

Written evidence submitted by Antoine Levesques – The International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) (IRR0023)

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2. This submission seeks to address the main question posed by the Committee: what updates should the Government make to the Integrated Review?

Summary

3. The UK integrated review update should feature more expansive and detailed language on how the UK wishes to work with France in the 'Western Indo-Pacific', that is principally the Indian Ocean region, where each works with strategic partners, especially India and the Gulf states. One key benefit of such an addition would be to set an updated public record of the UK's expectations for ties with its closest major European ally, in the context of the war in Ukraine and ahead of a major bilateral leaders' summit expected to take place in spring 2023.

Case for closer working defence and security-led ties with France in the Western Indo-Pacific

4. The 2021 Integrated Review document discusses repeatedly the UK's ambitions for ties with France. A full paragraph is devoted to the UK's partnership with France in Europe (p.60) and the document also mentions France as a key to its Indo-Pacific tilt partnerships (p.66).
5. Russia's unprovoked ongoing war of aggression in Ukraine has strained the whole-of-government resources which European states can devote in the near term to the Indo-Pacific theatre. The UK is no exception. France neither.
6. In his autumn 2022 statement, UK Chancellor Jeremy Hunt explained that 'The government recognises the need to increase defence spending to meet the threats we face, and will consider this as part of an update to the Integrated Review'. Yet, as the Chancellor's commitment to 'maintain the defence budget at least 2% of GDP' was framed first in the Ukraine war context.
7. In France, President Emmanuel Macron told the country's armed forces on 13 July 2022 that the Indo-Pacific was an 'absolutely key space' for France. Yet in light of the Ukraine war and the multiple pressures in domains of contestation, 'we do see that we need to re-evaluate our ambition. Not to do less [...] but to adjust our forecasts and draw the right lessons'.
8. As a result, the rationale is strong for European countries both likeminded and able to assign significant diplomatic, security, defence and economic resources to the Indo-Pacific region, to work more closely together to avoid any strategically deficient or otherwise inefficient duplication, as well as improve strategic impact, as a whole greater than the sum of the parts the UK and France could bring.
9. For the UK, France is the most natural of its European allies under consideration for closer defence and security-led Indo-Pacific ties, in the changed context of the Ukraine war. Both countries' national security leaderships well understand the co-dependency and co-relation of the European theatre with the Indo-Pacific one. Particularly, both the UK and France understand

the importance of outcomes and lessons being learnt across the Indo-Pacific from the war in Ukraine and the stakes these pose for the making and taking of future rules and norms, given China's strategic arrival.

10. The geographically expansive 'Indo-Pacific' nomenclature, which extends from the western American continental shoreline to eastern Africa's, has found a wide endorsement as a policy frame among major powers (except China and Russia) in the late 2010s and early 2020s. This includes the UK and France. As a result, in geostrategic terms, while retaining its discrete identity, character, and subregions (eg. Western Indian Ocean), the Indian Ocean Region has a renewed salience as the 'Western Indo-Pacific'.
11. The Western Indo-Pacific region has at least three broad, defining characteristics. First, within it, the security, defence and broader strategic outlooks of a growing number of its littoral and island states is aligning with the Indo-Pacific nomenclature. This redefines their self-identification with or turn to traditional regions such as the Asia-Pacific, Indian Ocean, Gulf or Africa. The second defining characteristic of the Western Indo-Pacific is that its major power geopolitics remain still less competitive and fractious, than they are east of the Straits of Malacca/Singapore, much closer to China. Thirdly, India is the Western Indian Ocean's foremost resident power by virtue of its natural geographical protuberance into the Indian Ocean, its ambitions, and growing capabilities there. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi outlined his country's Indo-Pacific outlook in 2018 at the IISS Shangri-La Dialogue summit in Singapore. India's primary focus as such is on being a preferred development partner and first responder to the Indian Ocean island and littoral states.
12. The UK, like France, possesses sovereign territory in the Western Indo-Pacific and locates in this Indo-Pacific sub-region major expanding economic, diplomatic, security and defence interests. The Integrated Review discussed the UK's tilt to the 'Indo-Pacific', an inflexion since reconfirmed by Sir Stephen Lovegrove, UK National Security Adviser in a July 2022 speech in Washington DC. For each of the UK and France, those interests converge at their strongest and more strategic level with India. Additionally, the UK now belongs to the AUKUS 'minilateral'. The UK, like France, has growing defence and security-led strategic partnerships with the US, Australia, Japan and India, the members of the Indo-Pacific Quad – the like-minded grouping growingly focused on the Indian Ocean in the Indo-Pacific context, that is in practice, the Western Indo-Pacific. Both the UK and France engage with the India-led Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI).
13. This projection of the UK's strategic interests in the Western Indo-Pacific theatre, including with India in the context of the May 2021 UK-India 2030 Roadmap, and France's own interests in this region, make a strong case for the UK and France, two bilateral and NATO treaty allies in Europe, to work bilaterally more often, more closely and across a wider range of bilateral common security and defence areas of interest.
14. The UK's reading of Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's meeting with President Macron on 7 November 2022 expressed that both sides 'looked forward to working closely together as allies and neighbours to strengthen bilateral ties and address global challenges.' Two days later President Macron in a speech marking the release of the country's 2022 National Strategic Review called for taking bilateral ties to 'another level'.

