

## Written evidence - James Rogers, Director, Global Britain Programme, Henry Jackson Society (FPW0026)

### Outline of this submission

This submission concentrates on the resurgence of state-based threats and intensifying wider state competition and the erosion of the international rules-based order. The first part of this submission focuses on the character of the ‘rules-based’ order. The second section looks at the role of the United Kingdom (UK) in this order. The third section outlines the challenges the rules-based order has faced in the past, before explaining how it is currently being eroded. The last section offers a strategy for the UK to help manage the rules-based system more effectively, with the objective of reinforcing it.

### THE CHARACTER OF THE INTERNATIONAL ORDER

- 1 Terms such as the ‘international rules-based order’, the ‘liberal international order’, the ‘international community’, and the ‘free and open international order’, among others, are frequently deployed by Western governments, but infrequently conceptualised or explained.<sup>1</sup>
- 2 In British discourse, the rules-based order is often articulated alongside ‘fundamental values’, namely ‘respect for human dignity, human rights, freedom, democracy and equality.’<sup>2</sup> As such, the rules-based order seems to be understood to be predicated on three different but interwoven components: politically, it is comprised of liberal-democratic nation-states; economically, it involves globalisation, whereby the world is progressively linked together in a more integrated economic system; and, diplomatically, it is founded on expectations of peaceful change, where its members structure their relations through a plethora of international laws and organisations.
- 3 In other words, the rules-based order is an attempt by a community of like-minded democratic states to ‘domesticate’ the international system in such a way that it becomes more like an international society, based on a clear set of rules, to try and prevent revisionist behaviour.
- 4 Therefore, this order is not ‘natural’ or permanent; its continued existence depends ultimately on the willingness of its members to uphold it and its principles, particularly when confronted by authoritarian states that seek to revise the rules or challenge the liberal assumptions on which it is based. It should not be forgotten that the rules-based order came under violent assault on several occasions -- both regionally and globally -- during the last century.
- 5 Since its emergence, countries have tended to position themselves in relation to the rules-based order in four different ways:
  - Custodians: countries that created and/or now *actively* support the rules-based order. These countries have benefited most from the system in terms of influence and status and without

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<sup>1</sup> The US National Defence Strategy now utilises the latter term. See: Mattis, J., ‘Summary of the 2018 National Defence Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge’, *US Department of Defense*, January 2018, available at: <https://www.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf>, last visited: 20 February 2018.

<sup>2</sup> See: May, T., ‘PM speech at Munich Security Conference’, *Gov.uk*, 17 February 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-at-munich-security-conference-17-february-2018>, last visited: 22 February 2018.

them it would almost certainly fracture or collapse. They are paternalist net providers of security for the overall system.

- **Coasters:** countries that are generally inside the rules-based order, but support it *inactively*. They do not challenge it directly, but nevertheless do little to protect it. They break even in terms of the security they provide within the system.
- **Shirkers:** countries that generally ‘freeride’, in whole or part, on the order, and particularly its custodians. These members benefit from the peace and prosperity the system provides, but give back little in return, despite often having the means to do so. They are narcissistic net recipients of security in the system.
- **Revisers:** countries that are opposed, in whole or part, either functionally or geographically, to the rules-based order itself, and particularly to its custodians. They frequently deny the political principles and structures on which the rules-based system depends. In other words, revisers are almost always authoritarian regimes, which seek to reverse or alter the established order in accordance with their own interests.

## THE ROLE OF THE UK IN THE RULES-BASED ORDER

- 6 The UK has always been a leading custodian of the rules-based order. Indeed, the construction of this order has largely gone hand-in-hand not only with the development of liberalism and constitutional democracy in the UK over the past two hundred years, but also with the country’s emergence as the foremost maritime power during the late eighteenth century.
- 7 During the Second World War, the United States (US) – realising that its geopolitical interests would be largely coterminous with those of the UK – took over from the UK as the lynchpin of the rules-based system. Insofar as the US emerged decisively during the war as the dominant liberal democratic state and the world’s largest and most technologically advanced economy, the UK worked with the US to expand and embed a more institutionalised version of the rules-based order, with the UK playing a special role in the creation of the post-war European architecture (e.g., the Council of Europe, the Western Union, the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation and the Western European Union).
- 8 Consequently, the rules-based order has become a geopolitical order, rooted in the North Atlantic but spreading progressively into Europe and across the Pacific into Asia. As such, it has been undergirded, ultimately, by UK and US naval strength, alongside an array of military bases from which to project armed force, both to dissuade and deter the revisionists, as well as to reassure the coasters and fill in for the shirkers.

## THE CHALLENGE TO THE RULES-BASED ORDER

9. During the twentieth century, the rules-based order came under violent attack from aggressive totalitarian ideologies in Germany, Japan, and Russia. However, lacking the means to overcome the UK and US, Nazi Germany and the Empire of Japan were vanquished and forcefully integrated into the rules-based order after the Second World War. The Soviet Union lacked the ideological and material means to compete with the UK and US and eventually fell apart. Since 1991, and until relatively recently, a plethora of regional powers – such as Serbia, Iraq and Iran – also sought to challenge or revise, albeit regionally, the rules-based order, although they were simply too small or weak to mount a truly existential challenge.

