

European Efforts to Contribute to the Stable Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Environment and Implications for South Korea

Ji-Hoon Yu

Korea Institute for Defense Analyses

인도-태평양 지역의 해양안보 질서유지 기여를 위한 유럽의 노력과 한국에 주는 함의

유지훈

한국국방연구원

Abstract As the instability in the Indo-Pacific maritime security environment intensifies, major European nations are endeavoring to contribute to maintaining the Indo-Pacific maritime security. This proactive engagement is rooted in the recognition that the preservation of a stable Indo-Pacific maritime security environment is directly linked to Europe's economic security. Maintaining a stable maritime security environment in the Indo-Pacific region is also a core interest directly tied to South Korea's security and national interests. A more proactive effort from Korea is crucial for preserving a stable maritime security order. Considering that 99.7% of South Korea's import and export volume relies on Sea Lanes of Communications(SLOCs), heightened inter-state competition for expanded influence in the Indo-Pacific maritime domain, culminating in military conflicts, could significantly impede the secure use of maritime routes, leading to substantial economic repercussions for South Korea. South Korea must intensify its efforts by fostering collaboration with nations that share common goals and values in maintaining a stable maritime security order in the Indo-Pacific. Establishing a multilateral cooperation framework with such nations will enhance the flexibility needed for effective action to promote national interests. In this regard, South Korea needs to collaborate with European states which are making efforts to strengthen cooperations with major Asian states, including South Korea, in the region. This paper assesses the maritime security environment in the Indo-Pacific, examines the active engagement efforts by Europe, and proposes policy implications for South Korea to enhance its national interests.

요약 인도-태평양 해양안보 환경의 불안정성이 고조되면서, 인도-태평양 해양안보 질서유지를 위해 주요 유럽국가들이 적극적인 관여 노력을 기울이고 있다. 이러한 관여 노력은, 안정적인 인도-태평양 해양안보 환경 유지가 유럽의 경제 안보에 직결된다는 현실인식에 기반하고 있다. 인도-태평양 지역의 안정적인 해양안보 환경 유지는 한국의 안보와 국익에도 직결되는 핵심이익으로, 안정적인 해양안보 질서유지를 위한 한국의 더욱 적극적인 노력이 요구된다. 한국 수출입 물동량의 99.7%가 해상교통로를 통해 이동되고 있다는 점을 고려할 때, 인도-태평양 해역에서의 영향력 확대를 위한 국가 간 경쟁이 군사적 무력충돌로 귀결되어 해상교통로의 안정적인 사용이 제약될 경우 한국에 미치는 경제적 파장은 막대할 것이다. 한국은 인도-태평양 지역의 안정적인 해양안보 질서유지라는 공동의 목표와 가치를 공유하고 있는 국가들과의 협력을 통해 다자협력 체계를 구축함으로써, 국익제고를 위한 행동의 유연성을 확장할 필요가 있다. 이를 위해, 인도-태평양 지역의 해양안보 질서유지 기여를 위해 한국을 비롯한 역내 주요 아시아 국가들과 협력 강화 노력을 기울이고 있는 유럽국가들과의 협력강화 방안을 모색하는 것이 중요하다. 본고에서는, 인도-태평양 지역의 해양안보 환경을 평가하고, 적극적인 관여 노력을 기울이고 있는 유럽의 관여 동향을 살펴본 후, 한국의 국익제고를 위한 정책적 함의를 제시한다.

Keywords : Europe, Indo-Pacific, Maritime Security, Sea Lanes of Communications, Multilateral Cooperation

*Corresponding Author : Jihoon Yu(Korea Institute for Defense Analyses)

email: yjhnavy3@hanmail.net

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1. Introduction

Amidst the escalating instability in the Indo-Pacific maritime security landscape, major European nations are progressively channeling policy endeavors towards actively contributing to the preservation of Indo-Pacific maritime security. The engagement of European countries in initiatives aimed at upholding maritime security in the Indo-Pacific is grounded in the recognition that the stability of the Indo-Pacific maritime security is intricately tied to the stability of Europe's global supply chain and economic security[1].

