

THE INDO-PACIFIC: AN ENLARGED PERSPECTIVE

BY MATTHEW HENDERSON AND JAMES ROGERS
WITH ALAN HAO YANG AND JEREMY HUAI-CHE CHIANG



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Cover image: Chinese vessels constructing an artificial island on Mischief Reef in the South China Sea, 21 May 2015. Today, Mischief Reef is joined by similar facilities on Subi Reef and Fiery Cross Reef, part of a network of air and naval bases, themselves part of China's attempt to assert control over the Western Pacific. Image Credit: US Navy.

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Executive Summary

- The emergence of the 'Indo-Pacific' space and geopolitical ordering concept has gone hand in hand with the rise of China as a major economic and political power.
- China has used its newfound material power to push forward with an increasingly geostrategic approach, formalised through attempts to wrest control of maritime space in the South China Sea and through the development of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Originally intended to address the increasing stagnation of the domestic economy, the BRI aims to reshape the economic and political geography of Eurasia and beyond.
- The spread of Chinese digital technologies via the BRI has tended to reinforce undemocratic forms of government, intensifying China's capacity to challenge the rules-based order directly and through client states.
- China regards unification with Taiwan as an existential imperative, and Taiwan is a crucial focus of Chinese geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific. Chinese military, political and economic expansion in the region seeks to weaken democratic countries' capacity to support and maintain Taiwan's de facto independence and security. Taiwan cannot be regarded as a side issue in preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific order.
- The military strength of the United States (US) has for too long been relied on as a given, sufficient in itself to guarantee the rules-based order in the region. This guarantee has, however, been significantly hollowed out by China's competitive geostrategy. The US now accepts that it needs assistance to uphold its position in the Indo-Pacific space.
- In response, Japan, India, and Australia, as well as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and other maritime states, have crafted distinct Indo-Pacific perspectives and strategies, varying according to their individual interests and circumstances, but also sharing the intention of pushing back against China's revisionist challenge.
- China's surge into the Indo-Pacific confronts the region with a complex set of interconnected challenges, on how to avoid conflict, maintain benefits, and minimise risks. Passive hedging is a default position, but in the absence of a comprehensive, US-led preservationist alliance, cannot mitigate authoritarian encroachment.
- To constrain and deter China's revisionist ambitions, a new approach is needed, based on collective coordination by a coalition of democratic and like-minded powers.
- Insofar as China's emergence and revisionism is increasingly felt even in Europe, France and the United Kingdom (UK) - with their strategic links to the Indo-Pacific - should engage in the Indo-Pacific in support of their allies and partners, as well as their own interests.
- National and multilateral forward planning is complicated by potential instability in the Chinese economy (whose earlier growth shaped the new environment). A beleaguered Chinese leadership may be prone to increased aggression on its borders. Environmental degradation is also likely to affect Indo-Pacific security and prosperity, exacerbating regional tensions.
- If preservationist countries wish to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific, they need to engage in a more organised way to develop broader institutionalised cooperation across strategic, economic, and political planes.

- Arguably, disruption to a free and open Indo-Pacific has now reached a stage that necessitates the establishment of an 'Indo-Pacific Treaty Organisation', as well as affiliated associations covering economic and political issues. Collaborative effort, designed to preserve the peace, would also reach out to China to mitigate against the emergence of two hostile blocs.
- Achieving this will require participating nations, great and small, inside and outside, to share in reallocated hegemonic responsibilities, to renounce some of their strategic autonomy, and to preserve the region from authoritarian revisionism, while also maintaining durable relations with China.

Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CCP	Chinese Communist Party
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
HMS	Her Majesty's Ship
LNG	Liquid Natural Gas
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
NSP	New Southbound Policy
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
UK	United Kingdom
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
US	United States

1. Introduction

East Asia is witnessing the birth of a new economic zone which is not delineated by national borders or groups of nation states such as China, Japan, Korea or the countries of South-East Asia. Rather, we find a maritime corridor, running from Vladivostok to Singapore, which takes in portions of nation states and subjects them to its own dynamic based on gradually converging legal systems and business practices.

