

NEW ALLIANCES IN DEFENCE AND THE FUTURE OF STRATEGIC STABILITY

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DEFENCE PARTNERSHIPS



Formal agreements between states to cooperate in the military domain have existed since the dawn of the century and have been a recurring feature in international relations. Being an important element of power politics, alliances are believed to play a significant role in maintaining peace and security.¹ More importantly, their role in deterring and minimizing the likelihood of conflict has been often highlighted. Throughout the years, states have formed alliances with a range of different aims in mind. States have entered into alliances based on common military and political aims, often by the use of force against adversaries. It has been argued that military alliances are often incorporated into “forward defence” strategies by states possessing more power.² States possessing lesser power, on the other hand, become part of military alliances to strengthen their defence capabilities, and secure economic benefits. Similarly, the present year has witnessed a series of newly emerged defence alliances, treaties, and pacts in multiple regions of the globe involving prominent state actors. Defence

¹ Jesse C. Johnson, “The Cost of Security: Foreign Policy Concessions and Military Alliances,” *Journal of Peace Research* 52, no. 5 (2015): 665–79.

² Ulrich Pilster, “Western Alliances in Times of Power Politics – A Review,” *NATO Review*, March 28, 2023, <https://www.nato.int/docu/review/articles/2023/03/28/western-alliances-in-times-of-power-politics-a-review/index.html>.

cooperation among these states signals an interesting shift in the geopolitical landscape, which ultimately influences strategic stability.

Defence partnerships and pacts have played an influential role in the global geopolitical landscape, resulting often in heightened tensions between adversarial blocs or states.³ Tracing back to history, during the two World Wars, the Triple Entente, the Allied Powers, and the Axis Powers emerged as prominent alliances of the time. Likewise, during the Cold War, NATO and the Warsaw Pact were the two major antagonistic military alliances.⁴ These alliances, thus, marked a clear division of the world into blocs, accompanied by a quest for global dominance.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict has resulted in the resurgence of East-West tensions, bringing the salience of defence alliances back into the picture. In June 2024, Russia and North Korea agreed to provide military assistance to each other in case of aggression by a third party.⁵ Both countries officially ratified this agreement recently, which commits the two parties to provide mutual military support in case of an attack.⁶ The defence treaty and North Korean forces being sent to Ukraine have prompted concerns regarding their growing military cooperation. The Western countries have also expressed concern about the possible Russian technology transfer to North Korea, supporting its nuclear and missile programs.

Voicing concerns surrounding the Russian-North Korean increased defence collaboration and fearing that “Ukraine today may be East Asia tomorrow,” Japan and the EU signed a defence pact in November 2024, aiming to pave the way for closer cooperation in key areas, including maritime security and defence industry partnerships.⁷ It has been argued that with the focus of evolving global security discourse shifting towards the ‘Indo-Pacific,’ Europe’s interests are becoming more strategic.⁸ Similarly, some analysts suggest that this partnership should be understood as a part of transforming the security framework connecting the European transatlantic alliance with security networks in the ‘Indo-Pacific’ like the Quad and AUKUS.⁹ Therefore, the establishment of this new

³ Raza Muhammad, “Military Alliances of the Great Powers,” *Russia in Global Affairs* 22, no. 4 (2024): 55-62.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ “North Korea Ratifies Landmark Mutual Defence Treaty with Russia,” *Aljazeera*, November 12, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/11/12/north-korea-ratifies-landmark-mutual-defence-treaty-with-russia>.

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Gabriel Dominguez and Francis Tang, “Japan and EU Launch Defense and Security Tie-up amid Mutual China Concerns,” *The Japan Times*, November 1, 2024, <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2024/11/01/japan/politics/eu-jap/an-defense-security-partnership/>.

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

inter-regional security arrangement is believed to be aimed at countering resurgent powers like Russia and the rising China.