Indo-Pacific maritime security stands as a crucial matter intricately tied to the national interests of Korea. There exists a compelling need for South Korea to expand its role in safeguarding maritime security within the region, with a specific focus on elevating its standing as a global pivotal state that actively contributes to regional peace and prosperity. Realizing this objective entails South Korea assuming a leadership role in international endeavors aimed at preserving maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. However, the intricacies of South Korea's security environment necessitate a strategic approach to this process.

Given its status as a small to mid-sized country, South Korea must prioritize flexibility in its actions to effectively maximize the advancement of national interests. Establishing a robust foundation for multilateral cooperation, underscored by a heightened commitment to collaborative efforts, is imperative. This involves actively participating in international initiatives geared towards maintaining maritime security in the region. In alignment with these initiatives, South Korea should explore opportunities for cooperation with nations sharing common values and demonstrating a willingness to collaborate, particularly those committed to contributing to the reinforcement of maritime security.

This paper conducts an evaluation of the Indo-Pacific maritime security environment, scrutinizes European engagement trends in preserving maritime security within the region, and subsequently offers policy implications for South Korea to bolster its maritime security efforts.

2. Indo-Pacific Maritime Security Environment

The Indo-Pacific region stands as a pivotal strategic area of significant economic and military security importance, hosting crucial Sea Lanes of Communications (SLOCs). In the midst of an ongoing restructuring of the international order in the Indo-Pacific, there is a heightened intensity in the competition among nations to broaden their maritime influence. The prolonged strategic rivalry between the United States and China, compounded by the protracted crisis in Ukraine, has elevated the instability of the Indo-Pacific maritime security environment.

Analyzing the factors contributing to heightened instability in the Indo-Pacific maritime security, the primary factor of significance is the maritime power competition between the United States and China. Motivated by its ambition to attain major power status, China is actively engaged in an assertive maritime policy, racing to augment its naval capabilities.

Table 1. Numbers of Chinese Naval Warships

Year of DOD report	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Ballistic Missile Subs	4	4	4	4	4
Nuke-powered attack Subs	5	5	5	6	6
Diesel Attack Subs	57	54	47	50	46
Aircraft Carrier	1	2	2	1	2
Cruisers	0	0	0	0	1
Destroyers	23	31	28	33	32
Frigates, Corvettes	75	79	79	96	98
Total China Navy ships, including types not shown above	303	317	306	335	333
Total US Navy Ships	271	275	279	286	296

The impetus behind China's maritime assertiveness lies in its rapid economic expansion, growing reliance on international trade, and the imperative to secure safe maritime routes for global trade, culminating in the strengthening of its naval power[2].

In response to China's expanding maritime influence, the United States is strategically shifting the focus of its naval power from the Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. This adjustment aims to dissuade China's maritime ambitions and uphold U.S. maritime dominance. The U.S. has unequivocally expressed its commitment to counter China's maritime expansion, implementing defense strategies that encompass initiatives such as the Ghost Fleet, distributed maritime operations, and defensive capabilities specifically tailored to address China's naval expansion.

The maritime power competition between the United States and China is undergoing a significant escalation in the Indo-Pacific, notably in critical areas including the South China Sea, Taiwan Strait, Korean Peninsula, and the East and South China Seas. This escalation introduces a heightened level of tension and the potential for inadvertent military conflicts.

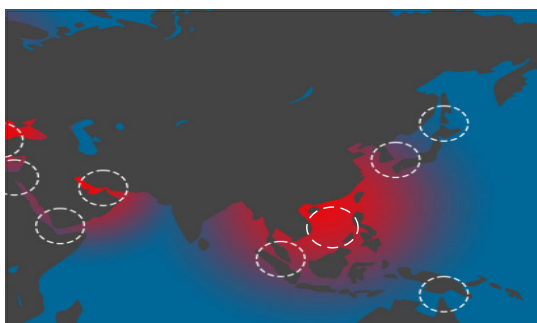


Fig. 1. Key Maritime Regions under the Increased Threat

Moreover, potential threats in the Indo-Pacific maritime domain involve North Korea's attempts to address strategic imbalances with neighboring countries by augmenting asymmetric capabilities, with a particular emphasis on surreptitiously

reinforcing underwater capabilities. The potential acquisition of versatile submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBMs) and the enhancement of long-range capabilities have the potential to pose a destabilizing threat to the balance of power in the region.