- François Gipouloux, 2011 [2009]¹

Already by the late 2000s, it was increasingly evident that the economic growth of China and other countries in East Asia was changing the economic geography of East and Southeast Asia. This space was conceptualised as the 'Asia-Pacific', not least with the formation of the economically oriented 'Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation', established during the 1980s as the countries of East Asia and the Pacific region experienced rapid development. Globalisation, industrialisation, large-scale infrastructure projects and continuing advancements in technology were just some of the mechanisms through which this change was delivered. Despite some downturns, the entire region has witnessed impressive growth since the 1980s, to the point where it far outweighs the Euro-Atlantic region in economic and industrial activity – a point Donald Trump, President of the United States (US), emphasised when he referred to the Asian region as “the most populous and economically dynamic part of the world”.²

What had not been fully understood, however, at least until the early 2010s, was the extent to which the 'Asia-Pacific' was extending itself towards Australasia, South Asia, the Middle East, and East Africa to become an 'Indo-Pacific'. Besides an acknowledgement by Shinzo Abe, Japan's Prime Minister, in 2007, that there was a growing “confluence of the Indian and Pacific Oceans”,³ and a mention in an Indian academic journal,⁴ the term – insofar as it was known – had primarily imperial or colonial connotations, having been used by the United Kingdom (UK) in the 1960s and German geostrategists during the 1920s.⁵ As Rory Medcalf, Head of the National Security College at the Australian National University, points out: “Just a decade ago, the term Indo-Pacific was heard almost nowhere.” He continues: “Even just a few years ago, it could only be found sprinkled in the writings of think-tank types.”⁶ Since then, with the increasing acknowledgement in academic and policy spheres, the term 'Indo-Pacific' has largely come to replace 'Asia-Pacific' and define a region that – at its widest – stretches from the shores of West Africa to the Pacific coast of the Americas and from the Bering Strait to the frigid waters of the Antarctic Ocean.

¹ Gipouloux, F., *The Asian Mediterranean: Port Cities and Trading Networks in China, Japan and South-East Asia, 13th-21st Century* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011), p.1.

² Trump, D., 'Remarks by President Trump at APEC CEO Summit, Da Nang, Vietnam', *White House Briefings*, 10 November 2017, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/remarks-president-trump-apec-ceo-summit-da-nang-vietnam/>, last visited: 27 February 2020.

³ Abe, S., 'Confluence of the Two Seas', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs* (Japan), 22 August 2007, available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁴ Gurpreet Khurana, then a Research Fellow at India's Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, invoked the term 'Indo-Pacific' to widen the Asia-Pacific concept to encompass India. See: Khurana, G. S., 'Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation', *Strategic Analysis* 31.1 (2007): pp.139-153.

⁵ The British government attempted to devise an 'Indo-Pacific' strategy during the mid-1960s. See: Ashton, S. R. and W. R. Louis, *East of Suez and the Commonwealth 1964-1971: Part 1 - East of Suez* (London: The Stationary Office, 2004). The term 'Indo-Pacific' was first coined as *Indopazifischer Raum* (Indo-Pacific space) by Karl Haushofer, a German geostrategist, in his 1924 work *Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean*. See: Haushofer, K., *An English Translation and Analysis of Major General Karl Ernst Haushofer's Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean: Studies on the Relationship Between Geography and History* (Ann Arbor, Michigan: Edwin Mellen Press, 2002).

