianet*. Available at: <https://eurasianet.org/perspectives-china-cements-its-dominance-in-central-asia>.

²⁴ Tian, Yew Lun (2022). "China will never renounce right to use force over Taiwan, Xi says." *Reuters*. Available at:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/china/xi-china-will-never-renounce-right-use-force-over-taiwan-2022-10-16/>.

²⁵ Lee, Yimou and Wu, Sarah (2022). "Furious China fires missiles near Taiwan in drills after Pelosi visit."

Reuters. Available at:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/suspected-drones-over-taiwan-cyber-attacks-after-pelosi-visit-2022-08-04/>.

²⁶ Council on Foreign Relations (2023). "Why China-Taiwan Relations Are So Tense". Available at: <https://www.cfr.org/backgrounder/china-taiwan-relations-tension-us-policy-biden>.

²⁷ Haime, Jordyn (2023). "Why Chinese students are an increasingly rare sight in Taiwan". *Al Jazeera*. Available at: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2023/3/14/why-chinese-students-are-disappearing-from-taiwan>.

²⁸ Election Study Center (2023). "Taiwan Independence vs. Unification with the Mainland (1994/12~2022/12)" *National Chengchi University*. Available at: <https://esc.nccu.edu.tw/PageDoc/Detail?fid=7801&id=6963>.

²⁹ Blanchard, Ben and Lee, Yimou. "China ends Taiwan drills after practicing blockades, precision strikes."

Reuters. Available at:

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/japan-following-chinas-taiwan-drills-with-great-interest-2023-04-10/>.

In this respect, the widespread Chinese narrative that there is no connection between what is happening in Eastern Europe and what might happen in Taiwan³⁰ or, more broadly, in East Asia, must be questioned. Since the beginning of Russia's aggression in Ukraine, Beijing has sought to portray relations across the Taiwan Strait as an entirely separate, essentially a domestic matter in which other countries should refrain from interfering. Despite the many differences between the two regions, there is a fundamental similarity in that both Russia and China regard some of their neighbors as illegitimate and deprived of the right to exist independently. The military and political response by the democratic community to Putin's adventurism in Ukraine is being closely watched by Beijing with an eye on possible future scenarios in the Taiwan Strait.

In light of these circumstances, it is crucial for democratic nations in the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions to unite in solidarity and foster coordinated efforts when faced with endeavors by Russia and China to establish a "new type of international relations" in their quest to build a "multipolar world order" with a greatly enhanced influence of the two powers as its "poles".³¹

Geopolitical implications of economic dependence

The PRC seeks to change global norms and standards, including through multilateral economic agreements in which it plays a dominant role. In the Indo-Pacific, these include the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which came into force on January 1, 2022, as the world's largest trade grouping. The RCEP agreement covers more than 30 percent of global GDP (the EU accounts for less than 18 percent), generates annual trade worth \$2.3 trillion, and its 15 countries collectively have a population of more than 2.3 billion people.³²

The RCEP differs significantly from the previously planned (and competing) Trans-Pacific Partnership (TPP) and its follow-on, the Comprehensive and Progressive

³⁰ Ren Yisheng (2022). "Confusing the Taiwan Question with the Ukrainian Issue is Totally Out of Ulterior Motives". *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of People's Republic of China*. Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjwb_663304/zwjg_665342/zwbd_665378/202204/t20220418_10669227.html.

³¹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China (2023). "Forging Ahead to Open a New Chapter of China-Russia Friendship, Cooperation and Common Development." Available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/202303/t20230320_11044359.html.

³² UNCTAD (2021). "A New Centre of Gravity - The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership and Its Trade Effects." Available at: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/ditcinf2021d5_en_o.pdf.

Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which entered into force in December 2018. The RCEP is much vaguer on environmental protection, labor conditions, intellectual property, and other international norms and standards.³³ The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), introduced by the US in May 2022, may also be a renewed alternative to the RCEP, but it focuses on general standards rather than reducing trade barriers.³⁴

The EU published the Global Gateway Concept Paper in 2021, seeking to deepen value-based international relations with partners worldwide, including those in the Indo-Pacific.³⁵ The Global Gateway strategy aims to address urgent global challenges, including climate change, health system enhancement, and the competitiveness and security of global supply chains. In this regard, it is crucial to recognize PRC's repeated abuse of these challenges for its own agenda. For example, CCP's non-transparency and mismanagement in the early phase of the Covid-19 pandemic³⁶, or holding the climate change issue hostage following Nancy Pelosi's visit to Taiwan in August last year³⁷.