In addition, major nations in the Indo-Pacific are intensifying their endeavors to enhance naval capabilities, aiming to safeguard core interests and extend influence at sea. This involves a focus on power projection and extended-duration operations. Concurrently, territorial and boundary disputes among nations, coupled with frequent friction, contribute significantly to the overall instability of the maritime security environment in the region.

Non-military threats in the Indo-Pacific are experiencing an upward trajectory. The waning influence of the United States in spearheading stability in maritime commons and maritime security, coupled with a rise in terrorist and pirate activities, along with incidents of maritime disasters, collectively contribute to the increasing prevalence of non-military threats within the maritime domain.

3. Europe's Engagement in the Indo-Pacific Maritime Security

The proactive efforts of Europe in Indo-Pacific maritime security are grounded in the awareness that establishing and sustaining stable conditions for the use of key maritime routes in the region is essential for securing the stability of the global supply chain and ensuring Europe's economic security. The majority of trade between Europe and the Indo-Pacific occurs through maritime routes connecting the Indian Ocean, Atlantic Ocean, and Pacific Ocean, with maritime routes holding significant importance in Europe's global supply chain[3].

While there may be variations in the understanding and perspectives of European countries regarding maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, major European nations collectively recognize the pivotal role of maritime order in driving international stability. They are working together, drawing on their historical identity as maritime nations, to contribute to the maintenance of Indo-Pacific maritime security and, in turn, enhance their national standing on the world stage[4].

Efforts by Europe to maintain maritime security in the Indo-Pacific are being pursued at the individual country level, as well as through the European Union and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Particularly, European countries with territorial interests and relatively strong naval capabilities in the Indo-Pacific are actively engaged in these endeavors. France, possessing territories, citizens, and standby forces in the Indo-Pacific region, emphasizes its status as an Indo-Pacific state. It is expanding maritime security cooperation in the region in accordance with international law and norms.

Countries such as Germany, the Netherlands, Italy, and the UK (despite its withdrawal from the EU) are also participating in activities to uphold maritime security. These nations are collaborating with regional countries and focusing on joint efforts, including the periodic deployment of naval assets to key areas in the Indo-Pacific. Their initiatives involve joint naval exercises with regional navies, maritime information sharing, cultivation of maritime domain awareness capabilities, and efforts to enhance mutual operational effectiveness.

In addition to endeavors undertaken at the national level, there are consolidated initiatives at the European Union (EU) level to actively participate in maritime security. The EU is committed to addressing maritime security threats and challenges in the Indo-Pacific, with the goal of upholding a rule-based maritime order. It is broadening its involvement across

diverse maritime security domains and intensifying collaborative efforts at both policy and operational echelons with countries in the region.

Following the announcement of its Indo-Pacific strategy, the EU, as part of its policy efforts to enhance security cooperation, has initiated the "Enhancing Security Cooperation in and with Asia (ESIWA)" project with key countries in the region. The ESIWA project, led by France and Germany with EU sponsorship, aims to derive practical policy and institutional measures to enhance rule-based security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. It involves collaboration with six major Asian countries in the region—South Korea, Japan, India, Indonesia, Singapore, and Vietnam. The project focuses on four security areas: maritime security, cyber security, crisis management, and counter-terrorism. Among these, there is a notable emphasis on maritime security cooperation[5].



Fig. 2. EU's ESIWA Project

Moreover, at the operational level, member countries within the European Union (EU) are actively engaged in deploying naval forces, conducting port visits, facilitating capacity building in maritime security, and participating in multilateral joint exercises. In a strategic move to bolster the EU's role and influence, member states are consistently executing sustained naval operations and deployments in the Indo-Pacific region. Presently, these initiatives encompass leadership in Operation Atlanta for counter-piracy

and maritime security in the Indian Ocean, the Coordinated Maritime Presence in the North-West Indian Ocean (CMP NWIO), and the Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean (CRIMARIO) operations. There is a deliberate effort to extend the operational reach of these missions into the Indo-Pacific and augment the involvement of regional countries[6].