⁶ Medcalf, R., 'The Indo-Pacific: What's in a Name', *The American Interest*, 10 October 2013, available at: <https://www.the-american-interest.com/2013/10/10/the-indo-pacific-whats-in-a-name/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

While, at its very foundation, the term ‘Indo-Pacific’ denotes a geographic space, it also represents a geopolitical and geoeconomic ordering concept. First pushed by Japan, the concept has been embraced by other maritime powers such as the US, Australia, the members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and France to provide an alternative to China’s expansionist policies. As an ordering concept, it integrates continental and maritime space in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans into a coherent continuum within which great and regional maritime powers project their strategic agendas and frame the objectives, risks, and gains that define and direct national geostrategy. Critically, by linking the Indian and Pacific Oceans, it also seeks to portray the maritime powers as the upholders of the regional order, in terms of international law, the peaceful settlement of disputes and high-quality infrastructure development. Indeed, the increasing attention focused on the Indo-Pacific by maritime states – large, medium, and small – highlights its concurrent significance as both a physical and a conceptual space in which new alliances and partnerships are being played out.

1.1. The Indo-Pacific: Competing Geographic Visions

Despite the Indo-Pacific having been adopted by a growing number of countries, there is no uniform understanding of its geographic boundaries. Although each national vision discerns the strategic character of the Indo-Pacific in relation to its geographical scope and area of cooperation, the result is a plethora of varying interpretations, driven largely by each country’s geographic location and national interests. A particularly strong determinant seems to be whether or not a country is physically adjacent to either the Indian or Pacific Ocean, whether it is ‘inside’ or ‘outside’ the region, and how far it is dependent on maritime communication lines for energy and commercial purposes. Moreover, from the perspective of geopolitical order, there are further subtle differences in terms of the degree to which countries that embrace the Indo-Pacific concept feel they should align their interests in pursuit of common objectives.

For Japan, heavily dependent on maritime communication lines to import energy from the Persian Gulf and export manufactured products to Europe, the Indo-Pacific looks southeast towards the Indian Ocean. Of all the national visions, the Japanese concept of the Indo-Pacific is the most expansive: the region has been constructed from two oceans, the Indian and the Pacific, and three separate continental seabords – those of the eastern Americas, East and South Asia, and East Africa – pinned together by the Malay archipelago. In this area, Tokyo aims to promote the rule of law, freedom of navigation, free trade, economic prosperity, peace and stability.⁷ For the US, the Indo-Pacific is less expansive than for Japan but more strategic; while still a vast space stretching from the Bering Strait to southern Australia and New Zealand, the Indo-Pacific fades into the Arabian Sea and the southern Indian Ocean. The region is reached primarily from America’s western seaboard from an array of naval bases and air stations on Hawaii and Guam, from which the US aims to deter attempts to undermine regional security.

While India lacks a formal vision of the Indo-Pacific, it does have an ‘Act East’ policy, which provides New Delhi with a Pacific horizon.⁸ In effect, New Delhi sees the Indo-Pacific as a sprawling and unbounded area stretching from the eastern shores of Africa to the Pacific Ocean; India’s strategic desires combine promoting cordial economic relations and defence cooperation together with an element of balancing between the US and China. And for Australia,

⁷ ‘Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific’, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan)* (2019), available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁸ For an overview of India’s ‘Act East’ policy, see: Jaishankar, D., *Acting East: India in the Indo-Pacific*, *Brookings India* (2019), available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Acting-East-India-in-the-INDO-PACIFIC-without-cutmark.pdf>, last visited: 27 February 2020; Kesavan, K. V., ‘India’s ‘Act East’ policy and regional cooperation’, *Observer Research Foundation*, 14 February 2020, available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/indias-act-east-policy-and-regional-cooperation-61375/>, last visited: 27 February 2020; and Bajpae, C., ‘Dephasing India’s Look East/Act East Policy’, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 39:2 (2017), pp.348-372.

with coasts facing both the Indian and Pacific Oceans, the Indo-Pacific has a north to north-western focus. The Australian perspective, distinct from that of Japan and India, is perhaps the narrowest of all; the Indo-Pacific is seen as ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific, with an emphasis on investment, economic, and defence relations with allies and partners.