In a broader context, the resilience of supply chains has a direct impact on national security, be it for products in the energy, pharmaceutical, food, or semiconductor industries, to name a few. The PRC has considerable control over supply chains in the areas of rare earths, steel, and pharmaceuticals, among others. As the largest producer and exporter of rare earths, including vital raw materials for advanced technologies and electric vehicles, China can influence the price, availability, and quality of these products on the global market. A country that chooses to abuse its privileged market position in the supply of raw materials and components in these chains can significantly destabilize the economic and social situation in other countries. Such disruption can be minimized primarily through systematic de-risking by diversifying sources, either by building local capacity or importing from multiple producers.

³³ Ward, Robert (2020). "RCEP trade deal: a geopolitical win for China." *International Institute for Strategic Studies*. Available at: <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis//2020/11/rcep-trade-deal>.

³⁴ Resilinc (2022). "Spotlight on trade agreements: IPEF, TPP, RCEP." Available at: <https://www.resilinc.com/blog/spotlight-on-trade-agreements-ipef-tpp-rcep/>.

³⁵ European Commission (2021). "Global Gateway". Available at: https://commission.europa.eu/strategy-and-policy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/global-gateway_en.

³⁶ Chan, John (2020). "Beijing Resists Pressure to Investigate Origins of COVID-19". China Digital Times. Available at: <https://chinadigitaltimes.net/2020/11/beijing-resists-pressure-to-investigate-origins-of-covid-19/>.

³⁷ Reuters (2022). "U.S. must dispel Pelosi's 'negative influence' before climate talks". Available at: <https://www.reuters.com/business/environment/us-must-dispel-pelosis-negative-influence-before-climate-talks-china-2022-08-31/>.

Security groupings in the region

As an expression of the collective defense of shared values, the concept of the Indo-Pacific is largely equivalent to the concept of the "Euro-Atlantic" – or the Euro-Atlantic community. Just as the (North) Atlantic Community was expected to defend democratic values against the expansionism of the Soviet Union after World War Two, the Indo-Pacific Community should now perform a similar function further east, as threats to the current rules-based international order shift there.

Unlike the Euro-Atlantic, however, the Indo-Pacific is characterized by a more extensive geographic range and much greater diversity. Despite calls by some European politicians for an extension of NATO's mandate to Asia – drawing Chinese protests against an “Asian NATO” – it is unlikely that an alliance of this type would emerge in the region any time soon, if ever. Such a role may fall to geographically narrower and more specialized initiatives, such as AUKUS or the Quad. For the foreseeable future, NATO will likely limit its activities in the region to select partnerships, such as the IP4 (South Korea, Japan, Australia and New Zealand).³⁸ One recent step is NATO's launch of the "Futures in the Indo-Pacific" initiative on 25 January 2023. Over the course of the next two years, this initiative will facilitate in-depth discussions among experts from Belgium, Australia, France, and Japan, emphasizing NATO's commitment to enhancing understanding and engagement in the Indo-Pacific.³⁹

Australia (AU), the United Kingdom (UK), and the United States of America (US) are members of the trilateral security pact AUKUS, which was announced on September 5, 2021, and aims to deepen diplomatic, security, and defense cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. It calls for intensive sharing of information and technology, industrial bases, and supply chains in the security and defense sector. As part of this pact, the US and UK are expected to help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines.⁴⁰

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (abbreviated as QSD or Quad), is a strategic security grouping that brings together the US, Japan, Australia, and India. The Quad was initiated in 2007 by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, with the support of Australian Prime

³⁸ NATO (2023). “Relations with partners in the Indo-Pacific region”. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/uk/natohq/topics_183254.htm?selectedLocale=en.

³⁹ NATO (2023). “NATO launches new cooperation initiative with experts from partners in the Indo-Pacific region”. Available at: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/news_211244.htm.

⁴⁰ Prime Minister of Australia (2021). "Joint Leaders Statement on AUKUS." Available at: <https://web.archive.org/web/20210927191438/https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-leaders-statement-aukus>.