Earlier, in October 2024, Germany and Britain undertook a similar initiative and approved a bilateral defence pact to counter their perceived threats from Russia.¹⁰ The British Defence Secretary, John Healey, referred to allies as being their “strategic strength” in a “more dangerous world,” and committed to “do more together.”¹¹ The German Defence Minister, Boris Pistorius, added that this pact would “strengthen...the European pillar of NATO.”¹² Moreover, this year witnessed the approval of an increased defence cooperation pact between India and the U.S. In August 2024, the two countries signed two major agreements to bolster their defence-industrial cooperation, advancing supply chain resilience, and boosting military coordination and interoperability.¹³ Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh referred to this partnership as a strong alliance with the ability to guarantee “peace, prosperity, and stability in the world.”¹⁴ These trends, therefore, reflect a growing emphasis on strengthening defence capabilities, while safeguarding collective security interests and addressing threat perceptions.

Despite the fact that global geopolitics has undergone significant shifts after the end of the Cold War, the emerging alliances and pacts illustrate how defence alliances remain central to international relations. In the past decades, there have been debates on whether defence alliances lead to peace or aggravate existing tensions. According to some scholars such alliances play a positive role in promoting peace.¹⁵ Others, however, have maintained that although alliances could produce a deterrent effect, there also lies a possibility that they can intensify military conflict in the international system as they could act as a motivating factor for states to initiate or aggravate conflicts.¹⁶ As defence alliances form a part of the debate surrounding peace and conflict, they are also relevant to the debate surrounding strategic stability. According to a 21st-century definition of strategic stability, it is the lack of incentive to use nuclear weapons, also involving the prevention of

¹⁰ “UK and Germany Seal Defence Deal as they eye Russian Threat,” *Aljazeera*, October 23, 2024, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2024/10/23/britain-and-germany-seal-defence-deal-to-bolster-european-security>.

¹¹ “Britain and Germany Sign Defense Pact to Counter Russia’s growing Threat,” *AP News*, October 23, 2024, <https://apnews.com/article/uk-germany-defense-pact-russia-nato-97d1ad3a8c60d1611581ddc942f4d302>.

¹² “UK and Germany seal Defence Deal.”

¹³ Rajat Pandit, “India, U.S. sign 2 key Agreements to Boost Def-industrial Ties,” *Times of India*, August 24, 2024, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/delhi/india-and-us-sign-agreements-to-boost-defence-industrial-ties/articleshow/112750458.cms>.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Brett Ashley Leeds, “Do Alliances Deter Aggression? The Influence of Military Alliances on the Initiation of Militarized Interstate Disputes,” *American Journal of Political Science* 47, no. 3 (2003): 427-439.

¹⁶ Jesse C. Johnson, and Brett Ashley Leeds, “Defense Pacts: A Prescription for Peace?” *Foreign Policy Analysis* 7, no. 1 (2011): 45-65.

significant military conflict between nuclear-armed states.¹⁷ Alliances are based on strengthening deterrence and deterring adversaries, but at the same time, they give rise to challenges that affect strategic stability.

In the evolving geopolitical landscape, it is evident the world has once again become an arena for power competition, while it is grappling with regional conflicts. The newly emerged alliances, which also involve major powers, once again indicate the drift towards competing blocs. As a concept that emerged during the Cold War, the future of 'strategic stability' increasingly becomes an area of concern. As highlighted earlier, there has been a proliferation of emerging new alliances and defence pacts across the globe. States feel threatened when the adversaries strengthen their defence in cooperation with another global or regional power, hence, forcing them to follow the same path. As each alliance intends to counter the threat of the other, it leaves less room for promoting peace but rather gives rise to tensions ultimately, providing an incentive for conflict. Therefore, against the backdrop of growing military alliances and defence pacts in this challenging geopolitical environment, the future of strategic stability remains under threat as there is a rather increased incentive for conflict between nuclear-armed states.

¹⁷ Dmitri Trenin, "Strategic Stability in the Changing World," *Carnegie Moscow Center*, March 2019, https://justice4allandall4justice.com/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/3-15_Trenin_StrategicStability.pdf.