

# CORE ASSUMPTIONS AND BRITISH STRATEGIC POLICY: TOWARDS THE NEXT FOREIGN, SECURITY AND DEFENCE REVIEW

BY JAMES ROGERS



**GLOBAL  
BRITAIN  
PROGRAMME**

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At the end of the Cold War, 'enlightened' Western statesman again turned towards internationalism - as they had done between the wars and also during the final phase of the Second World War. This time they relabelled it 'globalisation', while once again cutting our military capability. This incisive report critically analyses the weakness of our current posture and is a wake-up call for the overdue 'regeneration of British state power'.

**- The Rt. Hon. Dr Julian Lewis MP**

*Chairman of the Defence Select Committee, 2015-2019*

*Member of Parliament for New Forest East, 1997-*

## Foreword

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British strategic policy for the past three decades has been founded upon several core assumptions birthed at the dawn of the end of the Cold War.

It is in this vein that Britain has conducted itself on the world stage, from the fall of the Berlin Wall to today, with varying success. These assumptions have guided British strategic thinking as it has sought to secure peace in Europe and to protect the wider rules-based international system.

These are well-tested assumptions, but ones that were conceived in a past age. The harsh reality is that the world we find ourselves in as we enter the 2020s is almost entirely alien to the one at the dawn of the 1990s, making the principles that Number 10, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence are guided by progressively obsolete.

This report by James Rogers not only challenges these principles but also makes a stimulating and persuasive argument for Britain to break out of its archaic constraints. In addition, it offers a number of ideas for 'Global Britain' to pursue as it seeks to reorient its foreign, security and defence policy as it leaves the European Union.

It makes the case that while Britain is not a superpower like the United States or the People's Republic of China, it will remain a global power unlike Japan or Germany. Not only has Britain's history been global but its maritime tradition, its deep belief in free trade and the mindset of its people will also still flourish when the current controversies over Brexit are but a memory.

This report should be required reading for all those interested in Britain's future – especially as the country embarks on the deepest foreign, security and defence review in a generation.

**- The Rt. Hon. Sir Malcolm Rifkind**

*Chairman of the Intelligence and Security Committee, 2010–2015*

*Secretary of State for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, 1995–1997*

*Secretary of State for Defence, 1992–1995*

*Member of Parliament for Kensington, 2005–2015*

## About the Author

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**James Rogers** is Director of the Global Britain Programme at the Henry Jackson Society, of which he is a founding member. From 2012 to 2017 he held a range of positions at the Baltic Defence College in Estonia, including Acting Dean, Director of the Department of Political and Strategic Studies, and Lecturer in Strategic Studies. He has been an Associate Fellow (2013) and Visiting Fellow (2008) at the European Union Institute for Security Studies in Paris. He has also worked on projects for a range of organisations, including the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, RAND Europe, the European Council on Foreign Relations and the Royal Institute for International Relations (Egmont). He has been called to give oral evidence to the Foreign Affairs Committee and the Defence Committee in the Houses of Parliament, as well as the Subcommittee on Security and Defence at the European Parliament. He holds a first-class BSc Econ (Hons) in International Politics and Strategic Studies from Aberystwyth University and an MPhil in Contemporary European Studies from the University of Cambridge.

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## Executive Summary

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- In 2020, the United Kingdom will undertake the deepest foreign, security and defence policy review since the end of the Cold War.
  - This process will force British strategists and policymakers to grapple with their most deeply held core assumptions in relation to their country's global posture and strategic policy - with its many interlocking foreign, security, defence and development related components.
  - These assumptions animate the way that a nation's strategists and policymakers perceive of, and react to, the world around them.
  - The core assumptions behind Britain's strategic policy changed dramatically with the collapse of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War. Old certainties faded by the wayside as new assumptions took hold during the 1990s.
  - This report identifies those core assumptions, especially those that have structured and guided British strategic policy since the end of the Cold War. It detects and outlines fifteen assumptions, which grew in strength under the tenure of successive governments.
  - Relating to trends at the global level, geographic regions of concern, and British national priorities, these core assumptions chimed with the times and helped Britain establish a relatively consistent and ambitious strategic policy:
    - Global assumptions:
      1. Globalisation is an immutable and desirable force;
      2. The West will remain technologically dominant;
      3. Liberalism and democracy will continue to consolidate in countries around the world;
      4. 'Zones of chaos' are the primary threat;
      5. Global governance is replacing geopolitical competition.
    - Geopolitical assumptions:
      6. The European continent is Britain's overriding geostrategic concern;
      7. Britain is central to the Euro-Atlantic System;
      8. The region 'East of Suez' - the Gulf and Middle East - is of growing importance to British interests;
      9. The Indo-Pacific zone primarily presents economic opportunities;
      10. Nations will respect globally 'shared spaces'.
    - National assumptions:
      11. Britain is a pivotal - but declining - power;
      12. The pursuit of national security and economic growth are Britain's primary national interests;
      13. Britain is best served by working with allies and partners, particularly the US;
      14. National cohesion is becoming less relevant;
      15. Military and diplomatic power have declined in importance.
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- However, this report also demonstrates how the recent deterioration of the international environment has drawn several existing assumptions into question, a problem compounded by the country's decision in 2016 to withdraw from the European Union. The onset of climate change has further complicated Britain's existing strategic policy, even down to the political and economic levels.
- This analysis reveals that, in the new strategic environment, British strategists and policymakers need to re-appraise the country's core strategic assumptions to better prepare for a more unpredictable and competitive future.
- The report goes on to identify two visions - 'isolationism' and 'compensationism' - that have been put forward as replacements for Britain's global strategic policy, before explaining why these approaches are emotionally-charged and insufficient for dealing with the emergence of the most pressing geopolitical challenges now facing the country.
- In response, the study contends that the linkages between globalisation, climate change and geopolitical competition must be better understood in the upcoming foreign, security and defence review if 'Global Britain' is to prosper and secure its national objectives and interests in the 21st century.

## List of Acronyms

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DFID	Department for International Development
EU	European Union
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GNI	Gross National Income
GNSS	Global Navigation Satellite System
MDP	Modernising Defence Programme
MOD	Ministry of Defence
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSCR	National Security Capability Review
NSS	National Security Strategy
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PRC	People's Republic of China
SDR	Strategic Defence Review
SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review
UK	United Kingdom
US	United States

## 1. Introduction

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Just before the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) Leaders' Meeting in early December 2019, Boris Johnson, leader of the Conservative Party, announced that his government – if re-elected – would “undertake the deepest review of Britain's security, defence and foreign policy since the end of the Cold War”. He went on:

It will also consider Global Britain's foreign policy: British alliances and diplomacy, shifts of power and wealth to Asia, how we can best use our huge expenditure on international development, and the role of technology.<sup>1</sup>

In light of the Conservative Party's victory in the general election on 12 December 2019, Queen Elizabeth II confirmed that the strategic review would take place in 2020 as she opened the Houses of Parliament on 19 December 2019.<sup>2</sup>

If it is to be deep and effective, this upcoming review will need to grapple with some deeply held core assumptions about Britain's global position and strategic policy – with its many interlocking geopolitical, diplomatic and military components. These assumptions are often strongly but implicitly held views – forming an intellectual framework – about the nature and character of the international system, conflict and war, and the way agents and structures interact with one another. Some assumptions intersect with others, creating an integrated discursive system, while others can be in tension, particularly in relation to ends, ways and means. When the core assumptions reflect or reinforce phenomena and events, they help guide strategists and policymakers in the management or transformation of a country's international role and position.

However, when they cannot explain new developments, or be adjusted to accommodate new phenomena, strategic core assumptions may undergo structural dislocation. When this happens, a country's strategic policy can go awry, leading to mistakes or even outright disaster. A case in point is the early and mid-1930s when the dominant assumptions of British strategists and policymakers were out of sync with the worldview and intentions of a growing strategic adversary – in this case, Nazi Germany.<sup>3</sup>

As the United Kingdom (UK) starts a new strategic review, it appears to be at a moment of inflection. Insofar as the House of Commons finally approved the European Union (EU) (Withdrawal Agreement) Bill on 20 December 2019, the country will withdraw from the EU on 31 January 2020. The nation's decision to leave the EU has taken place during a period of ongoing regional and global change. This makes it an ideal time to re-appraise Britain's strategic policy, particularly by interrogating its underlying core assumptions. With that in mind, this paper seeks to identify and assess the core assumptions that have underpinned British strategic policy since the end of the Cold War (1989–1991). It then goes on to offer a number of policy recommendations to aid British strategists and policymakers as they embark on the upcoming review of UK foreign, security and defence policy.

### 1.1 Britain's strategic policy in the post-Cold War era

Since the end of the Cold War, British strategic policy has been both relatively ambitious and broadly consistent, based on a series of interlocking and intersecting assumptions and

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<sup>1</sup> 'Boris Johnson Pledges Security, Defence And Foreign Policy Review', *Forces Network*, 1 December 2019, available at: <https://www.forces.net/news/boris-johnson-pledges-security-defence-and-foreign-policy-review>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>2</sup> 'The Queen's Speech 2019: Background briefing notes', *Prime Minister's Office* (2019), 19 December 2019, available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/853886/Queen\\_s\\_Speech\\_December\\_2019\\_-\\_background\\_briefing\\_notes.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/853886/Queen_s_Speech_December_2019_-_background_briefing_notes.pdf), last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>3</sup> For an overview of the extent to which Nazi Germany saw Britain as its primary opponent, see: Simms, B., *Hitler: Only the world was enough* (London: Allan Lane, 2019).

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aspirations. Of course, most of these assumptions did not change overnight, but evolved gradually over the course of the 1990s, 2000s and 2010s. Some even tap into previous core assumptions, many of which took shape in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War – or earlier still. Others have varied in force since the 1990s, having been tweaked or moderated to stay relevant so as to accommodate new phenomena and events. The Conservative government led by John Major in the early 1990s paved the way for this paradigm, but the victory of New Labour in 1997 under Tony Blair led to its full realisation.

Robin Cook, the then Foreign Secretary, defined this new strategic paradigm in his ‘Mission Statement’ for the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO) in 1997 as “a global foreign policy”.<sup>4</sup> Taking shape during a period when the West was dominant across the cultural, technological, economic and military vectors, this global approach anticipated that globalisation, allied to the spread of liberal values and democratic structures, would fundamentally redefine international affairs – especially in Europe. It also assumed that Britain would use its considerable power and influence as a leading nation to help facilitate that change – as “a force for good in the world”, not least in binding together and mobilising the strength of the two sides of the North Atlantic.<sup>5</sup>

This ‘global’ paradigm can be found throughout an array of key documents produced since the 1990s – national security strategies, strategic defence and security reviews and ministerial speeches, such as those to the Lord Mayor’s Banquet or Mansion House, or to the conferences of political parties. It is particularly visible in the 1998 Strategic Defence Review (SDR), which set the strategic scene and tone for the next 12 years – updated with a ‘new chapter’ in 2002 and a ‘white paper’ in 2003.<sup>6</sup> It can also be found in much of the subsequent strategic and defence reviews, to some extent up to and including the 2015 National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review (NSS and SDSR).<sup>7</sup> From these documents and speeches, along with general policy choices, the core assumptions that have animated the development and dispersal of British strategic policy for much of the past three decades can be discovered and delineated.

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<sup>4</sup> Cook, R., ‘Mission Statement’, *Foreign and Commonwealth Office*, 12 May 1997, available at: [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/19991218205946/http://www.fco.gov.uk:80/text\\_only/directory/dynpage.asp?Page=26](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/19991218205946/http://www.fco.gov.uk:80/text_only/directory/dynpage.asp?Page=26), last visited: 10 October 2019.

<sup>5</sup> This term was invoked many times by Robin Cook, the then Foreign Secretary, and Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister, as well as by other ministers. See: Cook, R., ‘Robin Cook’s speech on the government’s ethical foreign policy’, *The Guardian*, 12 May 1997, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/1997/may/12/indonesia.ethicalforeignpolicy>, last visited: 10 October 2019.

<sup>6</sup> See: ‘Strategic Defence Review’, *HM Government* (1998), available at: [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121018172816/http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/65F3D7AC-4340-4119-93A2-20825848E50E/O/sdr1998\\_complete.pdf](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121018172816/http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/65F3D7AC-4340-4119-93A2-20825848E50E/O/sdr1998_complete.pdf), last visited: 3 October 2019; Ministry of Defence, *The Strategic Defence Review: A New Chapter* (London: Her Majesty’s Stationary Office, 2002), pp. 4-29; and ‘Delivering Security in a Changing World: Defence White Paper’, *HM Government* (2003), available at: [https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121018172935/http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/051AF365-0A97-4550-99C0-4D87D7C95DED/O/cm60411\\_whitepaper2003.pdf](https://webarchive.nationalarchives.gov.uk/20121018172935/http://www.mod.uk/NR/rdonlyres/051AF365-0A97-4550-99C0-4D87D7C95DED/O/cm60411_whitepaper2003.pdf), last visited: 3 October 2019.

<sup>7</sup> ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review’, *HM Government* (2015), available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/555607/2015\\_Strategic\\_Defence\\_and\\_Security\\_Review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/555607/2015_Strategic_Defence_and_Security_Review.pdf), last visited: 3 October 2019.

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## 2. British Strategic Policy: Fifteen Core Assumptions

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It is possible to identify fifteen core assumptions behind Britain's post-Cold War global strategic policy. These assumptions can be grouped into three baskets: some focus on the global level, some are based on the relative political significance of geographic spaces, while others still relate to the national level. At the highest level, the global assumptions provide the intellectual bedrock for Britain's strategic policy, while the geopolitical and national assumptions intersect with them, creating a wider formation.

### 2.1 Global assumptions

#### 2.1.1 Globalisation is an immutable and desirable force

Of all the fifteen assumptions, it is the supposed immutability of globalisation that has most animated Britain's post-Cold War strategic policy. As globalisation intensified during the 1990s and 2000s it came to be seen as an unstoppable force, to which the UK and other countries could only react. As Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister, told the Labour Party's Annual Conference in 2005:

I hear people say we have to stop and debate globalisation. You might as well debate whether autumn should follow summer. [...] In the era of rapid globalisation, there is no mystery about what works: an open, liberal economy, prepared constantly to change to remain competitive. The new world rewards those who are open to it. Foreign investment improves our economy.<sup>8</sup>

Equally, not only was globalisation seen as unchallengeable, but it was also seen as desirable. As Jack Straw, the then Foreign Secretary, put it in 2001:

We could ... retreat into our national economies and close our markets. But this would put at risk the real benefits that globalisation, and global capitalism, have brought to millions. The right choice is to preserve and maximise the benefits while minimising the risks through joint global action.<sup>9</sup>

Intersecting with (neo-)liberal economic discourse, which took hold in the UK and the United States (US) in the 1980s, it was expected that globalisation would open the world like never before: national borders would be rendered increasingly superfluous; a more integrated and prosperous global economy would be unleashed; and the 'traditional' nation-state would be undermined as the primary locus of economic and political organisation, leading ultimately to the transformation of politics into mere administration.<sup>10</sup> The state would be suspended in animation as its roles and functions were transferred down to the individual and up to international institutions and regional supranational organisations – such as the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and the EU. It was hoped that these bodies would then break down outstanding economic barriers, fostering further prosperity, while facilitating progressive

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<sup>8</sup> Blair, T., 'Conference Speech 2005', *The Guardian*, 27 September 2005, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2005/sep/27/labourconference.speeches>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>9</sup> Straw, J., 'Globalisation is good for us', *The Guardian*, 10 September 2001, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2001/sep/10/globalisation.jackstraw>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>10</sup> This perspective was best captured by Tony Blair in a speech on national identity in 2000: "We are living through a period of unprecedented change. The exponential growth of information and communication technologies is transforming the world's economies and making them increasingly interdependent. The breakup of the postwar international order and globalisation are calling into question systems constructed around the nation state. New ideologies of personal liberation and opportunities for self-fulfilment, made possible by social and economic change, are transforming traditional social structures and turning some inwards to themselves rather than looking outward to the nation and the state." See: Blair, T., 'Tony Blair's Britain speech', *The Guardian*, 18 March 2000, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2000/mar/28/britishidentity.tonyblair>, last visited: 9 October 2019. It is also reflected in the works of Robert Cooper, the former Deputy Secretary for Defence and Overseas Affairs in the Cabinet Office and UK Special Representative to Afghanistan. See: Cooper, R., *The Postmodern State and the World Order* (London: Demos, 1996) and Cooper, R., *The Breaking of Nations* (London: Atlantic Books, 2003).

cooperation – and hence, peace – between countries to confront common challenges that themselves cut across national lines.

