Catherine Jones, Lecturer, International Relations, University of St Andrews – Written evidence (TRC0016)

Dear Committee Members,

I am making this submission in response to the call for evidence for the inquiry on 'The UK's security and trade relationship with China'.

I am a lecturer in International Relations at the University of St Andrews and the author of 'China's challenge to Liberal Norms' (Palgrave, 2019) and co-editor of 'China-North Korea Relations: between development and security' (Elgar, 2020) and a special issue on East Asia, Peacekeeping and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief, published with the *Australian Journal of International Affairs.*

The views I am expressing in this written evidence are entirely my own and do not represent the views of the University of St Andrews.

This evidence is principally a response to the following questions posed in the call:

1. How can the UK best work with and leverage the resources of its allies and partners?
2. Which are the UK's principal partners and allies with regard to its engagement with China?
    a. What are their principal interests, and to what extent do they align with the UK's interests?
3. What are the implications of China's pursuit of major international strategic initiatives (such as the Belt and Road Initiative) for the UK's foreign, development and security interests? Are these in conflict with, or compatible with, the UK's interests?

Summary of arguments:

First, underpinning the questions asked is an assumption that the UK has clearly articulated and consistently followed objectives. There have been differences in the approaches towards China adopted under the premierships of David Cameron, Theresa May and Boris Johnson. Although there have been some consistent elements, there have also been very different emphasises. This affects both the UK understanding of China and how engagement with allies and partners can be pursued and better leveraged. Who the UK's principle partners are, and how these relationships can best be leveraged, will therefore depend on the articulation of the UK's stated interests.

Second, the implicit assumption in the question about China's 'international strategic initiatives' is a flawed question. I argue China doesn't have a clear set of coherent strategic objectives – even within the

BRI – instead, there are objectives that are sectoral and may internally conflict with each other.

Third, many of our partners especially those in the East Asian region face difficult strategic decisions. These partners are developing their responses to these decisions with different weightings placed on different policies. As a result, western allies and other liberal states are not very united in their global approach, increasingly broad consensus masks considerable disagreement on the details and the direction of global governance. This means these states should not be considered as a collective but rather need to be understood in and of themselves. This knowledge is lacking across the UK (within government, across government departments, and within the wider relevant community especially in academia). The absence of this deep-level of understanding, contributes to the emergence of fissures that exist between the UK and its traditional partners (particularly in Asia) and these fissures are currently being further fractured by the emergence of China.

Developed Argument

One consistent objective of the UK is to support the Rules Based International Order – Engaging with China within international institutions is not a means to tie China to liberal international norms. Rather, international institutions (including/especially multilateral frameworks that China has created) present opportunities for China to change understandings of key terms. An implication of this is that other likeminded states may find alternative definitions articulated by China helpful to their own position. These multilateral fora have become locations of contest leading to a new coalescence, rather than adopting China into previous commonly held understandings. The approach to agreeing broad principles and completing the detail later is a pattern of engagement that can be seen from China's practices in the UN to the Belt and Road.

In the 1990s there was an argument – put forward by John Ikenberry[1] and others – that engaging China within international institutions would socialise China to liberal norms, allowing it to gradually move away from authoritarian practices. What actually appears to have happened is that China learnt norms of practice that enable it to effectively challenge the meaning or terms within international institutions. It has been socialised to the practices of interaction rather than the liberal intensions.[2]

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[1] See for example: Ikenberry, G. 2009. Liberal Internationalism 3.0: America and the Dilemmas of Liberal World Order. *Perspectives on Politics, 7*(1), 71-87. Retrieved March 24, 2021, from http://www.jstor.org/stable/40407217 .

[2] Jones, Catherine. 2020. Contesting within order? China, socialisation, and international practice, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33:1, 105-133, DOI: 10.1080/09557571.2019.1674781

For example, in looking at China's approach to sanctions against North Korea. China votes in favour of sanctions in the UN Security Council and verbally condemns North Korean aggression. However, in the privacy of the UN sanctions committee China is cited as having limited the number, and the rendering of entities, that are subject to sanctions, and in reporting to the panel of experts it has been slow, and prevented experts from accessing some materials. In its own implementation of the sanctions it has its own approach to what different terms in sanctions resolutions means and the restrictions (and interdictions) this requires. I argue that this demonstrated China's exceptional understanding of the practices of the institution – the important difference between the public and private and the levels of definition at each stage that can either be prescriptive or permissive.

There are two important further points here. In the North Korea sanctions example, there is publicly available evidence of differences between the province's implementation and the implementation in Beijing.[3] As a result, it is not as straight forward as to argue that China (as in the party centre) doesn't want to implement sanctions, or that there is any malign intent, but rather this needs to navigate the internal political dynamics in China. This lack of internal cohesion may not serve China's interests internationally if it is widely known. As a result, it is necessary to use tools within institutions, to serve some domestic interests.

The second key point is that China has a long-held belief that security on the Korean peninsula is best achieved through development.[4] Imposing the UN sanctions as understood by Western actors would choke off some of the development that China considers could lead to greater stability and therefore security. As a result, the headline (rapidly achieved) agreement on sanctions, masks or obscures, deep underlying disagreements, that have lasting effects on both implementation and monitoring.