10. Since 2010, the rules-based order has come under far more intense pressure, which may become greater yet:
- Due to ‘war weariness’ and the Financial Crisis, the UK and US have experienced significant political and economic dislocation, which seems to have sapped, to some extent, their willingness to continue to act as custodians.
  - Many of the leading and closest allies of the UK and US have emerged as shirkers insofar as they fail to share responsibility in the burden of upholding the rules-based order.<sup>3</sup> This forces the UK and US to do more (and spread their forces increasingly thinly), which places additional – and potentially degenerative – stresses on their economies and societies.
  - Russia has emerged as a revisionist power, which has sought to alter not only the regional order in Eastern Europe in a geopolitical context, but has also waged an aggressive political war to degrade the legitimacy of democratic institutions in liberal states.<sup>4</sup>
  - China’s rapid and sizeable military modernisation programmes – allied to the expansion of its geopolitical footprint with the construction of ports, railways, roads and even artificial military islands (‘One belt, One road’) – have undermined the security system in East and South-East Asia, as well as the broader Indo-Pacific.
  - The digital communication revolution has accelerated, with more people than ever equipped with electronic devices, and connected through social media, providing a new means for the revisers and shirkers to influence social, political and economic ideas and traditions in unpredictable ways.

## HOW SHOULD THE UK RESPOND?

11. As The Henry Jackson Society’s recent ‘Audit of Geopolitical Capability’ has shown, the UK remains one of the most-capable countries in the world, and will likely remain so well into the current century.<sup>5</sup> It has many strengths across the geographic, economic, demographic technological, diplomatic, military and cultural domains.
12. Given the importance placed by British governments on the rules-based order, what the UK needs is an integrated strategy to uphold it. This strategy should be predicated on a four-fold approach:

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<sup>3</sup> For example, many large and wealthy European countries – not least Germany, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands – have cut back on their military, intelligence and/or Overseas Development Assistance (ODA) spending and capabilities to such an extent that their ability to protect the rules-based order has largely collapsed. Japan, Australia and Canada have also held their military spending down, despite experiencing increasing volatility in the Indo-Pacific region. See: Rogers, J., Wright, J., ‘What the European Union owes the United Kingdom’, *The Henry Jackson Society*, December 2017, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/HJS-Policy-Briefing-What-the-EU-Owes-the-UK-Final.pdf>, last visited: 20 February 2018.

<sup>4</sup> See: Rogers, J., Tyushka, A., “‘Hacking’ into the West: Russia’s “Anti-Hegemonic” Drive and the Strategic Narrative Offensive”, *Defence Strategic Communications*, 2017, available at: <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/james-rogers-andriy-tyushka-hacking-west-russias-anti-hegemonic-drive-and-strategic-narrative>, last visited: 22 February 2018.

<sup>5</sup> See: Rogers, J., ‘An Audit of Geopolitical Capability: A Comparison of Eight Major Powers’, *The Henry Jackson Society*, 2017, available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/An-audit-of-geopolitical-capabilities-part-1.pdf>, last visited: 20 February 2018.

- Consolidate the custodians: to no small extent, the durability of the prevailing rules-based order is dependent on the ability and willingness of countries like the UK and US to support and uphold it, and particularly to draw in more liberal democratic states in helping to support their wider strategic efforts.
  - Resist the revisers: if any country or group of countries seek to revise, particularly through violent means, the rules-based order, the UK should be prepared to prevent it/them through dissuasion and deterrence. And, as in the past, if dissuasion and deterrence fail and hostilities break out, the UK should be willing to use armed force to redress the challenge.
  - Co-opt the coasters: insofar as the rules-based order will only survive if enough countries gravitate towards its custodians, the UK should seek to draw in those countries that currently coast within the order, encouraging them to do more to contribute more to upholding and defending it.
  - Scold the shirkers: the UK should be more willing to hold its allies to account, particularly when they fail to meet their commitments and obligations. The UK should find creative new ways to encourage them to do more. Wealthy countries like Germany, Italy, Spain and the Netherlands – as well as Canada, Australia and Japan – should be engaged more robustly, and the UK should be more prepared to actively reward those allies that do increase their defence, intelligence and ODA spending, while rebuking those that do not. For example, those allies that increase their spending could receive preferential political support, heightened defence engagement, explicit military support, or even financial assistance (particularly if they are significantly less wealthy than the UK).
13. But most importantly of all, the UK would do well to maintain the capability and political will to underwrite the rules-based order itself, particularly in Europe, the Gulf and South-East Asia, areas where it has vital interests and where it could have the most decisive impact. This means it requires strong armed, intelligence and diplomatic services, as well as the political willingness to provide them with the means to undertake their responsibilities. Given the rising challenges to the rules-based order, the UK should contemplate spending a greater allocation of its national output on these vital national capabilities to uphold it.

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