However, since the Financial Crisis (2007-2009) and subsequent Great Recession, these assumptions have come increasingly under the microscope. While it is difficult to counter the claim that globalisation is an unstoppable force – the development of new technologies that compress space and time has been a constant in human history – it is no longer seen as a universal panacea, either in terms of economic openness or national sovereignty.<sup>11</sup> In particular, questions have been raised – not least since the EU referendum in 2016 – about globalisation’s uneven impact at the national level, as well as the desirability of the attendant (neo-)liberal orthodoxy, with its rigid policies of openness and deregulation.<sup>12</sup>

In this environment, it is likely that British strategists and policymakers, like those in other developed countries, will be forced to grapple with globalisation in a different way, as domestic political forces – such as the so-called ‘left behind’ in rural areas and provincial towns – mobilise to demand alternative solutions. These may assume a ‘national’ or ‘populist’ flavour as the public mood turns against further integration at the international and supranational levels. As it does so, new strategies may be required to level-up and reconstruct the national economic level, to work democratic oversight back into the economy.

### *2.1.2 The West will remain technologically dominant*

At the end of the Cold War, the West – of which the UK was a leading power – appeared to be technologically ascendant. Britain held second place in terms of the number of Nobel Prizes won by researchers working within its universities, which themselves were widely regarded around the world.<sup>13</sup> Indeed, already in 1989, Tim Berners-Lee, a British computer scientist, developed what would arguably become the most important invention of the post-Cold War period – the World Wide Web, which allowed the masses to make use of the internet. Together, the internet and the World Wide Web – combined with mobile telecommunications – revolutionised the cost, speed and scale through which people could communicate with one another.

It was anticipated that the resulting ‘information age’ would compound the West’s geostrategic reach and military edge. The strategic and tactical effectiveness of new weapons like Tomahawk cruise missiles and laser-guided bombs, when fired from UK and US submarines or warplanes, was confirmed during the conflicts of the 1990s – from Iraq in 1991 to Kosovo in 1999. Combined with other ‘network enabled’ systems, these gave the UK and its allies the means to destroy enemy targets with a degree of precision hitherto unknown, to the extent that military interventions came to be seen increasingly as a “spectator sport”.<sup>14</sup>

Yet, with the expansion of research and development in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and other countries in the Indo-Pacific, it is no longer clear whether the Western democracies – even the UK and US – will be able to uphold their technological edge. Between 1991 and 2016, the PRC leapt over six countries to become the world’s second largest spender in terms of Research and Development, while Britain fell from the world’s fifth to seventh

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<sup>11</sup> For an overview, see: Rodrik, D., ‘The great globalisation lie’, *Prospect*, 12 December 2017, available at: <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/the-great-globalisation-lie-economics-finance-trump-brexit>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>12</sup> The best overview of this idea is by David Goodhart, the Head of Demography, Immigration and Integration at Policy Exchange. He argues that British society has polarised into two groups since the end of the Cold War: ‘anywheres’, those Britons who have been drawn into the networks of globalisation, and ‘somewheres’, those who remain ‘rooted’ in their local communities. See: Goodhart, D., *The Road to Somewhere: The Populist Revolt and the Future of Politics* (London: C. Hurst and Co. Ltd., 2017).

<sup>13</sup> For Nobel Prize winners by country, see: ‘All Nobel Prizes’, *The Nobel Prize*, available at: <https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/lists/all-nobel-prizes>, last visited: 1 January 2020. For university rankings, see: ‘World University Rankings’, *Times Higher Education*, available at: <https://www.timeshighereducation.com/>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>14</sup> McInnes, C., *Spectator Sport War: The West and Contemporary Conflict* (Boulder, Colorado: 2002).

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largest spender.<sup>15</sup> Chinese investment into research and innovation has allowed the country to make significant advances in terms of fifth generation mobile telecommunications systems, data storage, mass surveillance, and artificial intelligence – technologies often considered at the frontier of scientific development. The PRC has also made strides in terms of military technology – particularly advanced missiles – which may provide it with the means to deny its opponents access to large swathes of the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>16</sup> Here, unless British research and development spending is both increased and targeted more effectively, the UK will lose what remains of its technological leadership, in both civil and military terms.

### *2.1.3 Liberalism and democracy will continue to consolidate in countries around the world*

Since the end of the Cold War, the (neo-)liberal political discourse that took hold in the UK and the US in the 1980s expended until it enjoyed a near-unabashed global ascendancy. It gripped Britain and other Western societies to the extent that humanity was widely understood to be moving towards a single political destination.<sup>17</sup> As Tony Blair told the Lord Mayor's Banquet in 2002:

The great ideological battle between Communism and Western liberal democracy is over. Most countries believe both in markets and in a necessary role for government. There will be thunderous debates inside nations about the balance, but the struggle for world hegemony by political ideology is gone.<sup>18</sup>

Due to globalisation, it was expected that even the most brittle authoritarian regimes would not be immune: as they were drawn into the networks of globalisation and traded their way to prosperity, it was hoped that a middle class would emerge, which would demand political reforms, leading ultimately to constitutional government. It was anticipated that this middle class would be empowered further by the spread of the new communications technology, which would make it harder for future governments to entangle their citizens in totalitarianism.

Initially, this assumption was bolstered by a global surge of democratisation after the fall of the Soviet regime. As Freedom House – an American organisation that measures the wellbeing of democracy around the world – points out: “Between 1988 and 2005, the percentage of countries ranked ‘Not Free’ in *Freedom in the World* dropped by almost 14 points (from 37% to 23%), while the share of ‘Free’ countries grew (from 36% to 46%)”.<sup>19</sup> In Europe, democracy's advance looked particularly strong: as the communist regimes in Eastern Europe were replaced after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989, a wave of reforms were initiated during the 1990s, which led, by the end of the decade, to increasingly stable and relatively well-governed democratic states. For example, according to Freedom House, the number of countries categorised as ‘Free’ in Europe increased by 38% from 61% in 1990 to 84% in 2005.<sup>20</sup>

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<sup>15</sup> The PRC's spending on Research and Development in 2016 was US\$451 billion, against US\$47.2 billion for the UK. For comparison, the US spent US\$511 billion, and Japan US\$169 billion. See: ‘Is China a global leader in research and development?’, *China Power*, 2019, available at: <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-research-and-development-rnd/>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>16</sup> For a succinct overview, see: Williams, I., ‘More Than Missiles: China Previews its New Way of War’, *Center for Strategic and International Studies*, 16 October 2019, available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/more-missiles-china-previews-its-new-way-war>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>17</sup> This thesis was popularised by Francis Fukuyama in *The End of History and the Last Man*. See: Fukuyama, F., *The End of History and the Last Man* (London: Penguin, 1992).

<sup>18</sup> Blair, T., ‘Prime Minister's address to the Lord Mayor's Banquet’, *The Guardian*, 11 November 2002, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/nov/11/labour.iraq>, last visited: 9 October 2019.

<sup>19</sup> Freedom House categorises countries in accordance with three levels of democracy: ‘Free’, ‘Partly Free’ and ‘Not Free’. See: ‘Freedom in the World 2019’, *Freedom House* (2019), available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019/democracy-in-retreat>, last visited: 2 October 2019.

<sup>20</sup> In 1990, there were 33 sovereign states in Europe. Of these 33 countries, Freedom House marked 20 as “Free”. See: ‘Freedom in the World 1989-1990’, *Freedom House* (1990), available at: [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Freedom\\_in\\_the\\_World\\_1989-1990\\_complete\\_book.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/Freedom_in_the_World_1989-1990_complete_book.pdf), last visited: 7 October 2019, p. 17. By 2005, the number of states in Europe had increased to 43. Of these 43, Freedom House ranked 36 as ‘Free’. See ‘2005 Freedom House Annual Report’, *Freedom House* (2005), available at: [https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline\\_images/2005.pdf](https://freedomhouse.org/sites/default/files/inline_images/2005.pdf), last visited: 7 October 2019, pp.16-17.

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Since 2005, however, democracy has been in retreat around the world, not least as the PRC and Russia developed authoritarian alternatives. The regimes in both countries worked out how to adapt the technologies of the information age to create digitally enabled mass surveillance states.<sup>21</sup> Freedom House reports that: “Between 2005 and 2018, the share of Not Free countries rose to 26%, while the share of Free countries declined to 44%”.<sup>22</sup> Most alarmingly, the backsliding of democracy has also taken hold in Europe: in 2014, Turkey – a NATO ally – descended from being ‘Partly Free’ to being ‘Not Free’, while Hungary – a NATO ally and EU member state – fell into the ‘Partly Free’ status.<sup>23</sup> Various ‘populist’ political forces, formerly on the political fringes, including the *Eesti Konservatiivne Rahvaerakond* in Estonia and *Alternative für Deutschland* in Germany, have also made sizeable advances in several European countries, gaining almost a fifth of parliamentary seats in recent elections.<sup>24</sup>

In the years ahead, the expansion of authoritarian alternatives to liberalism and democracy may force British strategists and policymakers to grapple with competing ideological systems – amplified by advanced technologies – in a way that they have not needed to do since the end of the Cold War. Indeed, if such illiberal alternatives grow further in strength, there is a risk that they may even gain significant traction among certain sections of British society, in the same way that fascism and communism did in the past, undermining the nation’s unity and resolve. If the UK is to protect the political values and structures it developed and nurtured – and which have long been the foundation of its national strength – it will need to put new effort into their protection and promotion.

#### 2.1.4 ‘Zones of chaos’ are the primary threat

During the 1990s and 2000s, the assumption that globalisation was breaking down national borders went hand in hand with the idea that the expansion of liberalism and democracy would render great power struggle obsolete – particularly in Europe.<sup>25</sup> The lack of near-peer and peer competitors merely compounded this assumption allowing a switch of focus towards different kinds of threats. In the words of the 1998 SDR:

For the last two hundred years, the dominant force in international affairs has been the nation state. Most wars have been caused by attempts to create or expand such states. In contrast, over the next twenty years, the risks to international stability seem as likely to come from other factors: ethnic and religious conflict; population and environmental pressures; competition for scarce resources; drugs, terrorism and crime.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> ‘Democracy in Retreat’, Freedom in the World 2019, *Freedom House* (2019), available at: <https://freedomhouse.org/report/freedom-world/freedom-world-2019>, last visited: 7 October 2019; and Barkin, N., ‘Democracy Is Under Attack’, Will Europe Fight Back?, *The Atlantic*, 3 October 2019, available at: <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2019/10/europe-falling-short-promoting-democracy/599311/>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> See: ‘Estonia – 2019 general election results’, *Politico*, 4 March 2019, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/europe-poll-of-polls/estonia/>, last visited: 7 October 2019 and ‘Bundestag election 2017’, *Federal Returning Officer*, 25 September 2017, available at: <https://www.bundeswahlleiter.de/en/bundestagswahlen/2017/ergebnisse/bund-99.html>, last visited: 7 October 2019.

<sup>25</sup> See: Cooper, R., *The post-modern state and the world order* (London: Demos, 1996) and Cooper, R., ‘The meaning of 1989’, *Prospect*, 20 December 1999, available at: <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/magazine/themeaningof1989>, last visited: 10 October 2019.

<sup>26</sup> ‘Strategic Defence Review’, 1998, p. 13. Likewise, as Tony Blair, then Prime Minister, explained during a speech to British diplomatic personnel in January 2003: “The common threat is chaos. That threat can come from terrorism, producing a train of events that pits nations against each other. It can come through irresponsible and repressive states gaining access to W[eapons of] M[ass] D[estruction]. It can come through the world splitting into rival poles of power; the US in one corner; anti-US forces in another. It can come from pent-up feelings of injustice and alienation, from the divisions between the world’s richer and its poorer nations...This has been understood, at least inchoately, ever since the fall of the Berlin Wall.” See: Blair, T., ‘Full Speech Tony Blair’, *The Guardian*, 7 January 2003, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2003/jan/07/foreignpolicy/speeches>, last accessed: 22 October 2019.

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It was anticipated that these threats would arise primarily in weak and failed states, before spreading to surrounding countries, until entire regions collapsed into “*terra nullius*” (‘no-man’s land’) or “zones of chaos”.<sup>27</sup> Such areas would then become even more dangerous because the new threats – especially extremist terrorism – would hijack globalisation’s growing communications infrastructure, using it to strike out at the UK and its allies. In the words of Robert Cooper, then Deputy Secretary for Defence and Overseas Affairs in the Cabinet Office, in 1996:

The existence of such a zone of chaos is nothing new; but previously such areas, precisely because of their chaos, were isolated from the rest of the world. Not so today when a country without much law and order can still have an international airport.<sup>28</sup>

Initially, the threat of chaos – especially its reach – was largely hypothetical. But after the Islamist terrorist group ‘Al Qaeda’ mounted successful attacks against the US on 11 September 2001, the linkage between failed states and terrorism and other forms of chaos was increasingly established. As Jack Straw, the then Foreign Secretary, put it in 2001:

Terrorists are strongest where states are weakest. When states collapse, warlords, criminals, drugs barons or terrorists fill the power vacuum. In a globalised world, that has the potential to bring chaos to our doorsteps, whether human trafficking to our ports, drugs to our streets or acts of terror.<sup>29</sup>

The fear from international terrorism and other forms of chaos became so great that two updates were made to the 1998 SDR, in 2002 and 2003, respectively.<sup>30</sup> In hindsight, much of this assumption turned out to be correct, if perhaps over-emphasised: the challenge from ethnic and religious extremism, terrorism and crime defined the period from the early 2000s to the mid-2010s, degrading the distinction between ‘domestic’ and ‘foreign’ affairs.<sup>31</sup>

More recently, however, British strategists and policymakers have been forced to question their earlier assumptions, not least because since 2014 (if not 2008), “wider state competition” or “intense state competition” – the terminology adopted in the 2015 SDSR, the 2018 National Security Capability Review (NSCR) and the 2018 Modernising Defence Programme (MDP) – has re-emerged and taken hold as large countries like the PRC and Russia have begun to assert their interests more forcefully.<sup>32</sup> This does not necessarily mean that one threat will replace the other, but rather, that zones of chaos and geopolitical rivalry may come together in so-called ‘vacuum wars’.<sup>33</sup> Similarly to the Cold War, peer and near-peer competitors may intervene in weak and failed states, using local proxies as pawns to compete with one another

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<sup>27</sup> Cooper, R., *The post-modern state and the world order* (London: Demos, 1996), p. 16. See also: ‘Defence White Paper’, 2003, p. 5.