The European Union (EU) seeks to establish a crisis management system in the Indo-Pacific by orchestrating coordinated military activities among its member states. The extension of these operations into the Indo-Pacific is designed to enhance operational interoperability through systematic information sharing with regional countries. The EU's strategic compass, delineating the strategic direction until 2030, underscores a proactive commitment to actively engage in the preservation of maritime order in the Indo-Pacific[7].

In the new strategic concept presented in NATO's security environment analysis and future strategic directions, the importance of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and cooperation with regional countries in maritime security are emphasized[8]. NATO engages in comprehensive military operations related to maritime security, and the Standing Naval Force (SNF), operating under the control of the Allied Maritime Command (MARCOM) within the Allied Command Operations (ACO), plans and executes overall maritime security activities. The SNF is a multinational naval organization for performing joint maritime security missions, consisting of four units, each with six ships.

Currently, the SNF primarily operates in the North Atlantic and the Mediterranean, but there are considerations to explore the expansion of operational scope to the Indo-Pacific. However, NATO's military activities for maritime security in the Indo-Pacific, given NATO's nature as a U.S.-led military alliance, may act as a factor that can heighten military tensions in the region, despite the altruistic goal of contributing to

maritime security order. Therefore, effective activities for maintaining maritime security in the region are expected to face significant constraints.

Another noteworthy aspect of Europe's involvement in maritime security in the Indo-Pacific is the effort to enhance maritime security cooperation in coordination with the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific strategy. The strengthening of maritime security cooperation with the United States reflects the recognition among European countries of the need for reinforced solidarity with the U.S. for European security, particularly in the context of China's expanding influence and events such as the Ukraine crisis in the maritime domain[9].

4. Challenges in Europe's efforts

While efforts to engage in maritime security for maintaining order in the Indo-Pacific are being pursued at the individual country or EU level, there are several limitations to achieving unified and organized initiatives among European countries. Differences in geographical distances and perceptions of maritime security, as well as varying capabilities, contribute to these limitations. For European countries located at a geographical distance from the Indo-Pacific, there are challenges in achieving unity and organizational coherence in addressing maritime security issues.

For European countries outside the Indo-Pacific region engaging in maritime security activities and cooperation with regional countries, securing naval capabilities with the ability for long-range projection is essential. However, only a few countries possess naval forces capable of conducting long-term distant operations, and the efforts are primarily led by countries with relatively strong naval capabilities (such as France, the United Kingdom, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy) due to differences in naval capabilities among nations.

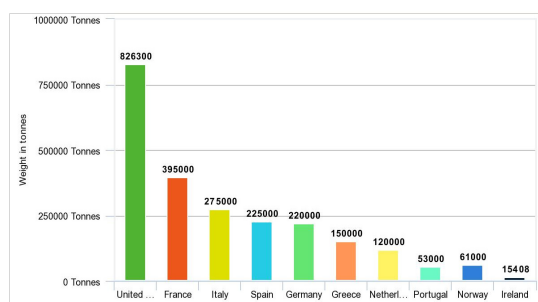


Fig. 3. Comparison Naval Capabilities between Major European States by Displacement (2020)

The growing concerns of European countries regarding deteriorating relations with China also pose a significant burden. Considering the economic dependence of European countries on China, Europe's involvement in Indo-Pacific maritime security activities, coordinated with the U.S.-led initiatives such as naval deployments, carries the risk of leading to strained relations with China. This, in turn, may act as a constraining factor for Europe's activities in maintaining maritime security order in the region.

Moreover, the prolonged situation in Ukraine and the escalating strategic competition between the U.S. and China underscore the imperative to enhance defense capabilities within Europe for security reasons. However, the potential projection of military power to the Indo-Pacific raises concerns about potential security vacuums within Europe. These factors have the potential to heighten apprehensions regarding Europe's security and add complexity to the challenges associated with European efforts to uphold maritime security order in the Indo-Pacific.

5. Conclusion

Despite the outlined structural limitations, there is an expectation that European nations will continue their efforts to uphold maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. This is driven by the significant relevance of Indo-Pacific maritime

security to European security and economic concerns. More specifically, collaborative endeavors are anticipated to be actively pursued, focusing on improving sustainability and coherence. Countries with substantial capabilities, particularly in naval forces, are likely to take on leadership roles in these initiatives[10].

