

Written evidence submitted by the Council on Geostrategy (TIP0015)

1. The Council on Geostrategy is an independent non-profit organisation situated in the heart of Westminster. We generate new geostrategic thinking for a more competitive age. Consequently, we focus on an international environment increasingly defined by geopolitical competition and environmental crisis. Our vision is a united, strong and green Britain, which works with other free and open nations to compete geopolitically and lead the world in overcoming the environmental crisis – for a more secure and prosperous future.
2. The author has been working on the European Union's (EU) and UK's role in the Indo-Pacific for some years, having written two pioneering studies on European and/or British geostrategy in the region, in 2009 and 2013, respectively.¹ As a longstanding analyst of the Indo-Pacific, he feels sufficiently qualified to offer this evidence in support of the Foreign Affairs Select Committee's inquiry on 'Implementing the Integrated Review: Tilt to the Indo-Pacific'.
3. Although the term 'Indo-Pacific' was first embraced by German geostrategists in the 1920s and British strategists in the 1960s, it was not until 2007 that the term became a modern geopolitical ordering concept. This occurred when Shinzo Abe, then Prime Minister of Japan, argued in a speech in the Indian Parliament:

...As this new "broader Asia" takes shape at the confluence of the two seas of the Indian and Pacific Oceans, I feel that it is imperative that the democratic nations located at opposite edges of these seas deepen the friendship among their citizens at every possible level.²

Since then, Japan has promoted a 'free and open' Indo-Pacific region stretching from the Gulf of Aden in the west to the Pacific coast of the Americas, and from the Bering Strait in the north all the way down to the Southern Ocean. Other countries – not least the United States (US), India, Australia, France, Germany and the Netherlands – and organisations – the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the European Union (EU) – have also subsequently embraced the concept, albeit in slightly different guises.

4. The UK formally embraced the Indo-Pacific concept in the Integrated Review – 'Global Britain in a Competitive Age: the Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy' – of March 2021. The Integrated Review explained that the UK would undertake a 'tilt' towards the region, insofar as the world's geo-economic centre of gravity has shifted towards the Indo-Pacific area. This was outlined through a two-page sub-strategy within the document, although the Indo-Pacific was alluded to throughout the Integrated Review (and was mentioned more than any other geopolitical theatre; for example, the Indo-Pacific was mentioned 34 times, whereas the Euro-Atlantic, the UK's home region, was mentioned only 15).
5. The Integrated Review identified three key national interests in the Indo-Pacific:
 - a. Seizing on regional economic opportunities, particularly given the fact that the Indo-Pacific is set to be the most youthful, populous and economically productive region throughout the remainder of the 21st century.

¹ James Rogers, 'From Suez to Shanghai: the European Union as Eurasian maritime security', *European Union Institute for Security Studies*, 03/2009, <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/op77.pdf> (found: 23/10/2021) and James Rogers, 'European (British and French) geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 9:1 (2013).

² Abe, S., 'Confluence of the Two Seas', Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan), 22/08/2007, <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html> (found: 23/10/2021).

- b. Promoting an open international order in the region, not least because the Indo-Pacific is ‘at the centre of intensifying geopolitical competition with multiple potential flashpoints’ and because the UK wants to make its voice count in an age when its home region – the Euro-Atlantic – has become less prominent in international relations.
 - c. To promote British values, such as freedom of the individual, transparency, the principle of democratic accountability, and openness – both politically and economically – when other countries, often with different principles, are actively promoting and projecting their own.
6. In terms of challenges and threats, the Integrated Review rightly identified the Indo-Pacific as a region of ‘intensifying geopolitical competition’ (which it identified as the key global threat facing the UK) and the People’s Republic of China (PRC) as a ‘systemic competitor’. This was explained by the Integrated Review in the following way:

China’s increasing power and international assertiveness is likely to be the most significant geopolitical factor of the 2020s. The scale and reach of China’s economy, size of its population, technological advancement and increasing ambition to project its influence on the global stage, for example through the Belt and Road Initiative, will have profound implications worldwide. Open, trading economies like the UK will need to engage with China and remain open to Chinese trade and investment, but they must also protect themselves against practices that have an adverse effect on prosperity and security. Cooperation with China will also be vital in tackling transnational challenges, particularly climate change and biodiversity loss.