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Straw, J., ‘Building will follow the bombing’, *The Guardian*, 26 October 2001, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/oct/26/britainand911.afghanistan>, last visited: 5 October 2019.

<sup>30</sup> See: ‘New Chapter’, 2002 and ‘Defence White Paper’, 2003.

<sup>31</sup> In Tony Blair’s words: “Many of our domestic problems are caused on the other side of the world. Financial instability in Asia destroys jobs in Chicago and in my own constituency in County Durham. Poverty in the Caribbean means more drugs on the streets in Washington and London. Conflict in the Balkans causes more refugees in Germany and here in the US.” See: Blair, T., ‘The Blair Doctrine’, *Global Policy Forum*, 12 April 1999, available at: <https://www.globalpolicy.org/component/content/article/154/26026.html>, last visited: 15 October 2015.

<sup>32</sup> See: ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review’, *HM Government* (2015), available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/555607/2015\\_Strategic\\_Defence\\_and\\_Security\\_Review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/555607/2015_Strategic_Defence_and_Security_Review.pdf), last visited: 3 October 2019, p. 15; ‘National Security Capability Review’, *HM Government* (2018), available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/705347/6.4391\\_CO\\_National-Security-Review\\_web.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/705347/6.4391_CO_National-Security-Review_web.pdf), last visited: 3 October 2019, p. 6; and ‘Mobilising, Modernising and Transforming Defence: A Report on the Modernising Defence Programme’, *HM Government* (2018), available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/765879/ModernisingDefenceProgramme\\_report\\_2018\\_FINAL.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765879/ModernisingDefenceProgramme_report_2018_FINAL.pdf), last visited: 11 October 2019, p. 12.

<sup>33</sup> For an interesting take on this possibility, see: Grygiel, J., ‘Vacuum Wars’, *The American Interest*, 1 July 2009, available at: <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2009/07/01/vacuum-wars/>, last visited: 11 October 2019.

so that they can avoid open confrontation. Here, the Russian and Turkish meddling in Syria may be an indicator of the shape of things to come.

### *2.1.5 Global governance is replacing geopolitical competition*

As the world's leading powers were drawn to cooperate by globalisation and/or to overcome the threat of chaos, it was assumed that they would form deeper structures of 'global governance', leading ultimately "to an international system based on rules".<sup>34</sup> This is why a raft of new organisations were reformed and/or enlarged (or even created) in the post-Cold War era, including NATO, the EU, the Group of Eight, and the WTO, often with scant regard to the political character or long-term objectives of their members.<sup>35</sup> In any case, it was expected that globalisation and liberal principles would eventually take hold in authoritarian countries, which in turn would become responsible stakeholders in the emerging order.

Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister, even implied in his famous speech on the 'Doctrine of the International Community' of 1999 that the major powers could act in coalition to intervene in weak and failed states to prevent or arrest the threat of chaos, particularly when it might result in a humanitarian emergency.<sup>36</sup> Progressively, by forcing the major powers to cooperate, it was projected that such interventions would – in a kind of virtuous circle – enhance global governance and compress and contain the zones of chaos.<sup>37</sup> Indeed, driven by globalisation and the spread of liberal values throughout the 1990s and 2000s, there was evidence that this approach was working. As they worked together in international coalitions of the willing, or through international structures like NATO, the EU and the United Nations, attempts were made to confront the new threats and prevent chaos from further expanding.<sup>38</sup>

However, with the resurgence of wider state competition during the 2010s, global governance has stagnated, while the rules-based international system has come under increased attack.<sup>39</sup> Although countries like the PRC and Russia have benefited greatly from globalisation, they have not opened up, liberalised or democratised in the way many British strategists and policymakers had expected in the 1990s and 2000s.<sup>40</sup> Far from becoming responsible stakeholders in the

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<sup>34</sup> Blair, T. 'Doctrine of the International Community', *British Political Speeches*, 22 April 1999, available at: <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=279>, last visited: 22 October 2019.

<sup>35</sup> As Tony Blair told the Lord Mayor's Banquet in 2005: "What I am saying is that out of this great pumping up of global integration, comes the need for stronger and more effective global, multilateral action. There is a real danger that the institutions of global politics lag seriously behind the challenges they are called upon to resolve." See: Blair, T., 'Mansion House speech: full text', *The Guardian*, 15 November 2005, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2005/nov/15/development.internationalaidanddevelopment1>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>36</sup> Blair, T. 'Doctrine of the International Community', *British Political Speeches*, 22 April 1999, available at: <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=279>, last visited: 22 October 2019.

<sup>37</sup> See: Cooper, R., *The post-modern state and the world order* (London: Demos, 1996), pp. 38-41. See also: Cooper, R., 'The new liberal imperialism', *The Guardian*, 7 April 2002, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2002/apr/07/1>, last visited: 22 October 2019.

<sup>38</sup> Many also pledged their support for the wider rules-based international system, to the extent that Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister, argued that it might be possible to form a 'global alliance for global values', the 'global values' being liberalism and democracy. See: Blair, T., 'A Global Alliance for Global Values', *Foreign Policy Centre* (2006), available at: <https://fpc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2006/09/798.pdf>, last visited: 6 October 2019.

<sup>39</sup> Likewise, General Sir Nicholas Carter, the Chief of the Defence Staff, also outlined the nature of the challenge: "We now live in a much more competitive, multi-polar world and the complex nature of the global system has created the conditions in which states are able to compete in new ways short of what we would have defined as 'war' in the past...Worrying though, all of these states have become masters at exploiting the seams between peace and war...Energy, cash – as bribes – corrupt business practices, cyber-attacks, assassination, fake news, propaganda and indeed military intimidation are all examples of the weapons used to gain advantage in this era of 'constant competition'." See: Carter, N., 'Dynamic threats and the British Army', *Royal United Services Institute*, 22 January 2018, available at: <https://rusi.org/event/dynamic-security-threats-and-british-army>, last visited: 1 October 2019.

<sup>40</sup> In the words of Philip Stephens, Chief Political Editor of the *Financial Times*: "Not so long ago policy makers in the west assumed that China and Russia would eventually decide they wanted to be like 'us'. China would develop as a responsible stakeholder in the existing international order and Russia, albeit with missteps, would see its future in integration with Europe. Mr Xi and Mr Putin have decided otherwise. The world is waking up from postmodern dreams of global governance to another era of great power competition." See: Stephens, P., 'What Xi and Putin really think about the west', *Financial Times*, 5 June 2014, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/3d9d513a-eb3c-11e3-bab6-00144feabd0>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

rules-based system, these countries have deliberately indulged in various forms of geo-economic and geopolitical revisionism. They have deployed increasingly sophisticated ‘anti-systemic’ and ‘counter-systemic’ strategies, which are designed either to *degrade* or *replace* the prevailing order.<sup>41</sup> For example, Russia has launched a series of ‘anti-systemic’ attacks – beneath the threshold that might elicit a military response – against countries across Eastern Europe and the broader North Atlantic area with the aim of corrupting the Euro-Atlantic structures.<sup>42</sup> Meanwhile, the PRC has engaged in a ‘counter-systemic’ offensive with a state-led neo-mercantilist approach based on policies such as the ‘Belt and Road’ and ‘Made in China 2025’ initiatives.<sup>43</sup>

### **Box 1: The character of Russia’s revisionist activity**

Russia is a revisionist power. The Kremlin regards the rules-based international system as unfair. It seeks to undermine the European security order, weaken the Atlantic alliance, divide NATO, and to challenge the EU’s role as a rule-setter, especially in energy policy.

Many in the West believe that the Kremlin became a revisionist power in 2014, after it annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine. But it is only possible to believe this if you were not paying attention for the two decades beforehand.

Since the end of the Cold War, Russia has maintained an old-fashioned idea of “spheres of influence” in which the geopolitical orientation of its neighbouring countries is a matter over which Russia has, by right, a veto.

In 1994, Lennart Meri, then President of Estonia, warned that the Kremlin’s menacing behaviour toward his country had not stopped when the Cold War ended, but instead had continued. Other politicians, including Lithuania’s Vytautas Landsbergis, also shared the Estonian leader’s concerns about Russia’s latent imperialism.

Russia’s frustration with the post-Cold War international order was made clear in President Putin’s venomous anti-Western speech at the Munich Security Conference in 2007. Russia launched cyberattacks against Estonia later the same year. The following year, Russia went to war with Georgia; it has occupied the territories of Abkhazia and South Ossetia ever since.

In the dozen years since, Russia has undertaken information warfare (propaganda) on a scale not seen in the West since the Cold War; engaged in economic coercion and subversion as weapons of foreign policy; and, interfered in the democratic processes in a number of Western countries.

Russia has also conducted military sabre-rattling against members of NATO; simulated nuclear attacks on Poland and Sweden; and, launched biological and radiological attacks on the streets of the UK.

**- Dr Andrew Foxall**

Director, Russia and Eurasia Studies Centre

<sup>41</sup> For an overview of ‘anti-systemic’ and ‘counter-systemic’ revisionism, see: Rogers, J., Foxall, A. and Hemmings, J., ‘Written Evidence on Autocracies and UK Foreign Policy’, *Foreign Affairs Committee, House of Commons* (2019), available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/foreign-affairs-committee/autocracies-and-uk-foreign-policy/written/98651.pdf>, last visited: 4 October 2019.

<sup>42</sup> See: Tyushka, A. and Rogers, J., ‘Hacking into the West: Russia’s “anti-hegemonic” drive and the strategic narrative offensive’, *Defence Strategic Communications*, 2 (2017), available at: <https://www.stratcomcoe.org/download/file/fid/75970>, last visited: 2 October 2019.

<sup>43</sup> For more on the PRC’s ‘Made in China 2025’ initiative, see: Kania, Elsa B., ‘Made in China 2025, Explained’, *The Diplomat*, 1 February 2019, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2019/02/made-in-china-2025-explained/>, last visited: 27 October 2019 and Brent, R. S., ‘How China Rode the Foreign Technology Wave’, *The American Interest*, 22 October 2019, available at: <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2019/10/22/how-china-rode-the-foreign-technology-wave/>, last visited: 27 October 2019.

Given that “intense” strategic competition – across the geopolitical, economic and ideological vectors – has become once again a permanent feature of international politics, British strategists and policymakers ought to think harder about how to respond and regain the initiative.<sup>44</sup> In this environment, rather than doubling down on the defence of the rules-based international system, it is more important to focus on the regeneration of British state power to push back against revisionists.<sup>45</sup> Equally, as the context and forces that gave birth to the established structures of global governance change, the UK may wish to cooperate more through ad-hoc groupings and with likeminded democratic states – even in new organisations and alliances.

## 2.2 Geopolitical assumptions

### 2.2.1 *The European continent is Britain’s overriding geostrategic concern*

Given the British Isles’ proximity to the European continent, it should be no surprise that European affairs have long been considered the UK’s pre-eminent geostrategic concern.<sup>46</sup> The emergence of powerful continental states like Germany in the 19th century and the Soviet Union in the 20th only served to underline this interest.<sup>47</sup> Their ability to disrupt the established European balance of power drew the UK into European geopolitics like never before. Consequently, during the first half of the 20th century, Britain steadily ‘de-globalised’ its strategic posture, before waging two systemic wars to contain German ambitions. Then, during the second half of the century, the country established a permanent ‘continental commitment’ for the first time in history, namely to dissuade and deter aggression in Europe.<sup>48</sup> This involved the formation of a permanent alliance – the Western Union, followed by NATO – and the deployment of a large and enduring forward presence on the European continent, including aerial and land-based components.<sup>49</sup>

Since the 1990s, the primacy of Europe in British strategic discourse has remained relatively constant. In the words of the 1998 SDR: “We are a major European state and a leading member of the European Union. Our economic and political future is as part of Europe” – a point similarly echoed in the later 2002 and 2003 additions, as well as the 2010 and 2015 strategic

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<sup>44</sup> In the words of the 2018 MDP: “After almost three decades of relative international stability, the world has now re-entered a period of persistent and intense state competition.” See: ‘Modernising Defence Programme’, 2018, p. 12.

<sup>45</sup> For example, in light of the international support the UK mustered in response to Russia’s deployment of chemical weapons in Salisbury in 2018, Boris Johnson, the then Foreign Secretary, claimed that “our values – and our belief in the rules-based international order – [...] proved their worth” in securing the diplomatic success. The question here is: did the UK really receive international support because of its belief in the rules-based international system, or was due to the scale of the nation’s diplomatic network, combined with effective diplomacy? See: Johnson, B., ‘Foreign Secretary’s Mansion House speech at the Lord Mayor’s Easter Banquet 2018’, *HM Government* (2018), available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretarys-lord-mayors-easter-banquet-speech-at-mansion-house-wednesday-28-march>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>46</sup> In Field Marshal Lord Carver’s words: “For centuries the basis for the protection of the interests of Britain has been the need to ensure that the continent of Europe is not dominated by a power that is unfriendly to us. That was the basis of opposition to France in the time of Louis XIV and XV and of Napoleon Bonaparte, and to Germany under Kaiser Wilhelm II and Hitler. It is the fundamental reason why we have welcomed the foundation of NATO, the threat from Germany having been replaced by that of the Soviet Union. Throughout our history a rival view of the priority for our strategy has been urged: that we should turn our backs on the continent and concentrate our efforts on securing trading advantage and access to raw materials across the oceans, in the Pacific and Indian oceans, the South and Western Atlantic. That strategy brought some significant successes, as well as notable failures; but it has never been able to preserve our fundamental interests and security, if alliances on the continent of Europe have failed us.” Field Marshal Lord Carver, ‘Getting Defence Priorities Right’, cited in: Baylis, J., *Alternative Approaches to British Defence Policy* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1983), p. 76.

<sup>47</sup> See: Rogers, J., ‘Defending Europe: Global Britain and the future of European geopolitics’, *The Henry Jackson Society* (2018), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/HJS-Defending-Europe-Global-Britain-Report-NEW-web.pdf>, last visited: 4 October 2019.

<sup>48</sup> Howard, M., *The Continental Commitment: The Dilemma of British Defence Policy in the Era of the Two World Wars* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books Ltd., 1972).

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

reviews.<sup>50</sup> The resurgence of Russia since the mid-2000s and the ‘anti-systemic’ threat it poses both to NATO’s eastern flank has only served to reinforce this assumption. This is why Britain played a leading role in the establishment of NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence, to which it remains the principal contributor – both in terms of the total number of troops deployed, as well as the number of allies to which troops have been sent.<sup>51</sup>

Despite looming withdrawal from the EU, the British government has continued to signal the importance it places on Europe. Discussing the UK’s renewed support for NATO’s exposed allies in Eastern Europe in 2016, Sir Michael Fallon, the then Defence Secretary, was unequivocal: “Although we are leaving the European Union, we remain committed to European security. This is our continent and we will keep on working to help keep it safe. We are not stepping away.”<sup>52</sup> Two years later, the 2018 NSCR was similarly explicit: “While the UK has chosen to leave the EU, we are unconditionally committed to European security and defence and want to work closely with our European partners to keep all of our citizens safe and our continent secure”.<sup>53</sup>

However, Russia’s behaviour notwithstanding, the extent to which Europe will continue to be – in Sir Winston Churchill’s colourful words – the place from “where the weather comes” is uncertain.<sup>54</sup> The latest demographic and economic projections for continental Europe look bleak. With the exception of eight EU countries, the rest will experience not only ageing, but also demographic contraction in the mid- to long-term.<sup>55</sup> According to the United Nations Population Division, the population of Europe is going to age and decline over the next thirty years from 747.2 million people in 2019 to 712.4 million by 2049 – a reduction of almost 5%.<sup>56</sup> Alongside the relative growth of the Indo-Pacific region, this will likely, in turn, accelerate the reduction of Europe’s significance to the global economy: in 2000, the combined economic output of the Eurozone was 20.6% of the world’s total; by 2050, it is projected to be only 9.9%.<sup>57</sup>

That said, even as it declines in relative strategic weight, Europe is unlikely to become any less important to the UK. A weakened continent might become less the place from ‘where the weather comes’, and more the destination to ‘where the weather goes’. In other words, a debilitated Europe might draw in the external major powers – such as the PRC and Russia, even Turkey and the US – to the extent that it becomes a chessboard for their geopolitical games. Under such circumstances, British strategists and policymakers ought to think harder about how to contain the fallout, or act as a “flying buttress” to reinforce their European partners.