Furthermore, as maritime security cooperation progresses, there is an anticipation of strategically aligning with the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific maritime security strategy. There will also be a deliberate strategic reflection on factors, such as China, within this process. The objective of these strategic considerations is to fortify effective maritime security cooperation by fostering increased collaboration with regional countries.

Maritime security in the Indo-Pacific is also a critical issue directly linked to South Korea's security and national interests, as the country heavily relies on the ocean for its national economy and livelihoods. In order to actively contribute to maintaining maritime security order in the region, South Korea needs to make more proactive efforts. Particularly, as a middle power that cannot avoid the dynamics of major powers, it is crucial for South Korea to build a foundation for multilateral diplomacy by sharing common values and goals with both regional and non-regional countries through cooperation.

To create favorable conditions for an expanded role and to broaden the strategic space for enhancing national interests in the maritime domain, South Korea should focus on collaborating with nations that share common values and objectives. As part of efforts to establish a foundation for multilateral diplomacy, exploring more refined cooperation methods with countries willing to participate in maintaining maritime security order in the Indo-Pacific is essential.

In this context, it is valuable to strengthen collaboration with European nations demonstrating a proactive eagerness to engage in safeguarding maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. This is

based on the potential for shared solidarity and cooperation among nations that hold similar positions, values, and goals. To establish effective collaboration with European countries, it is crucial to pinpoint specific areas of cooperation tailored to address differences in maritime security perceptions and capabilities among European nations. A comprehensive and proactive assessment of the security environment, both domestically and internationally, is essential to delineate the scope and depth of cooperation.

Currently, South Korea and Europe are in the early stages of forming a consensus on the necessity of maritime security cooperation, with practical levels of cooperation in maritime security still at an insufficient stage. Detailed discussions on specific methods and means for effective maritime security cooperation are essential. Considering the involvement level of European countries in maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and their willingness to cooperate with South Korea, leading the direction and agenda-setting for cooperation can create innovative opportunities for South Korea-led collaborative efforts in building a regional order for maritime security, contributing to the enhancement of national interests.

Considering the thorough assessment of European countries' engagement in maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and their eagerness to collaborate with South Korea, the latter is well-positioned to assume a leadership role in determining the direction and agenda for cooperation. Through this proactive stance, South Korea can actively shape the narrative and set the tone for collaborative endeavors. Such assertive engagement not only enhances South Korea's influence but also establishes a commendable global image for the country as a pivotal state actively involved in international initiatives aimed at upholding maritime security in the Indo-Pacific. This proactive role significantly contributes to fostering regional

peace and prosperity, further solidifying South Korea's standing in the international community.

To broaden collaboration and reinforce solidarity with key allies and amicable nations, particularly those prioritizing maritime security such as European countries, South Korea's national security strategy necessitates a more systematic and multifaceted approach towards maritime security. Emphasizing maritime security as a pivotal element in the evolving Indo-Pacific strategy, South Korea should adopt a comprehensive and strategic approach tailored to address the dynamic challenges in the region. This entails not only expanding cooperation with major allies but also fostering partnerships with friendly nations to collectively address shared concerns in maritime domains. A nuanced and forward-looking national security strategy should encompass various dimensions, including diplomatic, economic, and military aspects, ensuring a holistic and adaptive framework that can effectively navigate the intricacies of maritime security in the ever-changing geopolitical landscape of the Indo-Pacific. By prioritizing a comprehensive strategy, South Korea can contribute significantly to regional stability and security while fostering stronger ties with maritime-focused allies and partners.

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Ji-Hoon Yu

[Regular member]



- Dec. 2006 : US Naval Postgraduate School, MA in National Security Affairs
- Dec. 2014 : Syracuse University, PhD in Political Science
- Jan. 2021 ~ Dec. 2021 : ROK Naval Academy, Professor
- Jan. 2022 ~ current : Korea Institute for Defense Analyses, Research Fellow

⟨Research Interests⟩

International Security, Maritime Security, Defense Policy