7. Indeed, the speed at which the PRC has grown from an economic backwater in the 1980s to the world’s second-largest economy (and the largest in terms of purchasing power parity) and the world’s largest manufacturer or supplier of several key products – from steel and cement to computers and rare earth metals – has been central to the growth of the Indo-Pacific’s geopolitical prominence. The problem is that China’s government – the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) – is a deeply authoritarian regime lacking in any serious checks and balances on the arbitrary concentration and use of power. Worse, this regime sees liberalism and democracy as dangerous ideologies and hostile forces which threaten its own grip on power in China; consequently, it has blocked the Chinese people’s access to much of the World Wide Web and has begun to utilise and systematise new technologies to impose an Orwellian system of control on the Chinese people.³
 8. More importantly, at least in terms of Indo-Pacific geopolitics, while the CCP has always had a hierarchical worldview – it sees itself as central to China’s success and China as central to the Eastern Hemisphere – it now has the material power to enforce its writ beyond China’s shores. The CCP has shown that it is prepared to use the PRC’s growing economic and military power to revise the geopolitical status quo. This can be seen by the way it has trampled on neighbouring countries’ sovereignty and torn-up agreements it previously ratified when they no longer suit its interests. This can be seen in the South China Sea where it has

³ The extent to which the CCP sees liberal democracy as a threat to its own existence can be seen through Document 9, which was produced by the CCP’s General Office and circulated among officials prior to the Third Plenum of the 18th Party Congress in 2013. This document explicitly states that democratic nations’ ‘goal is to use Western constitutional democracy to undermine the [Chinese Communist] Party’s leadership, abolish the People’s Democracy, negate our country’s constitution as well as our established system and principles, and bring about a change of allegiance by bringing Western political systems to China.’ Document 9 sees Chinese communism as locked into a zero-sum struggle with Western liberal democracy. See: ‘Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation’, *ChinaFile*, 08/11/2013, <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation> (found: 23/10/2021).

dismissed surrounding countries and the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) when both got in the way of CCP geostrategic ambitions.

9. The risk is that the Eastern Hemisphere will condensing into at least two poles of geopolitical – and eventually, geoeconomic – competition. In this environment, tantamount to a cold war where both sides are locked into an existential confrontation, the UK may need to further harden its approach towards the PRC and invest in more resources to make its voice heard (and count).
10. That said, the Integrated Review has stressed that ‘What Global Britain means in practice is best defined by actions rather than words.’ Indeed, HM Government has taken a series of bold steps to enhance collective security in the Indo-Pacific by stitching the UK into the region’s economic and strategic architecture. Not only has it continued to deepen bilateral relations with an array of regional powers, including Japan, Australia, India and Vietnam, but it has also played a key role in the formation of the ‘AUKUS’ Pact and in pursuing (and achieving) ‘Dialogue Partner’ status of ASEAN. The UK has also started to realise that it cannot become dependent on the PRC in areas of critical national infrastructure and in terms of next-generation technology, although the implications of this have still to be fully understood and worked out.
11. Insofar as countries supportive of an open international order in the Indo-Pacific may never be ready to enter into a formal alliance such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation for the Indo-Pacific, the UK should continue to stitch itself into collective security in the Indo-Pacific, throwing its weight behind those countries which seek to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific order. To solidify its role in the Indo-Pacific, the UK should:
 - a. Embrace AUKUS and develop closer cooperation with Australia and the United States in terms of nuclear submarine technology, but as importantly next-generation technologies such as Quantum computing, Artificial Intelligence, and novel and potentially game-changing weaponry. While the most sensitive areas of cooperation ought to remain exclusive to Australia, the UK and US (and perhaps, Canada and New Zealand), the inclusion of other trusted partners – such as Japan and some European countries – should not be ruled out in the future.
 - b. Continue to cultivate closer relations with Japan, India and Vietnam, particularly in economic and where possible strategic areas. Although India and Vietnam have multivector foreign policies, the CCP/PRC’s growing power may propel them closer to countries like the UK and its allies and partners. Japan seems particularly keen on closer strategic cooperation with the UK; given their shared interests and how far the partnership between the two countries has come since the first defence agreement was signed in 2012, the two countries would do well to explore more formal defence arrangements, particularly given the close alliance between the US and Japan.
 - c. Deepen interaction with the Five Power Defence Arrangements, particularly through naval deployments to demonstrate that the UK is not a transient actor in the region.
 - d. Pursue closer relations with ASEAN and achieve membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).
 - e. Maintain a persistent naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, from the Gulf through to the Pacific. This presence, to be focused on Operation Kipon in the Gulf and River class Offshore Patrol Vessels in Southeast Asia for the next few years, should be expanded periodically – in keeping with the Integrated Review and the Defence Command Paper – to demonstrate the Royal Navy’s ability to ‘surge’ into the Indo-Pacific in

COUNCIL ON GEOSTRATEGY

support of allies and partners and to dissuade hostile activities. Given the maritime nature of the Indo-Pacific, greater naval power will be central to the UK's interests and ambitions, just as closer alliances and partnerships with key Indo-Pacific countries will matter more than ever. The UK should be prepared to invest further resources into both in the years ahead.

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