### 2.2.2 Britain is central to the Euro-Atlantic System

Given its European focus, one of the overriding features of the past thirty years has been the assumption that Britain is central to the Euro-Atlantic structures, namely NATO and the EU.

<sup>50</sup> ‘Strategic Defence Review’, 1998, p. 11; ‘New Chapter’, 2002, pp. 12-13; and ‘Defence White Paper’, 2003, p. 4. The 2010 SDSR drew an equivalence between ‘Europe’ and the ‘EU’: “UK membership of the European Union is a key part of our international engagement and means of promoting security and prosperity in the European neighbourhood”. See: ‘Strategic Defence and Security Review’, *HM Government* (2010), available at: [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/62482/strategic-defence-security-review.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62482/strategic-defence-security-review.pdf), last visited: 3 October 2019, p. 62. More directly, the 2015 NSS and SDSR states: “A secure and prosperous Europe is essential for a secure and prosperous UK.” See: ‘National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review’, 2015, p. 53.

<sup>51</sup> ‘NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence’, *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* (2019), available at: [https://shape.nato.int/resources/site16187/General/factsheets/factsheet\\_efp\\_en.pdf](https://shape.nato.int/resources/site16187/General/factsheets/factsheet_efp_en.pdf), last visited: 22 October 2019, pp. 1-2.

<sup>52</sup> Cited in: Barnes, J. E., ‘UK to Send Formidable Force to Eastern Europe’, *The Wall Street Journal*, 26 October 2016, available at: <https://www.wsj.com/articles/u-k-to-send-formidable-force-to-eastern-europe-1477440062>, last visited: 22 October 2019.

<sup>53</sup> ‘National Security Capability Review’, 2018, p. 5.

<sup>54</sup> Darwin, J., *The Empire Project: The Rise and Fall of the British World-System 1830-1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 306.

<sup>55</sup> For figures, see: ‘Total population by sex (thousands)’, *United Nations Population Division*, 2019, available at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>, last visited: 16 October 2019.

<sup>56</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>57</sup> ‘GDP long-term forecast’, *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*, 2018, available at: <https://data.oecd.org/gdp/real-gdp-long-term-forecast.htm#indicator-chart>, last visited: 7 October 2019.

British leaders have long considered their country as the “hub” – in the words of John Major, the then Prime Minister in 1991 – or the “bridge” – as Tony Blair, as Prime Minister, defined it in 1999 – linking together the two sides of the North Atlantic.<sup>58</sup> Gordon Brown, Tony Blair’s successor, was also keen to stress the importance of Britain’s role in bringing “Europe and America closer together for the future”.<sup>59</sup> This reflects the fact that the UK has judged itself to be *the* strategic knot that keeps both NATO and the EU – one a military alliance, the other a political union with both international and supranational dimensions – in alignment with one another.

Undoubtedly, Britain’s decision to withdraw from the EU makes acting as the hub or bridge between Europe and North America, as well as the EU and NATO, more difficult. But British strategists and policymakers have found it harder to perform this role for some years, not least since the Great Recession. Since then, new forms of competition within the EU have weakened Britain’s hand. The Ministry of Defence’s (MOD) Development, Concept and Doctrine Centre pointed to this problem in 2014 in ‘Global Strategic Trends’, a report issued periodically to inform future updates of the NSS and SDSR:

If a European country financially out-performed the rest of the EU to a significant extent, domestic political concerns could prompt the country’s leaders to use its leverage to dominate Europe not only economically but also politically, severely challenging the EU’s cohesion. In such a situation, Europe could split between those countries who are dependent on the large power and those who resent its influence. There is a risk that NATO could become less effective, as European countries may place loyalty or opposition to the economic power above any other alliances.<sup>60</sup>

If any country has ‘out-performed’ the rest of the EU to the extent that its influence has increased, it is Germany.<sup>61</sup> Under the tenure of Angela Merkel, the longstanding Chancellor, Germany has made up for its demographic constraints by pursuing what Hans Kundnani, a Senior Research Fellow at Chatham House, has called a “geo-economic” approach to its Euro-Atlantic allies, to maximise its economic power and diplomatic leverage.<sup>62</sup>

Consequently, Berlin’s position has strengthened to the extent that little can now occur within the EU without German consent.<sup>63</sup> The problem here is that German policies have become increasingly clumsy, giving scant regard to the importance of the Euro-Atlantic order. A number of tactless German moves – the chancellor’s description of Britain and the US as “competitors” or countries that Europeans “could not fully count on”; her decision to unilaterally open Germany’s borders in 2015 to international migrants from the Middle East and North Africa; her consistent failure to increase German defence expenditure or redress the

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<sup>58</sup> See: Major, J., ‘Leader’s Speech, London 1991’, *British Political Speeches*, 6 January 1991, available at: <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=137>, last visited: 15 October 2019 and Blair, T., ‘Leader’s Speech, Bournemouth 1999’, *British Political Speeches*, 28 September 1999, available at: <http://www.britishpoliticalspeech.org/speech-archive.htm?speech=205>, last visited: 15 October 2019.

<sup>59</sup> ‘Full Interview: British PM Gordon Brown’, *Columbia Broadcast Service*, 14 April 2008, available at: <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/full-interview-british-pm-gordon-brown/>, last visited: 15 October 2019.

<sup>60</sup> Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre, *Global Strategic Trends – Out to 2045* (Fifth Edition) (London: Ministry of Defence, 2014), p. 119.

<sup>61</sup> For example, in 2010, Germany accounted for 19.9% of the EU’s economic output, but by 2018, it accounted for 21.1%. See: ‘Eurostat Gross Domestic Product at Market Prices’, *European Commission*, 2019, available at: <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/refreshTableAction.do?tab=table&plugin=1&pcode=tec00001&language=en>, last visited: 7 October 2019.

<sup>62</sup> For more on the concept of Germany’s ‘geo-economic’ power, see: Kundnani, H., ‘Germany as a geo-economic power’, *The Washington Quarterly*, 34.3 (2011); and Kundnani, H., *The Paradox of German Power* (London: C. Hurst and Co., 2014).

<sup>63</sup> As Sir Paul points out in recent years even France – often considered to form the other part of the motor of European integration with Germany – can no longer push through policies in opposition to German resistance. In his words: “The relationship between Germany and France had become that of senior and junior partner. French ideas and initiatives were listened to and, to the extent that they were compatible with German interests, the German government sought to accommodate them. But France could not push through EU policies to which the German government was opposed.” See: Lever, P., *Berlin Rules: Europe and the German Way* (London: I.B. Tauris and Co., 2017), p. 3.

problems afflicting the *Bundeswehr*; and her failure to prevent the construction of Russian-backed energy infrastructure in the Baltic region – appear to have deepened the cracks in the Euro-Atlantic system, stimulating antagonism and resentment.<sup>64</sup>

British strategists and policymakers need to consider the long-term strategic implications of a more self-interested Germany, particularly in a relatively weaker Europe. As smaller European powers are drawn closer towards the German economy, a stronger Germany may further alienate Europeans, especially France and Poland. With his recent statement about the “brain death” of NATO, French President Emmanuel Macron may already be trying to enhance France’s weight in the key European security debates.<sup>65</sup> As the UK withdraws from the EU, the main European counterweight to German (and French) power will be removed and the principal strategic knot binding the EU to NATO will loosen. In this new strategic environment, Britain will need to work harder and more robustly to not only retain leverage within Europe, but also to maintain the EU’s alignment with the wider Atlantic framework.<sup>66</sup>

### *2.2.3 The region ‘East of Suez’ – the Gulf and Middle East – is of growing importance to British interests*

During the Cold War, it was commonplace to hear of Britain’s geostrategic retrenchment and retreat from the region ‘East of Suez’. Much of this was blamed on British decline and decolonisation in the aftermath of the Second World War. The reality was somewhat different: the threat from Germany (both Wilhelmine and Nazi) and the Soviet Union was so profound that Britain deliberately refocused its geostrategic effort into the Euro-Atlantic area, an enterprise that had been well underway since the 1930s, if not earlier in the century.<sup>67</sup> That said, the UK continued to retain a residual footprint in the Indo-Pacific zone, particularly in the Middle East, not least because of the region’s importance in the context of the struggle with the Soviet Union, as well as British companies’ interests in relation to the rich energy reserves in the Gulf. The rise of chaos in the post-Cold War period in the Middle East – a problem acknowledged in the 2002 and 2003 defence re-appraisals – drew the UK further in as US-led international coalitions were launched to contain and then topple the regime of Saddam Hussein in Iraq and oust the Taliban and Al Qaeda in Afghanistan.<sup>68</sup> Large British military formations were deployed to the region, with some up to the size of an armoured division.

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<sup>64</sup> For Angela Merkel’s comments, see: Momtaz, R., ‘Merkel sees post-Brexit UK as “potential competitor” to EU’, *Politico*, 14 October 2019, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/angela-merkel-sees-post-brexit-uk-as-potential-competitor-to-eu-emmanuel-macron/>, last visited: 15 October 2019 and Allen, N. and Mulholland, R., ‘Angela Merkel says Europe can no longer rely on US or UK – and must “fight for its own destiny”’, *Daily Telegraph*, 28 May 2017, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2017/05/28/angela-merkel-says-europe-can-no-longer-rely-us-uk-must-fight/>, last visited: 15 October 2019. For a snappy overview of the problems facing the *Bundeswehr*, see: Kanitschnig, M., ‘Germany’s Soldiers of Misfortune’, *Politico*, 15 February 2019, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/germany-biggest-enemy-threadbare-army-bundeswehr/>, last visited: 8 October 2019. For a Polish take on German energy interests in the Baltic region, see: Loskot-Strachota, A., Bajczuk, R. and Kardas, S., ‘Nord Stream 2 divides the West’, *Centre for Eastern Studies*, 18 June 2018, available at: <https://www.osw.waw.pl/en/publikacje/osw-commentary/2018-06-18/nord-stream-2-divides-west>, last visited: 7 October 2019. For US condemnation of Germany’s insufficient burden sharing, see: Herszenhorn, D., ‘Trump rips into Germany at NATO chief breakfast’, *Politico*, 11 July 2018, available at: <https://www.politico.eu/article/donald-trump-nato-summit-rips-into-germany/>, last visited: 7 October 2019.

<sup>65</sup> ‘Emmanuel Macron in his own words’, *The Economist*, 7 November 2019, available at: <https://www.economist.com/europe/2019/11/07/emmanuel-macron-in-his-own-words-english>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>66</sup> For two solutions to this dilemma, see: Rogers, J., ‘Defending Europe: Global Britain and the Future of European Geopolitics’, *The Henry Jackson Society* (2018), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/HJS-Defending-Europe-Global-Britain-Report-NEW-web.pdf>, last visited: 7 October 2019 and Kundhani, H., ‘To Preserve NATO, Britain Must Help Reinvent It’, *Chatham House*, 1 April 2019, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/preserve-nato-britain-must-help-reinvent-it>, last visited: 7 October 2019.

<sup>67</sup> See: Rogers, J., ‘Defending Europe: Global Britain and the Future of European Geopolitics’, *The Henry Jackson Society* (2018), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/HJS-Defending-Europe-Global-Britain-Report-NEW-web.pdf>, last visited: 7 October 2019, p. 15.

<sup>68</sup> ‘New Chapter’, 2002, p. 12-13 and ‘Defence White Paper’, 2003, p. 3.

As the British Armed Forces were withdrawn from Iraq and Afghanistan in the late 2000s, the UK revitalised its strategic posture in the Middle East. In 2011, the government announced that Britain's strategic footprint would be re-emphasised and made more permanent in the region, with the development of new military facilities, including the re-establishment of the Juffair naval base in Bahrain.<sup>69</sup> This was further compounded by the opening of a new 'defence hub' in Duqm – outside the Gulf, on the coast of the Arabian Sea in Oman – sufficient in size to accommodate the large new Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers. Boris Johnson, while Foreign Secretary, outlined the new approach in a speech at the Manama Dialogue in Bahrain in December 2016. There, he stated that “the policy of disengagement East of Suez” was “a mistake”; he also recognised the importance of “the strong historical attachment between Britain and the Gulf” and the need for the UK to “underscore the growing relevance and importance of that relationship in today's uncertain and volatile world”.<sup>70</sup>

While it makes sense to place greater emphasis on the region 'East of Suez' – particularly the Gulf – important questions remain about the UK's role in the Middle East, not least in terms of its support for the region's many authoritarian regimes. Moreover, due to successive cuts to the number of the Royal Navy's destroyers and frigates (and the British Armed Forces more generally), it is not clear the extent to which the UK has the strategic means to fulfil its interests and objectives, not least in deterring hostile near-peer competitors. Iran will remain a significant strategic challenge; the recent attempts by Iranian gunboats to intercept British-flagged or registered commercial ships show how exposed Britain has become.<sup>71</sup> If the UK is to become even more involved 'East of Suez', British strategists and policymakers will need more resources if Britain is to be effective.

#### *2.2.4 The Indo-Pacific zone primarily presents economic opportunities*

With the end of the Cold War, the shift in the global centre of economic gravity accelerated from the Euro-Atlantic to the Indo-Pacific. For example, in 2000, the Eurozone accounted for 20.6% of global output, while the Indo-Pacific – if defined only by India, Indonesia and the PRC – accounted for just 16.1%.<sup>72</sup> By 2005, this had changed to 18.8% and 20%, respectively.<sup>73</sup> A decade later, in 2015, the Eurozone accounted for just 14.4% of the global economy, while the Indo-Pacific accounted for 32.4%.<sup>74</sup> And the trend looks set to continue: by 2050 the figures are projected to be 9.9% and 48.7%, respectively.<sup>75</sup> It is therefore no surprise that British strategists and policymakers have continued to look at the Indo-Pacific region – particularly the Far East – primarily through the prism of business. George Osborne, the then Chancellor, took this approach to its logical conclusion in 2015 when he proclaimed the start of a “Golden Decade” in the UK's relations with the PRC.<sup>76</sup>

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<sup>69</sup> Stansfield, G. and Kelly, S., 'A Return to East of Suez? UK Military Deployment to the Gulf', *Royal United Services Institute* (2013), available at: [https://rusi.org/system/files/East\\_of\\_Suez\\_Return\\_042013.pdf](https://rusi.org/system/files/East_of_Suez_Return_042013.pdf), last visited: 22 October 2019; and Rogers, J., 'European (British and French) geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific', *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, 9.1 (2013), pp. 69-89.