This approach – of agreeing broad common interests and objectives, and determining the detail later – has been partly built-into some of the aspects of the BRI[5] and the Asian Investment Infrastructure Bank (AIIB).[6]

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[3] Jones, Catherine. 2018. 'Sanctions as tools to signal, constrain and coerce' *Asia Policy* 13(3); Jones, Catherine. 2020. Contesting within order? China, socialisation, and international practice, *Cambridge Review of International Affairs*, 33:1, 105-133, DOI: 10.1080/09557571.2019.1674781.

[4] Catherine Jones and Sarah Teitt (2020) *China-North Korea Relations: Between development and Security*, Edward Elgar Press, Cheltenham.

[5] Zeng, Jinghan. 2021. *Slogan Politics*, Palgrave Macmillan: Basingstoke.

[6] This is approach is discussed by Kobayashi, Yuka and Amaia Sanchez. 2017. 'Minilateralism à la Chine Strategic Responsibility in Climate Change and Global Finance' Lau China Institute Policy Paper Series, 6, August 2017, available https://www.google.com/url?sa=t&rct=j&q=&esrc=s&source=web&cd=&cad=rja&uact=8&ved=2ahUKEwiTu6KBscnvAhVSuHEKHaa4C8sQFjABegQIAhAD&url=https%3A%2F%2Feprints.soas.ac.uk%2F24924%2F1%2FKobayashi-Sanchez-Final-policy-brief-17-August-2017.pdf&usg=AOvVaw1bjCUsKlkPrL1qS7cpfRZG accessed 24 March 2021.

In both of these instances, headline agreements have been reached with other states. However, the detail of implementation and oversight have been left to be determined at a later date. Disagreements about how these China-led initiatives are likely to become less agreeable and less in line with the expectations of these other actors as their practices and processes emerge. As with China's own economic development, this will come from learning by doing rather than an overall grand strategy that has clear policy and tactics.

The UK has longstanding partnerships with a range of states in the greater East Asian region. Alliances depend on mechanism of assurance and deterrence. They are also premised on allies not deliberately drawing partners into areas of moral hazard. To date, the alliance management literature has focused on more effective deterrence, and less on what is credible assurance. I argue that in a context in which there is heightened anxiety, there is a greater chance for misperception of the credibility of threats and therefore a more robust approach to assurance is needed. This needs to extend far beyond public announcements.

The UK's defence relationship with Japan has tremendous potential to serve this purpose of providing Japan with credible robust assurances in the future. Currently it is an extensive relationship including areas of defence, trade and cyber.[7] Progress on developing this relationship is gradual and it must be underpinned by a deep understanding of each partner and how they understand their immediate international environment. The UK is home to some world leading Japan experts. However, greater depth and breadth of expertise is needed in order to support efforts to build the defence and foreign affairs relationship in the future. This effort is not only needed in relation to Japan but across the board in respect to Asian states.

This deepened level of understanding is also needed in comprehending the relationship between Asian states. This is especially the case in understanding relations between Japan and the Republic of Korea.[8] Differences in approach to how these two states understand the threat posed by North Korea and the different risks each state is exposed to creates difficulties in developing a common approach between them.[9] As a result, when the UK seeks to engage more deeply in this region the differences between these two friendly states will become more apparent

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[7] Details of the extent of the relations between the UK and Japan are available here: MOFA. 2021. Japan-United Kingdom Relations, https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/europe/uk/index.html accessed 24 March 2021.

[8] Indications of the provision of expertise basis in the UK is indicated through Undergraduate courses provided in for example Japanese, Korean and other languages. An indication is provided by a search of UCAS courses that in anyway reference 'Japanese' 193 courses, from 21 providers, 'Korean' 32courses from 5 providers, 'Thai' 12 courses from 1 provider, and for Vietnamese and Indonesian reports 0 courses and providers. Details and the search engine are available here https://digital.ucas.com/coursedisplay/results/providers?SearchText=Chinese accessed 24 March 2021.

[9] Catherine Jones and Sarah Teitt (2020) *China-North Korea Relations: Between development and Security*, Edward Elgar Press, Cheltenham.

and engaging with both becomes more difficult and challenging. For example, depending on the party in power in South Korea, the preferred policy on how to manage North Korea either tends towards engagement (which is closer to China's approach) or hostility (which is closer to Japan's preference).

Engaging with states in East and Southeast Asia should not only be determined by what these states can do for the UK. It should also reflect the needs of states in these regions. The most significant security threats in Southeast Asia are undoubtably related to climate-induced and humanitarian disasters. The region has developed wide ranging expertise in responding to these threats and in supporting neighbouring states.[10] The regional body – the Association of Southeast Asia Nations (ASEAN) – has developed a centre for regional responses. Supporting these regional efforts to address these crises offers the UK the potential to build confidence in the UK as a partner in the region and support the development in the region.

China is also a key player in these regional responses. However, China is both an opportunity and a challenge for the states of Southeast Asia. Although, it is easy to think that China has a clear coherent strategy in engaging within the region, in the area of humanitarian assistance and responses to natural disasters it is not clear this is the case.[11] It has the potential to disrupt coordination between other partners without providing a coherent alternative.

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[10] See the AHA centre, https://ahacentre.org/ accessed 24 March 2021.

[11] Hirono, Miwa.2020. 'Impact of China's decision-making processes on international cooperation: cases of peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance/disaster relief', *Australian Journal of International Affairs,* 74:1, 54-71, DOI: 10.1080/10357718.2019.1693502