

Written evidence submitted from LSE IDEAS (TIP0017)

LSE IDEAS is the foreign policy think tank of the London School of Economics and Political Science. LSE IDEAS seeks to make available to policy makers and the public the research and expertise of LSE in areas including foreign, defence and security policy. The following contributed to LSE IDEAS' submission: Professor Chris Alden, General Sir Richard Barrons, Professor Juergen Haacke, John Raine, Hugh Sandeman, Peter Watkins, and Dr Stephen Woolcock.

What are the UK's main interests in the Indo-Pacific region, and what are the main threats and opportunities?

1. The UK's main interests are economic opportunities in a dynamic Asia Pacific, coupled to security concerns linked to rising great power competition, maritime routes and militarisation in the region. A broader set of related interests centre on shaping the regional order such that it is more conducive to liberal markets and democracy.
2. UK involvement in the Indo-Pacific would also underscore its standing as a global power. The UK has already achieved much by securing a role as an ASEAN Dialogue Partner and through the actions of the carrier strike group, which during its mission to the region conducted exercises with 7 ASEAN navies, a recognition of its constructive role as a regional actor.
3. In the main, German and French interests overlap with the UK's, though the French are in a better position to operationalise the military component than Germany. Anglo-French competition, witnessed recently in the AUKUS agreement and the re-award of the Australian submarine contract, will periodically be a factor but will not override more general shared interests.

What are the geopolitical implications of the UK's potential accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership?

4. The principal geopolitical implication of the UK acceding to the CPTPP would be to confirm the UK's commitment to and support for a rules-based trading system in Asia that remains distinct from the practices pursued - in an increasingly arbitrary fashion - by China.
5. Trade and investment agreements are a means of underpinning strategic political relations. Geopolitically, the CPTPP therefore helps its members by building an alternative order of trading and investment rules to those promoted by either the US or China. For this reason, there is support among current CPTPP members for the UK's application, though the UK will have to negotiate bilaterally with all members before achieving the unanimous consent required for admission.

6. UK membership of the CPTPP would serve the Government's objective of signalling its intention to play a more global role in the world economy. The UK's impact on shaping rules within CPTPP, however, is likely to be less important than its contributions to shaping plurilateral negotiations such as on e-commerce, in which both the US and China are participating.

How can the UK maximise the influence brought by its new status as an ASEAN Dialogue Partner? And what should it use this influence for?

7. Becoming an ASEAN Dialogue Partner (ADP) is a considerable diplomatic achievement but it is only the beginning of what is necessarily a long process of deepening engagement. The UK needs to use its standing as an ADP to join the policy significant ASEAN-led organisations, namely the ASEAN Regional Forum, ASEAN Defence Meeting Plus, and the East Asia Summit.
8. Concurrently, it needs to exhibit consistency of commitment, participating in ASEAN fora at an appropriate level, and to demonstrate its standing as an independent global power (since the AUKUS agreement generated some concern as to the UK's position vis-à-vis US). Principles like 'ASEAN centrality' will obviate against unilateral stances on values by the UK, and are potential points of friction, as are the complex ties ASEAN has with China.

How should the UK respond to China's growing military assertiveness in the region? How should the UK prepare for responding to potential flashpoints like Taiwan and the Senkaku islands?

9. The UK's response to China's military assertiveness should look beyond the known flashpoints such as Taiwan and the Senkaku Islands, to instability from trends such as climate change and population that potentially could give rise to a confrontation with China.
10. Managing China's ambitions over places like Taiwan requires collective security arrangements, involving the US, European powers and like-minded powers in the Indo-Pacific. These collective arrangements will have a military dimension, but to be effective, they will not be solely military, relying instead on a fusion of all levers of power. Full-spectrum collective security arrangements could signal to China a wide range of potential costs of advancing its territorial ambitions through military means.
11. Military deterrence of China depends on the continued transformation of military hard power away from the increasingly obsolescent platforms the West has relied on. China has recognised this transition to new forms of warfare, through the creation of carrier-killing ballistic and cruise missiles and investment in space-based surveillance and reconnaissance for very long range target acquisition.

12. There is still a role for the traditional deployment of naval forces to demonstrate intent and commitment, but any battle fought over Taiwan would be more about precision long-range fires, cyber, social media manipulation and likely autonomous undersea capability than about battles involving manned platforms. Balancing the military equation with China means transforming Western combat power.
13. Thinking about a Chinese invasion of disputed territory (in particular, populated territory) needs to extend beyond resisting the initial invasion itself. This has two dimensions: making the occupation costly (ensuring mass civil resistance through planning, training and preparation), and - a task for collective security arrangements - imposing further costs on China elsewhere in the world.
14. There needs to be a deterrence framework, and this can credibly be led only by the US. The UK should think about how it could best contribute on a meaningful and sustainable basis to such a framework.
15. There is more continuity than change in the UK's "tilt" to the Indo-Pacific, reflecting the narrow space for UK policy towards China. The UK needs a thriving Indo-Pacific and a thriving China economically. And it needs China's cooperation on its stated top international policy priority, addressing climate change. But it cannot ignore increasingly disruptive Chinese behaviour. Brexit has made this dilemma more acute for the UK, but France and Germany are in a similar position. So the British "tilt" to the Indo-Pacific in the Integrated Review was less pronounced than expected, and the Euro-Atlantic remains the region of primary security interest for the UK.
16. China is not yet a military threat to the international order in the Indo-Pacific in the same way as Russia in the Euro-Atlantic, despite the expansion of China's armed forces. An attack on Taiwan would change that. In the meantime, there is a deepening pattern of coercive and/or disruptive Chinese behaviour in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond – intimidation (using military or 'Coastguard' assets) of regional states, cyber-attacks, and other 'sub-threshold' coercion, modulated up or down at short notice. Against that background, periodic aircraft carrier deployments – British or French – do not contribute materially to regional security.
17. The Western country with the most equities at stake in the Indo-Pacific will remain the US. The US appears likely to move towards a more explicit deterrence posture towards China and provide most of the forces required. The UK should start by considering how it can best contribute to this posture, taking into account the views of the US and key regional partners such as Japan and Australia. The same applies to France and Germany, although they will be less comfortable than the UK in explicitly following a US lead.
18. While the UK is a big player militarily in the Euro-Atlantic region, it is much less so in the Indo-Pacific – in terms of simple quantity or mass, its armed forces are smaller than Japan's. To make a sustainable contribution, the UK might better help alleviate the pressures on the US by carrying more of the burden in Europe and the Gulf, facilitating the redeployment of US forces to the Indo-Pacific.