<sup>70</sup> Johnson, B., 'Foreign Secretary speech: "Britain is back East of Suez"', *HM Government*, 9 December 2016, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-speech-britain-is-back-east-of-suez>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>71</sup> As Lord West, a former First Sea Lord, discovered when he questioned the British government's preparedness for the possibility of the seizure of British-flagged vessels, the UK's exposure to Iran in the Strait of Hormuz is not only limited to the number of warships available, but also the lack of preparedness for Iranian hostility. See: Defence Committee Oral Evidence: Strait of Hormuz, HC 2627, *House of Commons*, 2019, available at: <http://data.parliament.uk/writtenevidence/committeeevidence.svc/evidencedocument/defence-committee/strait-of-hormuz/oral/105226.html>, last visited: 8 October 2019, Question 11.

<sup>72</sup> 'GDP long-term forecast', *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*, 2018, available at: <https://data.oecd.org/gdp/real-gdp-long-term-forecast.htm#indicator-chart>, last visited: 7 October 2019.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Osborne, G., 'Chancellor: "Let's create a golden decade for the UK-China relationship"', *HM Government*, 22 September 2015, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chancellor-lets-create-a-golden-decade-for-the-uk-china-relationship>, last visited: 14 October 2015.



For Britain's allies and partners – not least the US – the situation is very different. Since 2011 America's gradual geostrategic “pivot” or “rebalance” to the East Asian region has been animated by its concerns over the PRC's growing economic and geopolitical influence.<sup>77</sup> In the last US National Security Strategy, published in 2017, the PRC was called out as a “revisionist power” which seeks to “challenge American power, influence, and interests” while “attempting to erode American security and prosperity.”<sup>78</sup> Japan has also grown increasingly alarmed with what are described in its National Defence Programme Guidelines as the PRC's “unilateral, coercive attempts to alter the *status quo* based on its own assertions that are incompatible with existing international order.”<sup>79</sup> Due to geographic proximity, both countries – one Britain's closest ally, the other a growing partner – cannot overlook the challenge posed by the PRC's broad counter-systemic offensive.

Here, as Box 2 shows, the PRC's ability to leverage its growing economic strength to undermine Britain's own interests, as well as the interests of British allies and partners, has been largely overlooked. Although the UK has moved to beef-up security cooperation with several countries in the Indo-Pacific, not least Japan, the members of the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA), and various South Pacific island states, British strategists and policymakers have been playing catch-up.<sup>80</sup> Perhaps the biggest indicator of Britain's failure to understand the importance of Indo-Pacific geopolitics is the fact that the cabinet minister responsible for the ‘Asia-Pacific’ (itself an archaic term) is just a Parliamentary Under Secretary of State – the most junior ministerial position in government.<sup>81</sup>

### **Box 2: The character of the PRC's revisionist activity**

Vested interests, ignorance and Chinese disinformation shape many Western and UK assumptions about the PRC's economic, political and strategic aims. Despite evident ground truths such as military adventurism in the South China Sea; the global impact of environmental damage in China; support for authoritarian client states; corruption and economic mismanagement; human rights violations in Tibet, Xinjiang and Hong Kong; repressive use of digital data and cyber-espionage and much more, the image of the PRC as a benevolent counterpart for the UK, rather than a rival, retains widespread credibility across the British political spectrum. The reality behind the so-called ‘Golden Decade’ in PRC-UK relations is very different, and British policies based on complacent optimism do not serve Britain's domestic and international interests.

The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is now projecting its wealth, technical and military capabilities into international space to contest and eventually replace the existing rules-based order. In expedient partnership with Russia and lesser authoritarian regimes, Beijing

<sup>77</sup> Clinton, H., ‘America's Pacific Century’, *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>78</sup> ‘National Security Strategy of the United States of America’, *US Government* (2017), available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf> last visited: 7 October 2019, p. 2 and p. 25.

<sup>79</sup> ‘National Defence Programme Guidelines for FY 2019 and beyond’, *Cabinet Secretariat of Japan*, 18 December 2018, available at: [http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryuu/pdf/2019boueikeikaku\\_e.pdf](http://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryuu/pdf/2019boueikeikaku_e.pdf), last visited: 2 January 2020, p. 5.

<sup>80</sup> As Theresa May, the then Prime Minister stated in her Mansion House speech in 2018: “We continue to increase our security co-operation in Asia, undertaking our first land exercises with Japan and deploying three Royal Navy ships to work alongside America, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Japan to enforce sanctions against the DPRK and reinforce the maritime security on which all trading nations depend.” See: May, T., ‘PM speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet’, *HM Government*, 12 November 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-speech-to-the-lord-mayors-banquet-12-november-2018>, last visited: 15 October 2019.

<sup>81</sup> In comparison, all FCO ministers below the Foreign Secretary carry the title Minister of State. The only exception is the minister covering Asia and the Pacific states. See: Foreign and Commonwealth Office, *HM Government*, 2019, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/organisations/foreign-commonwealth-office>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

seeks the renaissance of a fictional past, before the rise of the industrialised West, in which a non-democratic China was unconstrained by any alternative systems of governance.

This revisionist 'China Dream' threatens international legal, moral and ethical norms. Far from being a programme to promote the collective good, it aims to expand the authority of a ruthless, lawless and unaccountable elite. The CCP is now waging so-called 'hybrid warfare' against the UK and its allies across the world. Crude and aggressive diplomacy; cyber and human intelligence theft of sensitive military intellectual property and other data; influence of operations, including elite capture and 'lawfare'; money-laundering and other financial crime; and unchecked investment in property, key industrial and digital infrastructure are already serious challenges.

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Thus, although the challenge posed by the PRC has for a long time appeared to be geographically distant, Britain should be more aware of the growing geostrategic linkages between Europe, the Middle East, and the broader Indo-Pacific zone. As the balance of power between the US and the PRC tilts gradually in Beijing's favour, at least in the Indo-Pacific zone, it is likely that the US will grow progressively entwined in the regional power balance. Here, the US may look to the UK - its most powerful ally, soon to be equipped with large operational aircraft carriers - to 'backfill' for the US Navy in the Mediterranean and the Gulf. Moreover, British strategists and policymakers have missed the potential connection between the strategic situation in the Far East and Europe, not least in terms of Russia. To offset the PRC's rise, Washington may try to draw Moscow into a strategic relationship in an attempt to apply pressure on Beijing from within Eurasia. In exchange, America might be willing to accept significant trade-offs in terms of Russia's interests in the Caucasus or even Eastern Europe, with potential implications for NATO.

### *2.2.5 Nations will respect globally 'shared spaces'*

With the passing of the Cold War, it was anticipated that other countries would generally respect globally 'shared spaces' (sometimes called the 'global commons') - including the polar regions, outer space, international waters, and the Earth's atmosphere. This assumption was well founded: despite the Cold War, the major powers had already worked to put in place the Antarctic Treaty System in 1961, the Outer Space Treaty in 1967, the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) in 1982, and the Montreal Protocol in 1987. More recently, it was assumed that countries would work collectively to overcome the challenge from their excessive emission of greenhouse gases, culminating in the Paris Agreement of 2016.

In recent years, however, the treaty systems governing these shared spaces appear to be crumbling. Although there is unlikely to be a neo-imperial dash to formally claim these spaces, the major powers have become more anxious about one another's intentions in them. The PRC's activities in both polar regions and Russia's assertive claims on the Arctic continental shelf are well known, as is the Chinese attempt to "continentalise" the South China Sea by replacing UNCLOS (which Beijing helped negotiate from 1973 to 1982 and ratified in 1996) with its own hierarchical system.<sup>82</sup> It is also well-known how difficult it has been to encourage the world's major powers to reduce their greenhouse gas emissions, with the US under President Donald

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<sup>82</sup> 'Continentalisation' refers to attempts by large continental powers to project a norm that involves looking at the sea as if it were land, with borders, barriers and the primacy of land-based 'anti-access' and 'area-denial' weapons systems. See: Lambert, A., *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict that Made the Modern World* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 318. See also: Hemmings, J. and Rogers, J., 'The South China Sea: Why it Matters to "Global Britain"', *The Henry Jackson Society* (2019), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/the-south-china-sea-why-it-matters-to-global-britain/>, last visited: 2 October 2019.

Trump deciding to withdraw entirely from the Paris Agreement. What is less well known is the extent to which, given recent developments in space technology, outer space has become increasingly a zone for interstate competition. The PRC has demonstrated its anti-satellite capabilities, while America established the US Space Force in 2019. In a slightly different vein, EU attempts to gain autonomy over the Galileo Global Navigation Satellite System (GNSS) have forced the UK out of the project, even though the country provided it with significant investment.<sup>83</sup>

If geopolitical competition were to intensify in these shared spaces over the coming years, British strategists and policymakers would find it hard to look in the opposite direction. For starters, as an island nation, Britain is heavily dependent on unfettered access to the sea for imports and exports, just as it is committed to mitigating against climate change. Moreover, the UK is the closest major power to the Arctic that does not itself have territory in the region, while it has a territorial claim in Antarctica. Indeed, through its interests in the North Atlantic, Britain is part of an emerging 'Wider North', just as it can claim to be part of a broader South Atlantic (through the Falkland Islands and other territories) – zones in which the PRC may become more active in an attempt to displace the UK and US from the Indo-Pacific.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, as a leading military power, Britain cannot afford to be outflanked from above. The development of its own GNSS must remain a priority, just as the British Armed Forces should be empowered to prevent opponents from operating with impunity in outer space.<sup>85</sup>

## 2.3 National assumptions

### 2.3.1 Britain is a pivotal – but declining – power

Since the end of the Second World War, British strategists and policymakers generally oscillated between 'declinism' – the idea that the UK is in absolute and/or relative decline – and more confident thinking about the nation's international position. In the 20 years after the end of the Cold War, it was generally the latter perspective that prevailed. Douglas Hurd, the then Foreign Secretary, wrote in the *Daily Telegraph* in 1992 that Britain "punched above her weight" in the world, while in 1997 Tony Blair, then Leader of the Opposition, asserted that "century upon century it has been the destiny of Britain to lead other nations".<sup>86</sup>

He built on this notion in 1998 – as Prime Minister – in his annual speech to the Lord Mayor's Banquet to outline his vision of the UK as a "pivotal" power, a concept he utilised in later speeches in 1999 and 2002, respectively.<sup>87</sup> In 2003, John Reid, the then Defence Secretary, gave a broader overview of what being such a power entailed:

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<sup>83</sup> 'Satellites and space programmes after Brexit', *Gov.uk*, 4 November 2019, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/satellites-and-space-programmes-after-brexit>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>84</sup> Rogers, J., 'Geopolitics and the "Wider North": The United Kingdom as a "Strategic Pivot"', *RUSI Journal*, 2012, Vol. 157, 6 and Rogers, J., 'South America: Strategic drivers and Britain's interests', *The British Interest*, 2 December 2019, available at: <https://britishinterest.org/south-america-strategic-drivers-and-britains-interests/>, last visited 2 January 2020.

<sup>85</sup> Hoare, C., '£5 billion Galileo replacement revealed as Boris Johnson plans 2030 "full system" launch', *Daily Express*, 9 December 2019, available at: <https://www.express.co.uk/news/uk/1214959/brexit-news-galileo-uk-gnss-boris-johnson-chris-skidmore-space-defence-spt>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>86</sup> For Douglas Hurd's comments, see: Harvey, M., 'Perspectives on the UK's Place in the World', *Chatham House* (2011), available at: [https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Europe/1211pp\\_harvey.pdf](https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/public/Research/Europe/1211pp_harvey.pdf), last visited: 21 October 2019, p. 14. For Tony Blair's remarks, see: Kampfner, J., *Blair's Wars* (London: Simon and Schuster, 2003), p. 3.

<sup>87</sup> Blair, T., 'Tony Blair – 1998 Speech on Foreign Affairs', *UK Political Speeches*, 15 December 1998, available at: <http://www.ukpol.co.uk/tony-blair-1998-speech-on-foreign-affairs/>, last visited: 21 October 2019. See also: MacAskill, E., 'Blair's case for "pivotal" Britain', *The Guardian*, 23 November 1999, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/1999/nov/23/labour.labour1997to99>, last visited: 10 October 2019; 'Blair: UK becoming a pivotal power', *BBC News*, 23 November 1999, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/532620.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/532620.stm), last visited: 10 October 2019; and Sparrow, A., 'Blair claims pivotal role for Britain', *Daily Telegraph*, 5 January 2002, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/1380494/Blair-claims-pivotal-role-for-Britain.html>, last visited: 10 October 2019.

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We take a view of the world which is not isolationist, which has always been internationalist – which recognises that we not only have rights to defend in the world, but we also have responsibilities to discharge.<sup>88</sup>

Self-evidently, then, during the immediate post-Cold War period, Britain looked to itself as a powerful, even exceptional, country, with obligations to uphold in the world.

However, since the Great Recession, which impaired the British economy more than the economies of many of its peers, the UK has been prone to introspection and new bouts of ‘declinism’.<sup>89</sup> This has been exacerbated by the assumption – much of it partisan and speculative, or even *prescriptive* – that British power and influence will wane after leaving the EU.<sup>90</sup> For example, there was mild hysteria in 2016 when – largely due to the devaluation of the British currency in the immediate aftermath of the EU referendum – France temporarily leapfrogged Britain as the world’s fifth largest economy.<sup>91</sup> There have also been accusations that the UK is increasingly “irrelevant” or has declined in power – in the words of *The Economist* – to the extent that it “has not cut such a pathetic figure on the global stage since Suez”.<sup>92</sup>

Although it is uncertain – especially if remedial and proactive measures are not taken – the extent to which EU withdrawal might degrade UK power, British strategists and policymakers would do well to question the deeper ‘Goliathist’ presumption that has taken hold in recent years, if not since the end of the Second World War. With roots in the 19th century, ‘Goliathism’ is predicated on the premise that national power is born of sheer size and/or from membership of larger organisations.<sup>93</sup> Of course, there is a kernel of truth to this idea: small countries frequently lack the resources with which to generate power; because of this, regional organisations have often become the most attractive option for them.

It is, however, important to remember that Britain is – despite being physically small – not a small power. This point is captured aptly by Robert Tombs, a historian at the University of Cambridge:

Britain is more secure from major external threat than for half a millennium. Taking a long view (say the last three centuries) it remains what it always has been – one of the half-dozen or so strongest states in the world, and one of the most global in its attachments, its vision, and its trade. Within this leading group of states, Britain has not declined but has actually advanced, being now more powerful than its ancient rivals France, Germany and Russia.<sup>94</sup>

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<sup>88</sup> Cited in: Kampfner, J., ‘NS Interview – John Reid’, *New Statesman*, 3 March 2003, available at: <https://www.newstatesman.com/node/157205>, last visited: 10 October 2019.

<sup>89</sup> For example, the British economy has been compared to the more positive economic fortunes of Germany. For more on this debate, see: Evans, S., ‘Why do the German and UK economies differ sharply?’, *BBC News*, 11 February 2011, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-12447607>, last visited: 8 October 2019; and Pidd, H. and Inman, P., ‘Britain v Germany: how do their economies compare?’, *The Guardian*, 18 November 2011, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2011/nov/18/britain-germany-economies-eurozone-crisis>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>90</sup> Rogers, J., ‘Towards Global Britain: Challenging the Narratives of National Decline’, *The Henry Jackson Society* (2017), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Towards-Global-Britain.pdf>, last visited: 21 October 2019, p. 15.

<sup>91</sup> See: Cockburn, H., ‘France overtakes Britain as world’s fifth largest economy as Brexit fears hits markets’, *The Independent*, 6 July 2016, available at: <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/home-news/france-britain-uk-world-s-fifth-largest-economy-brexit-eu-referendum-a7123761.html>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>92</sup> See: Powell, J., ‘Britain once punched above its weight. Now it is irrelevant’, *The Guardian*, 13 November 2017, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2017/nov/13/britain-irrelevant-world-transatlantic-brexit>, last visited: 17 October 2019; and Bagehot, ‘Britain’s decline and fall’, *The Economist*, 29 June 2017, available at: <https://www.economist.com/britain/2017/06/29/britains-decline-and-fall>, last visited: 16 October 2019.