15. The contours of such UK-France convergence on the Western Indo-Pacific require greater policy research if they are to be useful to both countries' policymakers. But the possible modalities, for instance in the defence and security area, range from greater cooperation, coordination, networking, even substitution and interchangeability, possibly underpinned by forms of division of labour, for their assessments, capabilities and operations, including with the private sector (for instance in the undersea domain). New modalities may emerge with India in particular, but also with other key littoral or island states, which for many have a history of relating to the UK (e.g Oman, UAE) or France. Some could involve their Combined Joint Expeditionary Force (CJEF). Beyond bilateral cooperations, the UK may consider with France degrees of policy linkage with other groupings invested in Western Indo-Pacific stability, such as I2U2 (Israel, India, US, UAE).
16. Should the UK set aside the 'Western Indo-Pacific' nomenclature as premature or otherwise, the case for including updated language on prospects for working for closely with France in and around the Indian Ocean, up to the Gulf, would remain in full.
17. The case for closer working defence and security-led ties with France in the Western Indo-Pacific could be laid out in updates to the main paragraph devoted to the UK's ties with France; but also in the section devoted to the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt. Corresponding language could also feature in any future update to the UK's March 2021 Defence Command Paper.

Case for more language in the Integrated Review on UK-France Western Indo-Pacific cooperation

18. In the bilateral context of UK-France relations, release of greater details of the UK's aspirations and expectations to work more closely with France, in the Western Indo-Pacific would principally help 'right-size' mutual expectations ahead of the next leaders' summit expected in spring 2023. After challenging years in the bilateral relationship owed principally to the UK's departure from the EU, this UK-France summit will build as much on the considerable depth and width of the existing relationship, as it will define its longer-term outlook in the new age of major power competition.
19. Releasing more details does not obviate the need and possibility to pay heed to sensitivities over the more competitive areas of the UK-France relationship in the Western Indo-Pacific, particularly as the UK seeks to implement its ambitious 2030 roadmap with India; but also in the context where France is growingly framing its Indo-Pacific focus as a major member of the EU, committed to the block's priorities in Indo-Pacific, especially those of the 2022 Strategic Compass.
20. Secondly, greater level of detail on the UK ambitions to work with France in the Western Indo-Pacific would also serve as hard evidence to the UK's existing and prospective partners in the region. Those partners seek greater clarity over how the UK intends to successfully and meaningfully implement its Indo-Pacific pivot given the added challenge of the war in Ukraine. Moreover, as the Indian Ocean is undergoing a rapid redefinition its challenges in terms of traditional, sometimes even military security, India and China, could look favourably to a UK statement of its ambitions with France, to help them assess, from their respective perspectives, the risk of major-power-led growing regional geostrategic instability and their respective needs to hedge against it.
21. Finally, greater level of detail on the UK ambitions to work with France in the Western Indo-Pacific would also serve to bolster the UK's global 'strategic communications', one of the

Integrated Review's priorities. France could also see this favourably after it newly identified in November 2022 the need to elevate 'influence' to a full strategic priority.

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