Minister John Howard, Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, and US Vice President Dick Cheney. After a period of lull between 2008 and 2017, it has been revived. A joint statement issued in March 2021 states that the grouping's top priorities include ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific and promoting a rules-based maritime order in the East and South China Seas.⁴¹

Recommendations

The Czech Republic's core foreign policy principles stem from its strong alignment with the European Union and the North Atlantic Alliance. Accordingly, it should align the officially announced forthcoming review of its relations with China⁴² with its Indo-Pacific Strategy and focus on developing alliances with strategic partners in the region, both at the bilateral level as well as within the aforementioned multilateral formats. Closer diplomatic and military coordination is now widely perceived as a necessary response to China's growing economic and military power. A coordinated and strategic approach is essential in particular vis-à-vis the Taiwan issue, where international solidarity and cooperation can provide a credible deterrent against possible aggression with potentially catastrophic consequences.

The Czech Republic has several long-term and promising partners in the Indo-Pacific region in the fields of industry, civil society, academic, and cultural exchange. Multifaceted relations with democratic countries are a prerequisite for a joint response to the encroachment of autocratic regimes on our societies. The Czech Republic's commitment to the region should, like at the European level, include all partners who share democratic principles, values, or interests.

After several decades of accelerated globalization since the end of the Cold War, much of the global supply chain has transferred to the PRC, affording it substantial leverage on the global stage. Despite its different political system and core values, China's economic potential cannot be ignored, but rather approached with due caution. The Czech Republic should strive, in coordination with its EU, Trans-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific partners to de-risk its trade relationship with the PRC by diversifying the supply chains and nearshoring the procurement of strategic commodities where possible.

⁴¹ The White House (2021). "Quad Leaders' Joint Statement: The Spirit of the Quad." Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>.

⁴² Vláda České republiky (2022). "Programové prohlášení vlády". Available at: https://www.vlada.cz/cz/programove-prohlaseni-vlady-193547/#zahranicni_politika.

The Czech Republic needs a unified and well-thought-out approach towards the Indo-Pacific region, with specific attention to its relations with the PRC and Taiwan. To achieve this, coordination and communication among key stakeholders is crucial. The President, the government, the Chamber of Deputies, and the Senate might consider establishing a dedicated platform to facilitate regular communication, exchange of information, and decision-making on the Indo-Pacific policy. Such a platform would enable comprehensive discussions and ensure a coherent and unified approach across all relevant institutions. In addition, the importance of the Indo-Pacific region and the activities of the Czech Republic need to be adequately communicated to the public. This can be achieved through PR campaigns, media engagements, and educational programs that promote awareness and understanding of the strategic importance of the region and the Czech Republic's role in it.

The Czech Republic's approach to building strategic ties with like-minded partners in the Indo-Pacific region might offer a point of reference for other European countries seeking to step up their engagement. By maintaining its commitment to human rights and value-based diplomacy, the Czech Republic has repeatedly demonstrated that it is possible to foster strong economic and diplomatic ties with democratic partners like Taiwan without compromising on strategic interests. Such an approach ultimately contributes to the stability, security, prosperity, and sustainable development of the region, as emphasized in the EU Indo-Pacific Strategy.

Relations with the PRC, economic and otherwise, should be underpinned by a thorough understanding of the potential risks. The risks cannot be avoided entirely yet could be minimized by a consistent and prudent policy that considers not only immediate economic benefits but also possible long-term impacts on the economic and overall security. Such an approach is perhaps best summed up in the current concept of “de-risking,” which replaces, both in the EU⁴³ and the US⁴⁴, the earlier, not entirely realistic notion of “decoupling.” To de-risk its relationship with the PRC, the Czech Republic can diversify economic dependencies and partnerships by seeking new trade opportunities and expanding ties with other countries in the region. Strengthening alliances and regional collaboration will enhance resilience and

⁴³ Von der Leyen, Ursula (2023). “Speech by President von der Leyen on EU-China relations to the Mercator Institute for China Studies and the European Policy Centre”. European Commission. Available at: https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/speech_23_2063.

⁴⁴ The White House (2023). “G7 Hiroshima Leaders’ Communiqué”. Available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2023/05/20/g7-hiroshima-leaders-communication/>.

reduce vulnerability to the PRC-related pressures. The basic premise is an acute awareness of persisting geopolitical risks, previously considered obsolete for decades following the post-Cold War complacency, as expressed in the once prominent concepts like the “flat world”⁴⁵ and the “end of history”⁴⁶. The world has never really been flat, and the short vacation from history we took after the end of the Cold War has now come back to haunt us.

⁴⁵ Friedman, T. L. (2005). *The World Is Flat: A Brief History of the Twenty-first Century*. New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux.

⁴⁶ Fukuyama, F. (1989). The End of History? *The National Interest*, 16, 3–18.
<http://www.jstor.org/stable/24027184>.