<sup>93</sup> For an overview of the concept of ‘Goliathism’, see: Rogers, J., ‘Britain could do better after Brexit by behaving more like David, and less like Goliath’, *Daily Telegraph*, 5 April 2019, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/04/05/brexit-britain-could-do-better-acting-like-david-less-like-goliath/>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>94</sup> Tombs, R., ‘The myth of Britain’s decline’, *The Spectator*, 8 July 2017, available at: <https://www.spectator.co.uk/2017/07/the-myth-of-britains-decline/>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

Indeed, contrary to the Goliathist logic, national power is born of more than a large land area, a large population, or even a large economic output. Power is also generated from a country's geography, culture, and political institutions, as well as an often coherent and well thought-out national (geo)strategy, including – incidentally – the alignment of the country's strategists' and policymakers' core assumptions about the world with the events and phenomena they are supposed to help deal with. Although Britain lacks the economic heft of the US, the industrial might of the PRC, and the demographic potential of India, Indonesia, Brazil or Nigeria, it has continued to bring together a range of capabilities into a synthesis, which it has often managed to harness to considerable national effect.<sup>95</sup> In the biblical tale in the *Book of Samuel*, it was the lumbering giant – Goliath – who lost to the smaller David's intelligence, speed and agility.

So, before succumbing either to declinism or Goliathism, British strategists and policymakers would do well to remember that the emerging powers – the PRC, India, Indonesia, Brazil and Nigeria, and so on – will not necessarily overtake Britain in terms of power and influence. Even if these continue to outrank the UK in various ways or catch up with it in others, most countries still have a long way to go to overcome their internal problems, to say nothing of harnessing their national capability to project power beyond their borders or immediate neighbourhoods. Thus, British strategists and policymakers should understand that if the UK is indeed destined to become a 'middle-ranking' or 'medium-sized' country in terms of power – as it was recently labelled – it will be largely a consequence of their own failure to craft an appropriate strategic approach to uphold their country's global position in the 21st century.<sup>96</sup>

### 2.3.2 *The pursuit of national security and economic growth are Britain's primary national interests*

Perhaps somewhat counter-intuitively, as Britain's strategic policy became less focused on geopolitical peer-competitors like the Soviet Union, it became progressively 'securitised' and economically-driven as the focus switched to combatting the threat of chaos and securing international trade and investment.<sup>97</sup> Consequently, it was assumed in the post-Cold War period that British strategic policy would be less fixated on the pursuit of national *power*, and more on the quest of national *security* and economic growth.

In terms of security, successive governments have placed increased emphasis on the need for national *security* strategies and strategic defence and *security* reviews. Throughout the 20th century, defence reviews were undertaken when it was felt politically expedient or when the strategic or financial situation dictated; since 2010, however, they have been undertaken every five years, and have become increasingly long and unwieldy processes, resulting in ever-lengthier documents.<sup>98</sup> Indeed, the degree of securitisation has become so profound that the country finds it difficult to articulate a coherent set of national objectives about how it wants the world to look from a broader geopolitical and normative standpoint.<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Rogers, J., 'Audit of Geopolitical Capability: An Assessment of Twenty Major Powers', *The Henry Jackson Society* (2019), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HJS-2019-Audit-of-Geopolitical-Capability-Report-web.pdf>, last visited: 5 October 2019.

<sup>96</sup> See: Glaze, B., 'Tony Blair claims Britain is a 'medium-sized country in a world of tall countries' as he steps-up campaign to block Brexit', *The Mirror*, 29 March 2018, available at: <https://www.mirror.co.uk/news/politics/tony-blair-claims-britain-medium-12271465>, last visited: 19 October 2019; and MacDonald, S., 'The Foreign and Commonwealth Office after Brexit', *Institute for Government*, 4 June 2018, available at: <https://www.instituteforgovernment.org.uk/fco-after-brexit>, last visited: 10 October 2019.

<sup>97</sup> 'Strategic Defence and Security Review', 2010, p. 41.

<sup>98</sup> The Defence Programme of 1981 was 12 pages in length; the SDR of 1998 was 71 pages (with an additional 315 of supporting essays and factsheets); the SDSR of 2010 was 73 pages (with another 37 pages for the National Security Strategy, published concurrently); and the NSS and SDSR of 2015 was 94 pages!

<sup>99</sup> See: Seely, B. and Rogers, J., 'Global Britain: A Twenty-First Century Vision', *The Henry Jackson Society* (2019), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/HJS-Global-Britain-%C2%AD-A-Twenty-first-Century-Vision-Report-A4-web.pdf>, last visited: 8 October 2019, p. 22.

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In relation to the economy, successive governments have de-emphasised the linkage between economic relations and geopolitical matters. However, economic power has not been actively levered in pursuit of the national interest, broadly defined in terms of generating national power. Instead, the logic of globalisation has prevailed, with its attendant (neo-)liberal ideology. The UK deregulated its economy and opened itself up to attract foreign direct investment, ignoring the risk from authoritarian powers – even when critical national infrastructure was involved.<sup>100</sup> Consequently, alongside national security, obtaining foreign investment and promoting economic growth have been consistently prioritised as national objectives.

Although national security and economic growth will remain important, Britain needs to consider the extent to which the changing character of the international system obliges a realignment of the nation's interests. By securitising its strategic policy so much, the UK has lost sight of the wood for the trees, or rather, it has lost sight of the dragons and bears to focus exclusively on midges and wasps. Granted, biting and stinging insects can be unpleasant, but they are unlikely to become an existential challenge, even if they take hold in zones of chaos. Bears and dragons – peer competitors – however, can become altogether a different magnitude of threat, which mandates the ability to dissuade and deter. In this environment, British strategists and policymakers need to 'de-securitise' the country's strategic policy, to pursue instead the regeneration of British national power, which will be needed to push back against opponents.

Likewise, in terms of economic growth, the UK needs to consider the extent to which international trade and investment are always desirable, especially if authoritarian regimes are allowed to get inside the British economy or if they consistently benefit more from an economic exchange than Britain does. It is here that British strategists and policymakers need to ask themselves whether authoritarian states are prepared to operate as partners, or whether they seek economic relations merely as an extension of competitive geopolitics. If the latter, it becomes questionable as to whether it is strategically wise to allow the British economy to remain open to investment from them or their companies.<sup>101</sup>

### 2.3.3 *Britain is best served by working with allies and partners, particularly the US*

Since the Second World War, the UK has made a conscious decision to work with allies and partners, to the extent that it has largely – but not exclusively – surrendered its capacity for autonomous action.<sup>102</sup> As the 1998 SDR put it:

We have a responsibility to contribute to a strong world Community. But we cannot achieve all our aims alone. Instead, we need to work through strong partnerships and alliances.<sup>103</sup>

Or, as Tony Blair, the then Prime Minister, explained to the Lord Mayor's Banquet eight years later:

Global challenges can only be met by global alliances. A nation like Britain has no prospect – *none* – in the world as it is developing today, of pursuing its national

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<sup>100</sup> For a succinct overview of recent concerns over the PRC's investment in the UK's Fifth Generation mobile network, see: Seely, B., Varnish, P. and Hemmings, J., 'Defending our data: Huawei, 5G and the Five Eyes', *The Henry Jackson Society* (2019), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/HJS-Huawei-Report-A1.pdf>, last visited: 9 October 2019.

<sup>101</sup> For an overview of the consequences of this approach in relation to the PRC, see: Hemmings, J., 'Is it time to rethink British policy on the People's Republic of China?', *The British Interest*, 15 July 2019, available at: <https://britishinterest.org/is-it-time-to-rethink-british-policy-on-the-peoples-republic-of-china/>, last visited: 8 October 2019 and Hemmings, J., 'How Britain should respond to Chinese threats', *The British Interest*, 18 July 2019, available at: <https://britishinterest.org/how-britain-should-respond-to-chinese-threats/>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>102</sup> Of all the combat operations undertaken by the British Armed Forces since 1991, only one – in Sierra Leone in 2000 – was undertaken autonomously.

<sup>103</sup> 'Strategic Defence Review', 1998, p. 3.

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interest except in close concert with others. That is why [...] the alliances Britain has with America and within Europe, must remain the cornerstones of our policy.<sup>104</sup>

Of all its allies and partners, the UK has favoured working with the US and various European countries. The UK has an established alliance – the ‘special relationship’ – with America: underpinned by liberal-democratic values, both countries stood against the Soviet Union and its communist worldview for much of the second half of the 20th century, just as they worked together to crush Nazi Germany. Since then, the US – with its commanding lead over authoritarian competitors like the PRC and Russia in almost every area of national capability – is still seen as Britain’s closest ally.<sup>105</sup>

Likewise, once back on their feet after the Second World War, both France and (West) Germany were seen as powerful partners in securing and then consolidating peace and prosperity in and around the Euro-Atlantic space.

Animated by both globalisation and Goliathism, Britain’s belief in working with allies was recently reaffirmed in the previous two NSSs and SDSRs – in 2010 and 2015, respectively – as well as the more recent 2018 NSCR and 2018 MDP.<sup>106</sup> More practically, it has been reconfirmed through procurement decisions and military operations (such as in Libya and Syria), as well as through the 2010 Lancaster House treaties with France and in the form of the ‘E3’ format with France and Germany since 2003.<sup>107</sup>

However, in recent years, Britain has been forced to question how willing and capable its existing allies will remain in the coming decades, not least in helping to dissuade and deter peer and near-peer competitors. It is not clear, for example, to what extent the US – with growing interests in the Indo-Pacific region – will remain focused on security in the Euro-Atlantic, or whether the American domestic political system can continue to bear the burden for the strategic defence of Europe.<sup>108</sup> It is also unclear whether European allies will continue to align themselves with Britain, not least after British withdrawal from the EU. Recently, Europeans have been less willing to support UK interests – for example, in relation to the Mauritian claim on the British Indian Ocean Territory – even when they have little directly at stake.<sup>109</sup>

And as they have weakened, the strategic utility of European allies has also come into question. For example, although France may look increasingly to the UK to enhance its position in Europe with respect to Germany, the French armed forces have been sapped of their strength, just as

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<sup>104</sup> Blair, T., ‘Tony Blair foreign policy speech’, *BBC News*, 13 November 2006, available at: [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/6145454.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/6145454.stm), last visited: 9 November 2019.

<sup>105</sup> Rogers, J., ‘Audit of Geopolitical Capability: An Assessment of Twenty Major Powers 2019’, *The Henry Jackson Society* (2019), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HJS-2019-Audit-of-Geopolitical-Capability-Report-web.pdf>, last visited: 5 October 2019.

<sup>106</sup> See: ‘National Security Capability Review’, 2018, p. 8 and ‘Modernising Defence Programme’, 2018, p. 4.

<sup>107</sup> ‘Strategic Defence and Security Review’, 2010, p. 61.

<sup>108</sup> While President Donald Trump has been most vocal over insufficient burden sharing within the context of NATO, over the past ten years, a succession of US leaders have warned of the consequences of European inadequacy. The most eloquent was Robert Gates, then US Secretary of Defence, who declared in a speech in Brussels in 2011: “The blunt reality is that there will be dwindling appetite and patience in the US Congress – and in the American body politic writ large – to expend increasingly precious funds on behalf of nations that are apparently unwilling to devote the necessary resources or make the necessary changes to be serious and capable partners in their own defence. Nations apparently willing and eager for American taxpayers to assume the growing security burden left by reductions in European defence budgets. Indeed, if current trends in the decline of European defence capabilities are not halted and reversed, future US political leaders – those for whom the Cold War was *not* the formative experience that it was for me – may not consider the return on America’s investment in NATO worth the cost.” See: Gates, R. ‘Remarks by Secretary Gates at the Security and Defence Agenda, Brussels, Belgium’, *US Department of Defence*, 10 June 2011, available at: <https://archive.defense.gov/Transcripts/Transcript.aspx?TranscriptID=4839>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>109</sup> For more on the problems Britain has had with its allies, see: Rogers, J., ‘Why does Britain often look so weak?’, *The British Interest*, 5 August 2019, available at: <https://britishinterest.org/why-does-britain-often-look-so-weak/>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

they have been kept busy monitoring internal political instability.<sup>110</sup> If Britain's allies become more burdensome as they weaken, the country needs to know which of their demands it will be prepared to meet or reject.

Consequently, British strategists and policymakers should be prepared to push existing European allies to do more to help underpin European security, just as they should consider how to diversify their country's alliance portfolio. Equally, building on the successes of recent years, relations could be rekindled or built with other countries, such as Japan, Australia, Canada and New Zealand in the Indo-Pacific, Chile and Columbia in South America, and Nigeria and Kenya in Africa.<sup>111</sup> As these potential new allies' and partners' respective regions rise, they may become increasingly important for the UK in the decades ahead.

#### *2.3.4 National cohesion is becoming less relevant*

Since the end of the Cold War, national cohesion and identity have been consistently downplayed. It was assumed that national identity was weakening under the conditions of globalisation, just as (neo-)liberalism would serve to empower the individual (which could itself have several intersecting identities above and beyond a national one). Throughout the post-Cold War era, the ability – even the right – of the nation-state to demand the loyalty of citizens has also been downplayed, to the extent that British governments have been generally unwilling to apply treason laws against individuals who might otherwise be considered to be guilty of such crimes.<sup>112</sup> This has applied particularly to those who have left the UK to fight on behalf of proscribed political and religious groups, those who leak official secrets and/or those who collude with foreign governments with whom the British government is in dispute.

This problem corresponds with a general weakening of the UK as a political entity as regional political movements – led by the Scottish National Party in Scotland – have taken hold. This political movement has already begun to agitate for a second referendum on Scottish separation from the UK, despite having had a national referendum in only 2014.

Of course, the lack of patriotic sentiment among some Britons is well-known. George Orwell pointed out in 1941 that “it is unquestionably true that almost any English intellectual would feel more ashamed of standing to attention during ‘God save the King’ than of stealing from a poor box”.<sup>113</sup> While such sentiment might be fairly harmless during periods of relative peace and prosperity, in less benign times it can prevent a nation from even upholding its own security, let alone shaping the wider world. If a country does not have the loyalty of its own people, near-peer and peer-competitors could exploit various factions – particularly so-called ‘useful idiots’ – within the country through the tactics of divide and rule, to the extent that they do not even know that they are being used.

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<sup>110</sup> In terms of defence expenditure as a percentage of national output, the French armed forces have seen a reduction from 1.87% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to 1.84%. According to NATO, in terms of gross expenditure, even Germany now spends more than France, despite spending less as a proportion of GDP. In 2019, NATO estimated that French defence spending would be US\$50.7 billion, against Germany's US\$54.1 billion. See: ‘Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2012-2019)’, *North Atlantic Treaty Organisation* (2019), available at: [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf\\_2019\\_06/20190625\\_PR2019-069-EN.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2019_06/20190625_PR2019-069-EN.pdf), last visited: 8 October 2019, p. 3. According to the French Ministry of Defence, Operation SENTINELLE, the operation the French government initiated in 2015 in response to the terrorist attacks around Paris, has required up to 10,000 French military personnel. See: ‘Opération Sentinelle’, *La Ministre des Armées*, 2019, available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/fre/operations/france/operation-sentinelle>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>111</sup> One option would be to foster closer a closer alignment between so-called ‘CANZUK’ countries. See: Seely, B., ‘Proposals for CANZUK’, *The British Interest*, 13 July 2019, available at: <https://britishinterest.org/proposals-for-canzuk/>, last visited: 10 October 2019.