19. In the meantime, the technological competition with China is deepening. China has made no secret of its intent to master critical technologies such as AI and quantum. European powers should work with the US and regional partners to better protect our technological edge where it still exists, to uphold international rules and standards, and to ensure that we do not become dependent on China for future critical technologies in the way that happened with Huawei and 5G.
20. An additional route for European powers to “tilt” to Asia is through deepening security and defence partnerships with allies or partners in the region. To make a difference, European powers must coordinate their military activities in the Indo-Pacific with each other and with regional partners. This has been discussed for some years, for example with respect to naval deployments. To provide some certainty for US planners, France and UK between them could undertake to maintain one carrier in the Indo-Pacific region for say, 90%, of the time.
21. European powers must also try to develop a long-term strategy for the region. The vast space of the Indo-Pacific region provides strategic depth, which European partners in the region should seek to use.

How can the UK build on and enhance existing defence arrangements in the region, such as the Quad, the Five Power Defence Arrangements, and Five Eyes?

22. The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) remain the only formal multilateral defence arrangement in the Indo-Pacific. The UK should continue to encourage the FPDA to deepen practical cooperation between its members, including exercises and training, and explore possibilities for engagement with other regional players.
23. As a defence partner (to a greater and lesser degree) of the existing members of the Quad, the UK should welcome an opportunity or invitation to join the group on a "Quad plus" basis. Given the history of close defence cooperation between the UK and France, it would seem sensible for both countries to join at the same time.
24. The AUKUS agreement is, similarly, a minilateral arrangement that offers a pragmatic way of not only deepening cooperation among like-minded countries in (or with interests in) the Indo-Pacific but also contributes to deterrence. AUKUS seeks to foster deeper integration of security and defence-related science, technology, industrial bases and supply chains, starting with collaboration on future nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Australian Navy.
25. The coordination and development of the UK's existing intelligence and security relationships should be integral to the tilt to the Indo-Pacific. These relationships will have to accommodate the balancing which partners make between their interests in China and partnering with the UK. Similar constraints will flow from the differences in legal frameworks and intelligence and security cultures between the UK and regional partners, limiting the level of operational co-operation.

26. The Five Eyes has resisted expansion of its core membership and there is no indication that it is yet prepared to include other countries. It relies upon a unique blend of shared political, legal and security cultures. It lacks the formality of most multilateral organisations, reflecting the importance of the underlying affinities and shared history that generate the trust on which the intelligence sharing and operational cooperation depend.
27. The strength of these affinities has also made the Five Eyes reluctant to expand despite the desire of others to join. But if it were to expand, it would be invidious to select a single country ahead of other security partners. The inclusion of Japan, for example, and not France or Germany would be controversial.
28. Against that, Five Eyes members have historically developed often deep relationships with other non-Five Eyes members, a formula which is applicable to partnerships in the Indo-Pacific including Japan. Although the Five Eyes is generally understood as an intelligence-sharing arrangement, it is also active in other areas - particularly Cyber and Space. The Five Eyes Combined Space Operations (CSpO) initiative was launched in 2014. This provides an example of Five Eyes engaging with other countries - Germany formally joined in December 2019 and France in February 2020.
29. This model of "Five Eyes Plus" in a specific area of cooperation could be adopted elsewhere. Just as Germany and France (but not Japan) have joined the CSpO, so Japan (but not France and/or Germany) might conceivably join another Five Eyes initiative. The UK should encourage a pragmatic approach along these lines.

What should the UK's approach be to strengthening relations with Indonesia? In what areas should the UK prioritise deeper collaboration (e.g. trade, education, science and tech, defence and security, development)?

30. Strengthening relations with Indonesia should be a significant objective for the UK in the Indo-Pacific region, given Indonesia's geographic position, rising economic standing, size/population and military posture. Indonesia is widely regarded as the cornerstone – or indispensable state – within ASEAN and Southeast Asia more generally for all of the factors listed above. Providing recognition to this rising status and working with Indonesia in multilateral fora including the G20 as a crucial state in the 'league of democracies' would be important route to engagement.
31. Collaboration in the military sector/defence diplomacy should also be a priority. Educational exchanges are critical to developing near term collaborations in science, technology and public policy that would in the longer run pay dividends for UK interests. Development cooperation is another area where UK expertise, particularly as it relates to scaling up from a middle-income economy to higher value added production and services, would be valued.