

# NATO Wants Permanent Footprints in the Indo-Pacific, with Talks About Opening an Office in Japan

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*This week NATO is convening its three-day summit in Washington, celebrating its 75th birthday. Much has been talked about Ukraine, of course. One of the highlights of this year's summit however is the issue of Asia - China appearing in this summit's [declaration](#) again (this being the third time in a row). The Asian superpower was described as a "decisive enabler" in Russia's conflict against Ukraine. The document further describes Beijing as posing "systemic challenges to Euro-Atlantic security."*

**Wang Yi**, Chinese Foreign Minister told his Thai counterpart **Maris Sangiampongsa** in Beijing this week that "It is necessary to resist the negative impact of the Indo-Pacific strategy and guard against NATO reaching out to the Asia-Pacific." This was a message to ASEAN countries in general.

The matter of opening a NATO office in Tokyo is part of this larger context. It is not officially on this week's agenda, but Tobias Billström (Sweden's Minister for Foreign Affairs) has said that NATO members are likely to bring the issue up with France soon (Paris opposes it). It was discussed last year, and often described in very humble terms. According to a 2023 Reuters report:

"NATO officials have said the proposed Japan office would be small, with a staff of only a few people focused on building partnerships, and would not be a military base."

Last year, this seemingly modest proposal (heavily criticized by China) was nevertheless blocked by France's **President Emmanuel Macron**, who, at the time, said that, although the Alliance should have partners "with whom we manage major security issues in the Indo-Pacific, Africa and also the Middle East", NATO "remains an organization of the North Atlantic Treaty." Macron added, ironically, that "whatever one says, geography is stubborn: the Indo-Pacific isn't the North Atlantic." As I [wrote](#) back in 2021, Paris is still a global player,

and has its own interests in the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR) and globally – and sometimes they clash with NATO and Washington in a number of issues.

This relatively modest proposal of setting up a NATO office in Tokyo, which, as I mentioned, has resurfaced, means in fact much more. According to Jack Detsch and Robbie Gramer (Foreign Policy's reporters) it is all about giving the Atlantic Alliance "its first-ever permanent footprint in the Indo-Pacific region."

On Tuesday, US **National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan** went as far as to say that "Japan, [South] Korea, and Australia are all on the road to invest 2 percent of their GDP on defense, a historic step forward", adding that "put simply, the ties between the United States, Europe, and the Indo-Pacific have never been more important or more interrelated than they are today." The 2 per cent figure is clearly a nod to NATO's two per cent spending target, which has always been an internal issue.

As I [wrote](#) recently, back in 1997, then senator **Joe Biden** was already [saying](#) that the attitudes of European NATO members pertaining to the American share of the Alliance's costs, "seem to many senators to be variants of taking the United States for suckers" and that "unless we quickly come to a satisfactory burden sharing understanding in all its facets with our European and Canadian allies, the future of NATO in the next century will be very much in doubt." This rhetoric finds an echo in Donald Trump points today. In other words, Sullivan is saying that the West might find allies that are more eager and ready to invest on defense in the East.

In the same page, ahead of his participation at the summit, Japan's **Prime Minister Fumio Kishida** told Reuters that "**Japan is determined to strengthen its cooperation with NATO and its partners.**" **Along with Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and South Korea (known as the "Indo-Pacific Four" - IP4), are also attending the Alliance's meeting.** Kishida also echoed NATO officials' accusations against Beijing, by saying, without naming China, that "some countries" have been providing Moscow with dual-use civilian-military goods.

Last year, as mentioned, Macron, in an appeal to the institution's founding treaty and to the acronym itself, described NATO, in a rather simplistic manner (his words), as "an organization of the North Atlantic Treaty." Since the 2022 NATO Summit in Madrid, however, it has become increasingly clear to anyone that a "[global NATO](#)" (as Liz Truss, who was briefly the British First Minister in 2022, famously [called it](#)) has been emerging. Truss, at the time, claimed that London rejected "the false choice between Euro-Atlantic security and Indo-Pacific security" in favor of "a global NATO": "I mean that NATO must have a global outlook, ready to tackle global threats."

While there has been much talk about a "new Asian NATO" (pertaining to the [QUAD](#) or even the so-called "[new QUAD](#)"), the specter of a new (US-pushed) "global NATO", comprising allies in Asia, Europe, and the Middle East still haunts global peace. This proposed "bloc" raison d'être would be – what else? – to counter the so-called "threat" of Chinese-Russian cooperation, a "threat" that is nothing but the outcome of the Alliance's own encirclement policies against these two great powers.

The whole "[pivoting east](#)" talk is nothing new and has often been pushed by Washington – Hillary Clinton's "[Pacific Century](#)" comes to mind, for instance. US foreign policy (in pursuit

of the “American Century” and maintaining unipolarity) often resembles the swing of a pendulum. It often oscillates, in the long run, back and forth, between the idea “countering” Beijing or Moscow – and at times it might even attempt to accomplish both things simultaneously, as was the case with the incumbent American presidency and its ambitious and risky “[dual containment](#)” approach.

Such geopolitical voracity (albeit pendulous) is to face more than a few challenges. For one thing, up to very recently, very few Alliance members could even keep up with their military spending commitments (a fact which, by the way, explains much of [Trump’s rhetoric](#) against the organization). Washington itself is an increasing [overextended](#) superpower.

To sum it up, today one can see an increasingly divided NATO, which does not possess a clear view on the challenges of dual containment. With Ukraine’s fatigue lingering on, and the specter of Biden’s [senility](#) and a [new Trump presidency](#) (amid a US political crisis), the idea of [pivoting east](#) is gaining traction – however important allies within the Alliance will challenge that notion.

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