<sup>112</sup> Schraer, R., ‘Does the Treason Act need updating?’, *BBC News*, 25 July 2018, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-44954200>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>113</sup> Orwell, G., *England Your England* (London: Penguin Classics, 2017 [1941]), p. 34.

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Consequently, British strategists and policymakers need to ask themselves if the country has got the balance right. The UK is unlikely to ever indulge in brash outpourings of national patriotic fervour, but a powerful national story is needed to bind a country together. Likewise, they should consider whether effective treason legislation is needed to deter British citizens from colluding with proscribed foreign forces, as well as to prevent hostile regimes from exploiting weaknesses within Britain's open economic and political system.<sup>114</sup>

### 2.3.5 Military and diplomatic power have declined in importance

Due to the more benign international environment in the immediate post-Cold War era, successive British governments assumed it was possible to cut back on the nation's coercive capabilities and invest instead – albeit at a greatly reduced level – in so-called 'soft' power.<sup>115</sup> In terms of diplomatic projection, the FCO has witnessed sustained cuts in spending and personnel over the past three decades. For example, in 1991, it had 2,710 staff serving overseas, while in 2018, it had only 1,744 – a 35% reduction, compounded by additional reductions in personnel in the UK.<sup>116</sup> Likewise, in terms of diplomatic spending, the FCO has been allotted just 0.1% of national output annually for the past 30 years, but in 2019, it could fall below 0.1% for the first time in history, despite the government's attempt to re-emphasise a 'Global Britain'.<sup>117</sup>

Equally, in terms of British military capability, the trajectory has also been downward. In the early 1990s, the UK could put to sea three aircraft carriers, 29 attack submarines and 51 destroyers and frigates; in 2019, it has no operational aircraft carriers (although two large aircraft carriers are undergoing sea trials); seven attack submarines and just 19 destroyers and frigates.<sup>118</sup> Similarly, the British Army could assemble an armoured division in 1991 to send to Iraq to fight in the Gulf War; today, the RAND Corporation alleges that the UK would have difficulty assembling an armoured brigade to defend a NATO ally.<sup>119</sup> The reason for this is simple: besides having been recalibrated to operate in zones of chaos, British military expenditure has been reduced from just over 4% of national economic output in 1989 to around 2.5% in the late 1990s, to just over 2% by the mid-2010s.<sup>120</sup> Consequently, despite continuing to put to sea some impressive capabilities, the British Armed Forces lack the capacity and sustainability required to project power to several regions simultaneously, let alone take on, dissuade or deter a peer or near-peer competitor – even as the framework nation within an alliance or coalition when America might choose not to become directly involved, which is an increasingly likely eventuality.

Meanwhile, the UK has placed greater emphasis on cultivating 'soft' power, not least through the dispersal of Official Development Assistance (ODA) – money allotted to developing countries

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<sup>114</sup> Ekins, P., Hennessey, P., Mahmood, K. and Tugendhat, T., 'Aiding the Enemy: How and why to restore the law of treason', *Policy Exchange*, 2018, available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Aiding-the-Enemy.pdf>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>115</sup> 'Soft power' is the power to attract. For more on the concept, see: Nye, J., *Soft Power: The means to success in world politics* (New York City: Public Affairs, 2004).

<sup>116</sup> For statistics, see: 'Running out of credit? The decline of the Foreign Office and the case for sustained funding', *British Foreign Policy Group* (2019), available at: <https://bfp.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/Running-out-of-Credit-HR.pdf>, last visited: 8 October 2019, p. 38.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

<sup>118</sup> Mitch. D., 'Royal Navy and Royal Fleet Auxiliary – Today, past and future (a quick overview)', *Naval Analyses*, 2015, available at: <https://www.navalanalyses.com/2015/09/royal-navy-and-royal-fleet-auxiliary.html>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>119</sup> Shurkin. M., 'The Abilities of the British, French, and Germany Armies to generate and sustain armored brigades in the Baltics', *RAND Corporation*, 2017, available at: [https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research\\_reports/RR1600/RR1629/RAND\\_RR1629.pdf](https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR1600/RR1629/RAND_RR1629.pdf) last visited: 8 October 2019, p. 1.

<sup>120</sup> For defence spending statistics, see: Rogers, J., 'Global Britain and the future of the British Armed Forces', *The Henry Jackson Society* (2017), available at: <http://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/11/HJS-Global-Britain-and-the-Future-of-the-British-Armed-Forces.pdf>, last visited: 7 October 2019, p. 20.

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to alleviate poverty.<sup>121</sup> Over the past three decades, Britain has dramatically expanded its ODA provision, from US\$3.9 billion in 1991, to US\$18.1 billion in 2017.<sup>122</sup> In part, this was due to a substantial increase in British economic output, but UK ODA has also grown because successive governments have increased the relative size of the expenditure, almost year-on-year since 1999. These efforts culminated in the passage of legislation called the ‘International Development Act’ in the Houses of Parliament in 2015, mandating annual ODA spending to be fixed at 0.7% of Gross National Income (GNI). Paradoxically, these efforts have intensified as extreme poverty has fallen around the world, from 36% of the world’s people living on less than \$US1.90 per day in 1990, to just 10% in 2015.<sup>123</sup>

However, as wider state competition takes hold, British strategists and policymakers will need to ask themselves whether the UK is both spending enough in relation to ‘hard’ and ‘soft’ power and/or getting the balance right. While it has become increasingly apparent that the resources available for future objectives should be increased – the government committed an extra £2.2 billion to defence in the latest Spending Round in September 2019 after several parliamentarians called for higher military funding – the pace of change has been slow.<sup>124</sup> Although the British government now accepts the long-term challenge from intense state competition, there remains a hesitancy to take effective remedial action. Besides additional funding over the coming years, Britain may also need to reorient spending priorities in relation to diplomacy, defence and development. As extreme poverty continues to fall around the world, the UK would do well to shift its focus to confronting future challenges, just as it would be wise for it to rethink its emphasis on ‘soft’ power – at least in its current incarnation.<sup>125</sup> Here, it is worth noting that most of Britain’s allies – Canada, France, Italy, Japan and the US – spend significantly less on ODA, averaging 0.28% of GNI per year between them.<sup>126</sup> In a world of increasingly powerful and determined authoritarian states, it is essential to ascertain how British national influence overseas might be better projected.

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<sup>121</sup> For the definition of ODA, see: ‘Official development assistance – definition and coverage’, *Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development*, 2019, available at: <https://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/officialdevelopmentassistance/definitionandcoverage.htm>, last visited: 12 October 2019.

<sup>122</sup> See: ‘Net Official Development Assistance (ODA)’, *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*, 2019, available at: <https://data.oecd.org/oda/net-oda.htm>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>123</sup> ‘Poverty headcount ratio at \$1.90 a day (2011 PPP) (% of population)’, *World Bank*, 2019, available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SI.POV.DDAY>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>124</sup> For a good overview of the recent increases in defence spending, see: Chalmers, M., ‘The end of defence austerity? The 2019 spending round and the UK defence budget’, *Royal United Services Institute*, 30 September 2019, available at: <https://rusi.org/commentary/end-defence-austerity-2019-spending-round-and-uk-defence-budget>, last visited: 8 October 2019. For the calls for higher defence spending, see: Ellwood, T., ‘The new prime minister must spend 3% of GDP on defence’, *The Times*, 4 June 2019, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/the-new-prime-minister-must-spend-3-of-gdp-on-defence-7zpd3ch3g>, last visited: 9 October 2019; ‘Jeremy Hunt says UK “should consider defence spending boost”’, *BBC News*, 14 May 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-parliaments-48262331>, last visited: 9 October 2019 and Lewis, J., ‘The extra money for defence is a sticking plaster on a gaping wound’, *The House*, 12 November 2018, available at: <https://www.politicshome.com/news/uk/defence/defence-funding/house/house-magazine/99702/julian-lewis-extra-money-defence-sticking>, last visited: 9 October 2019.

<sup>125</sup> For more on why UK development assistance should be focused on more than traditional poverty reduction, see: Seely, B. and Rogers, J., ‘Foreign aid must be about more than just alleviating poverty’, *CAPX*, 4 March 2019, available at: <https://capx.co/foreign-aid-must-be-about-more-than-just-alleviating-poverty/>, last visited: 9 October 2019.

<sup>126</sup> See: ‘Net Official Development Assistance (ODA)’, *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development*, 2019, available at: <https://data.oecd.org/oda/net-oda.htm>, last visited: 8 October 2019. Canada spends 0.26% of its GNI on ODA, France spends 0.43%, Italy spends 0.3%, Japan spends 0.23%, and the US spends a mere 0.18%.

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### 3. 'Global Britain' and the future of British strategic policy

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Despite the horrors in zones of chaos over the past 30 years, the international environment has been relatively benign when seen from a broader timeframe. The key global trends even appeared to be moving in line with the core assumptions behind British strategic policy. Globalisation was drawing countries closer; liberalism and democracy were expanding; the world was largely centred on the Euro-Atlantic, in which the British Isles were geographically medial; and – with strong allies and no peer competitors – the country was able to devote a relatively smaller share of its national output to diplomacy and defence, leaving ever-greater resources for domestic consumption.

Over the past few years, however, it has become clearer that the international environment is starting to change and in ways that are not conducive either to the established global paradigm – with its intrinsic core assumptions – or the British national interest. Irrespective of the emergence of the rules-based international system, the rise of wider state competition is now beginning to make the world less predictable, increasingly contested and ever-more difficult for British strategists and policymakers to manage, let alone shape or expand.

In this changing geopolitical environment, it is evident that many of the core strategic assumptions behind British strategic policy are becoming outmoded. Placing these assumptions under critique is important for two additional reasons beyond the fact that they are under mounting challenge from international developments and phenomena. Firstly, many of the assumptions behind the global approach have also doubled-up as aspirations. British strategists and policymakers have not only been gripped by them, but have also *hoped* that many would come to pass. This makes certain core assumptions dangerous: they may generate normative path dependencies, making it difficult to accept their dislocation. Secondly, given that these are *core* assumptions, ordering operational and tactical suppositions, their strength and traction could have significant implications for British strategic policy well into the 21st century. Consequently, as it initiates a new strategic review, the UK cannot afford to get them wrong.

#### 3.1 Contending approaches?

As Britain's global perspective has come into question, a number of alternative approaches – with their own core assumptions – have been offered as replacements. Over the past few years, two perspectives have been put forward as visions for Britain's strategic policy: the first is traditional isolationism; the second is 'compensationism'.

Isolationism has a rich tradition in the UK. The major assumption behind this perspective is that passivity breeds peace; in other words, if Britain is indifferent and disengaged, it will be less likely to provoke a reaction from its competitors. Isolationists argue that British engagement – especially in terms of a military forward presence – with other countries and regions, whether in Eastern Europe or the Middle East, is responsible for the way other countries behave.<sup>127</sup> For example, they claim that Britain's support for NATO's enlargement in the 1990s and recent troop and fighter deployments to the Baltic states, Romania and elsewhere, provoke Russia into a hostile response, whether in Ukraine and/or Syria.<sup>128</sup> Isolationists also frequently see the

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<sup>127</sup> See: Jenkins, S., 'The London arms fair is an inexcusable disgrace - It's a stain on the nation', *The Guardian*, 9 September 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/09/london-arms-fair-weapons-british-repressive-regimes>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>128</sup> See: Hitchens, P., 'Peter Hitchens addresses the Bow Group on British Foreign Policy', *The Bow Group*, 9 June 2018, available at: <https://www.bowgroup.org/media/peter-hitchens-addresses-bow-group-british-foreign-policy>, last visited: 8 October 2019; and Simon Jenkins, cited in Shorthouse, R., 'How should Britain defend itself?', *Bright Blue*, 12 June 2019, available at: <https://brightblue.org.uk/britain-defend-itself/>, last visited: 7 October 2019.

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UK military presence or arms transfers in the Middle East as the cause of ‘blowback’, in the form of terrorist atrocities on the part of Islamist extremists.<sup>129</sup>

Like isolationism, compensationism is also predicated on the assumption that Britain is responsible for many of the world’s problems, whether poverty in Africa or the Caribbean (seen as a consequence of slavery), discord in the Middle East (perceived as a consequence of past British governments’ roles in drawing national borders), or even environmental degradation (due to Britain’s role in unleashing the industrial revolution). But, in response, compensationists do not believe the UK should simply take a more modest role in the world; instead, they assert that Britain should provide economic assistance and technological transfer – even reparations – to ‘compensate’ those they feel have suffered due to past British actions.<sup>130</sup>

Each of these perspectives is flawed. Isolationism is predicated on a false premise: doing what Russia wants, for example, by withdrawing British support for allies like the Baltic states or Poland, would not coax Moscow into a less belligerent posture. The regime of Vladimir Putin is not without both agency and interests. Indeed, Russia annexed Crimea and invaded eastern Ukraine just after the UK declared that it would withdraw its military presence from Germany by 2020, after the last US main battle tanks were extracted from Europe, and when the EU and NATO both still sought active cooperation with the Kremlin. What this shows is that, far from placating Russia, the drawdown of the British and American forward presence in Central and Eastern Europe may have encouraged Moscow into thinking that they no longer considered the region to be of strategic import, leading ultimately to the destabilisation of democratic allies and geopolitical revisionism.

Likewise, Britain cannot ‘compensate’ foreign actors because it is not responsible for the problems in other countries or regions – they often predate British engagement, and frequently acted as a vacuum to draw the UK in. Even where Britain might be held originally culpable, the country was far from uniquely destructive and often became a pioneer of reform. For example, despite having been the largest trader in African slaves in the 18th century, the UK was the first major power to permanently outlaw the slave trade (in 1807) and fully abolish slavery (between 1834 and 1838) – even as it was still practised elsewhere around the world (including in parts of Africa itself). Indeed, it was the UK that used its naval power for much of the remainder of the 19th century to repress the slave trade to the point that it had all but been delegitimised and abolished by 1900.<sup>131</sup>

### **3.2 From ‘global policy’ to ‘Global Britain’**

If isolationism and compensationism are ill-conceived and emotional responses to the progressive dislocation of Britain’s established global strategic approach, what, then, could be developed to replace it? For starters, not all of the core assumptions behind British strategic policy – on the global, geopolitical and national planes – are necessarily wrong. Several also chime with the nation’s broader strategic aspirations, such as the spread of liberal principles and democratic structures or the development of a rules-based international system – in Europe and beyond. Rather than offering a wholesale paradigm shift – throwing the baby out

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<sup>129</sup> See: Jenkins, S., ‘The London arms fair is an inexcusable disgrace – It’s a stain on the nation’, *The Guardian*, 9 September 2019, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/sep/09/london-arms-fair-weapons-british-repressive-regimes>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>130</sup> For example, John McDonnell, the Shadow Chancellor, has argued that Britain should ‘begin making some reparations for our colonial past’, in the form of ‘green technologies’, to the ‘Global South’. See: McDonnell, J., ‘John McDonnell speaking at Labour Party Conference’, *Labour*, 23 September 2019, available at: <https://labour.org.uk/press/john-mcdonnell-speaking-labour-party-conference/>, last visited: 7 October 2019.

<sup>131</sup> To show how far Britain was prepared to go to enforce the abolition of the slave trade, even with friendly countries see Bethell, L., *The Abolition of the Brazilian Slave Trade: Britain, Brazil and the Slave* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2009), p. 327.

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with the bathwater – it is perhaps better simply to change the bathwater. Many of Britain’s core strategic assumptions merely require reworking to reduce tensions between them, making them fit for purpose; however, others need more systemic re-appraisal, not least to prevent the emergence of logical inconsistencies caused by changing geopolitical circumstances.

For example, although the UK has continued to view globalisation as both immutable and desirable, it has also become increasingly alarmed about the resurgence of intense state competition, as well as – in recent years – the acceleration of climate change. In May 2019, the House of Commons declared a ‘climate emergency’, while the British government enacted legislation in June 2019 to reduce Britain’s greenhouse gas emissions to net zero by 2050.<sup>132</sup> The UK Committee on Climate Change argues that this is the year by which the country should significantly reduce emissions to help thwart catastrophic global warming (which is projected to begin once the global temperature exceeds 1.5°c above pre-industrial era levels annually).<sup>133</sup> However, the problem here is that globalisation is stimulating both geopolitical competition and climate change.

The reason is clear. Like many other Western countries, Britain has implemented a raft of new environmental legislation since the 2000s – to the extent that the country has reduced greenhouse gas emissions by 39% since 1990.<sup>134</sup> However, at the same time, the UK took advantage of (even pioneered) globalisation by de-industrialising and ‘offshoring’ its industries to countries where environmental standards were (and remain) far lower.<sup>135</sup> Consequently, Britain has become increasingly dependent on the import of foreign manufactured goods (and the export of waste for recycling), which requires container shipping – creating much pollution – from (and to) countries like the PRC, India, Malaysia and Indonesia.<sup>136</sup> Thus, the UK has partly negated the progress it has made in terms of reducing its own emissions because approximately 20% of British emissions are now effectively released overseas.<sup>137</sup> At the same time, as authoritarian peer competitors – such as the PRC – have grown wealthier from manufacturing items that were previously produced in British factories (as well as those of other Western democracies), they have acquired the financial means to challenge the rules-based international system.<sup>138</sup> This is compounded by the fact that the PRC has also disregarded global climatic concerns, using its newfound wealth to open an array of new coal-fired power stations.<sup>139</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> On the issue of the ‘climate emergency’, see: ‘UK Parliament declares climate emergency’, *BBC News*, 1 May 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-48126677>, last visited: 8 October 2019. Kumar, For an overview of the 2050 target, see: Harrabin, R., ‘Climate change: UK government to commit to 2050 target’, *BBC News*, 12 June 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-48596775>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>133</sup> ‘Net Zero: The UK’s contribution to stopping global warming’, *Committee on Climate Change* (2019), available at: <https://www.theccc.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/05/Net-Zero-The-UKs-contribution-to-stopping-global-warming.pdf>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>134</sup> See: Evans, S., ‘Analysis: UK’s CO2 emissions fell for a record sixth consecutive year in 2018’, *Carbon Brief*, 4 March 2019, available at: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/analysis-uks-co2-emissions-fell-for-record-sixth-consecutive-year-in-2018>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>135</sup> From 1990 to 2018, the value added from manufacturing in the UK economy declined from 16.7% to 8.9% of GDP – a 46.7% reduction. See: ‘Manufacturing, value added (% of GDP) - United Kingdom’, *World Bank*, 2019, available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NV.IND.MANF.ZS?locations=GB>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>136</sup> For an overview of the pollution caused by shipping, see: Raval, A., Spero, J. and Campbell, C., ‘Pollution: the race to clean up the shipping industry’, *Financial Times*, 30 May 2019, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/642b6b62-70ab-11e9-bf5c-6eeb837566c5>, last visited: 8 October 2019. For an summary of UK waste exports, see: Harrabin, R. and Edgington, T., ‘Recycling: Where is the plastic waste mountain?’, *BBC News*, 1 January 2019, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-46566795>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>137</sup> Owen, A. and Barrett, J., ‘Guest post: The UK’s carbon footprint is at its lowest level for 20 years’, *Carbon Brief*, 11 April 2019, available at: <https://www.carbonbrief.org/guest-post-the-uks-carbon-footprint-is-at-its-lowest-level-for-20-years>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

<sup>138</sup> For example, from 2000 to 2018, the PRC’s defence spending ballooned by 308% from US\$41.2 billion to US\$168.2. See: *The Military Balance 2001* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2001), p. 301 and *The Military Balance 2019* (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2019), p. 514.

<sup>139</sup> Shearer, C., Yu, A. and Nace, T., ‘Out of Step: China is Driving the Continued Growth of the Global Coal Fleet’, *Global Energy Monitor* (2019), available at: <https://endcoal.org/global-coal-plant-tracker/reports/out-of-step/>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

Here there is self-evidently a disconnect, in both an environmental and geopolitical context: to properly meet its 2050 target and to prevent wider state competition from intensifying further still, Britain will have to wean itself off foreign manufactured goods. To do that, it will need to pursue ‘de-globalisation’, in the form of drawing back manufacturing to the British Isles, otherwise known as ‘reshoring’ industry.

It is here where the paradigm of ‘Global Britain’ – a confident and outward-looking country, ready to seize new opportunities and play its part in building a greener and more stable and orderly world – holds much potential for the strategic review in 2020.<sup>140</sup> Unlike isolationism and compensationism, this new approach would allow for the best elements of Britain’s post-Cold War global approach to be adapted and updated in accordance with the changing character of the international system, which is undergoing negative change as climate change and geopolitical competition surge in consequence. At the same time, by re-emphasising the importance of the British union-state, ‘Global Britain’ provides the political foundations for the development of the capabilities needed to actively and forcefully protect British interests, both in terms of environmental protection and in dissuading and deterring the potential actions of others – not least authoritarian, revisionist regimes.

### **3.3 Policy recommendations**

As British strategists and policymakers come to realise that the kind of world the UK favours will not emerge of its own volition and that opponents mean it and its allies harm, it will be necessary to adapt. Here are eight recommendations for consideration during the run-up to the strategic review in 2020:

#### *3.3.1 Embrace the need for substantial adaptation*

While the complete overhaul of British strategic policy would be unnecessary and potentially counterproductive, it would also be erroneous to cling to a set of increasingly outmoded and contested core assumptions. Therefore, British strategists and policymakers need to prepare to make meaningful and significant changes to the dominant global approach, to the extent that the nation’s broader objectives will still be upheld. This may be painful, particularly as some of the core assumptions – not least the acceptance of globalisation – have become so deeply rooted. However, the UK has some of the finest intellectual and material capabilities on Earth, so there is no reason why it cannot continue to secure its national interests, even in a set of changed strategic circumstances.

#### *3.3.2 Acknowledge the nature of authoritarian competitors*

To no small extent, the UK has, alongside its allies, succeeded in projecting and ‘installing’ its vision of economic and international order to the global level – in the form of liberal principles and the wider rules-based international system. But many other countries, particularly authoritarian regimes, do not see the world in the same way that Britain does. This is because such regimes are engaged in a daily struggle for power to survive, particularly in relation to their own people, especially dissatisfied elements within their own societies. Because some of these elements look to the UK and other democratic nations for inspiration, Britain’s liberal democracy becomes a target for autocrats to undermine. In turn, this means that ‘peace’ – as a state of existence – does not exist for such regimes: for them, peace is just another form of war, waged with different means. There needs to be a wider recognition amongst British strategists

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<sup>140</sup> For more on the concept of ‘Global Britain’, see: ‘Global Britain: delivering on our international ambition’, *Gov.uk*, 12 June 2018, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/global-britain-delivering-on-our-international-ambition>, last visited: 8 October 2019.

and policymakers of this difference in understanding, especially as authoritarian powers – like the PRC and Russia – are re-emerging as geopolitical and ideological competitors.<sup>141</sup>

### 3.3.3 Focus on the power of the British union-state

Under the conditions of climate change and geopolitical antagonism, the state is the guardian of national freedom and action, not its enemy. This is a challenge for the broadly (neo-)liberal and teleological perspectives that have prevailed for the past 30 years. If contemporary history can teach Britain anything, it is surely that the values and principles that it holds dear – liberalism and democracy – have survived *only* because of the country's geopolitical strength and determination to uphold them. The UK cannot hope to compete with aggressive authoritarian states if it is too open – economically and politically – to their attempts to weaken and undermine it.<sup>142</sup> Central coordination is therefore the best means to dissuade and deter against foreign attack – from its many angles – and marshal the power to push back.<sup>143</sup> In Britain's context, this means the re-centring and strengthening of the union-state – the UK – through policies to enhance national identity and cohesion (Britishness) and shut out foreign interference.

### 3.3.4 Reassert intellectual and technological leadership

As a small island, the UK's continued global success will depend on its ability to uphold its position as one of the world's most intellectually innovative and technologically powerful countries. In the same way that Britain pioneered liberalism, democratisation and industrialisation in the late 18th and 19th centuries, it could develop the ideas and technologies – with all their positive impact for the nation and economy – to lead the world in the 21st century. The UK should therefore do more to spread its own message and develop radical new solutions to overcome climate change and to remain at the cutting edge of military technology. This could be achieved by pressing forward with the establishment of a national advanced research projects agency, with an explicit mandate to pursue new and revolutionary green and military technologies, such as fusion power, decarbonisation techniques, quantum systems, artificial intelligence, and direct energy weaponry.<sup>144</sup>

### 3.3.5 Reorder the institutions responsible for strategic policy

The institutions responsible for the implementation of British strategic policy – the FCO, the MOD, the Department for International Development (DFID) and the National Security Council

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<sup>141</sup> General Sir Nicholas Carter, the Chief of the Defence Staff, has begun to grasp at this difference. See: Carter, N., 'Chief of the Defence Staff, General Sir Nick Carter's annual RUSI speech', *Gov.uk*, 5 December 2019, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/chief-of-the-defence-staff-general-sir-nick-carters-annual-rusi-speech>, last visited: 2 January 2020. For an overview of the wider problem, see: Rogers, J., 'UK Defence Doctrine 2018: Geopolitics and the Changing Character and Nature of War', *Paper Commissioned by the Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre* (London: The Henry Jackson Society, 2018).

<sup>142</sup> To prevent collusion with foreign competitors, proposals have recently been made for new treason laws and a British version of America's 'Logan Act'. For more on these proposals, see: Ekins, R., Hennessey, P., Mahmood, K. and Tugendhat, T., 'Aiding the Enemy How and why to restore the law of treason', *Policy Exchange* (2018), available at: <https://policyexchange.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/Aiding-the-Enemy.pdf>, last visited: 16 October 2019; and Goodman, S., 'Why Britain needs a Logan Act', *The British Interest*, 11 September 2019, <https://britishinterest.org/why-britain-needs-a-logan-act/>, last visited: 16 October 2019.

<sup>143</sup> As Lord Palmerston explained in the House of Commons on 8 May 1841: "Those who desire to see the principles of liberty thrive and extend through the world, should cherish, with an almost religious veneration, the prosperity and greatness of England. So long as England shall ride preeminent on the ocean of human affairs, there can be none whose fortunes shall be so shipwrecked – there can be none whose condition shall be so desperate and forlorn – that they may not cast a look of hope towards the light that beams from hence; and though they may be beyond the reach of our power, our moral support and our sympathy shall cheer them in their adversity, and shall assist them to bear up, and to hold out, waiting for a better day." Cited in: Francis, G.H., *Opinions and Policy of the Right Honourable Viscount Palmerston* (London: Colburn and Company, 1852), pp. 429-430.

<sup>144</sup> Rogers, J., 'Britain needs foreign aid policy fit for modern era', *The Times*, 19 December 2019, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/edition/comment/britain-needs-foreign-aid-policy-fit-for-modern-era-d9m2kwb69>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

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- were developed in a different age. If the UK is to compete successfully against potentially larger powers in the future, it needs to better integrate its national institutions to maximise their effectiveness and efficiency. To further radicalise the 2018 NSCR's innovative "fusion doctrine", the establishment of a National Strategy Council ought to be considered to set long-term strategic policy and to coordinate the departments responsible for its delivery.<sup>145</sup> Likewise, to ensure that British ODA spending is more strategically targeted, DFID ought to be taken under the wing of the FCO - preferably as a semi-autonomous agency.<sup>146</sup>

### *3.3.6 Recalibrate strategic resources*

The UK has already recognised that the resources available to British strategists and policymakers are as insufficient as they are misaligned for dealing with the deteriorating international situation. To help the UK compete more robustly against authoritarian competitors, both defence and diplomatic spending need to be made more efficient and then increased - or, more accurately, "normalised" - to levels akin to those of the past when wider state competition was more intense. In addition, greater attention needs to be given to how existing British military assets, not least the Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers, could be better leveraged to dissuade and deter opponents. Moreover, Britain would do well to consider the acquisition of a new Royal Yacht to help project the country's image around the world and drum-up the sale of UK products.<sup>147</sup>

Likewise, British ODA efforts are still targeted overwhelmingly on the reduction of material poverty in the developing world, a problem that has decreased substantially since the 1990s, just as the challenge from authoritarianism and climate change has become more pervasive. In this sense, some of the UK's vast ODA expenditure could be re-allocated to undertake research (especially through the advanced research projects agency) into innovative new green technologies, particularly if the resulting innovations could help developing countries transition towards a greener and more sustainable future.

### *3.3.7 Expand geographic and strategic horizons*

Because of its close geographic proximity, Europe will always assume a special place in British strategic thinking. That said, the continent is - increasingly - no longer the world's economic and geopolitical cockpit. As a global power, the UK needs to understand how developments in distant theatres are connected to its own geopolitical interests, as well as the concerns of its alliances, not least in relation to the US. This means it should be ready to press its existing allies to share more of the burden for European security, as well as upholding the rules-based international system. Britain also needs to be ready to form new alliances and partnerships with similarly minded countries to confront the problems of the future, whether in outer space, the Indo-Pacific, the South Atlantic or even Europe itself.

### *3.3.8 Continuously test core assumptions*

Finally, challenging the core assumptions behind strategic policy is important at all times. But during strategic reviews - particularly during periods of deep international change - such testing becomes even more important. Unforeseen and revolutionary international developments

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<sup>145</sup> 'National Security Capability Review', 2018, pp. 10-11.

<sup>146</sup> For more on such proposals, see: Seely, B. and Rogers, J., 'Global Britain: A Twenty-First Century Vision', *The Henry Jackson Society* (2019), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/HJS-Global-Britain-%C2%AD-A-Twenty-first-Century-Vision-Report-A4-web.pdf>, last visited: 1 January 2020.

<sup>147</sup> In December 2019, it was reported that Sir Donald Gosling had left up to £50 million in his will to help procure a new Royal Yacht. See: Malvern, J., 'Sir Donald Gosling will leave £50 million to pay for new royal yacht', *The Times*, 12 December 2019, available at: <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/sir-donald-gosling-will-leaves-50-million-to-pay-for-new-royal-yacht-k26lhs5pz>, last visited: 2 January 2020.

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can occur very quickly, catching an unprepared or intellectually languid country by surprise. Therefore, there can be no place for complacency. Rather, as they put in place the foundations of the next foreign, security and defence strategy, British strategists and policymakers need to let go of tired assumptions and come to terms with how the world is changing. Challenging the core assumptions that have underpinned British strategic policy over the past 30 years – and to some extent, the past 70 – is an essential part of that process.

## **About the Global Britain Programme**

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The Global Britain Programme is a research programme within The Henry Jackson Society that aims to educate the public on the need for an open, confident and expansive British geostrategic policy in the twenty-first century, drawing off the United Kingdom's unique strengths not only as an advocate for liberalism and national democracy, but also a custodian of both the European and international orders.

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