Unsurprisingly, despite having been formally articulated first by Japan, the US vision has become the most prominent. America's vast strategic community has enthusiastically embraced the concept – not least since Hillary Clinton, then US Secretary of State, mentioned the term in passing, when announcing America's "pivot" to Asia in 2011 – pushing it forward through a range of media.⁹ The rise of China has undeniably contributed to this; as the Chinese economy has grown at such remarkable rates, the US has looked on at Beijing's attempts to expand its influence across the South Pacific, Southeast Asia, even East Africa and South America. Washington views Beijing's actions as a threat both to its own power and to the rules-based international system, especially in the East and South China Seas. The 2017 US 'National Security Strategy' went so far as to call China a "revisionist power", and one that seeks to "reorder the Indo-Pacific region in their favour".¹⁰

1.2. Research Outline

This report, based on a research seminar that took place at the Henry Jackson Society in November 2019, sets out to explain the importance of the 'Indo-Pacific' term, both as geographic space and as a geopolitical ordering concept. In part funded by the Taiwan Representation Office in the UK, this project involved consultation with international experts and government officials from Britain and Taiwan, as well as Australia and other countries. The resulting report explains why British and other European strategists and policymakers should deepen their understanding of the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific region, as well as the strategic measures required to deter threats to a genuinely free and open Indo-Pacific.

This report does not recommend any existing national geographic vision of the Indo-Pacific, but rather adopts a 'maximalist' understanding of the region's boundaries; that is to say, it understands the Indo-Pacific to include everything within and surrounding the Indian and Pacific Oceans. This vast space stretches from the Bab-el-Mandeb and Africa's eastern coast in the west to the Pacific coast of the Americas, and from the Bering Strait separating Eurasia from North America to the Antarctic Ocean. Indeed, as the report demonstrates, other parts of Eurasia, particularly Europe, are themselves being drawn into and connected with the increasingly dynamic Indo-Pacific space.

In addition to this introduction, this report contains three additional sections. Section 2 explains what the major powers in the Indo-Pacific region are seeking to achieve, in terms of their national geostrategies, and how these are in conflict with China's approach. Section 3 then explains why the major maritime powers need to cooperate in the years ahead – in strategic and economic terms – to keep the Indo-Pacific free and open. This section also outlines the geopolitical problems that need to be overcome in the development of a successful Indo-Pacific strategy. Finally, the conclusion provides a summary of the above and outlines the most salient points, with a particular emphasis on the need for British strategists and policymakers to embrace and work with the Indo-Pacific concept.

⁹ In her article in *Foreign Policy*, Mrs Clinton used the term 'Indo-Pacific' once, in comparison to the term 'Asia-Pacific', which was mentioned 19 times. See: Clinton, H., 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>, last visited: 20 February 2020.

¹⁰ 'National Security Strategy of the United States of America', *White House* (2017), available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, last visited: 20 February 2020, p.25.

2. The Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific

The realm of international politics is like a field of forces comparable to a magnetic field. At any given moment, there are certain large powers which operate in that field as poles. A shift in the relative strength of the poles or the emergence of new poles will change the field and shift the lines of force. A reorientation and realignment of the small powers in such a field may be the first result of a shift in the balance of forces between the large powers.

- Nicholas Spykman, 1939¹¹

The emergence of a new power can have an enormous geopolitical impact on its own region, particularly when that power is dissatisfied with the prevailing order or has an agenda different to those who are satisfied, or at least partially content, with it. Such a power is often described as 'revisionist': it seeks to disrupt or destroy the prevailing geopolitical order while simultaneously crafting a new system to reflect its own interests better. In the context of the Indo-Pacific, this identifies China as the pre-eminent revisionist power, bent on challenging across the entire spectrum an evolving rules-based system underpinned by US power.

Historically, as the revisionist power grows in strength, a group of countries tend to emerge as seeking to 'preserve' the prevailing order. In this sense, 'preservation' does not necessarily include the reversion to a previous state of affairs, but rather a set of distinct principles. As time goes on, two broadly defined groups of countries will likely take hold, each opposed to the other. In the Indo-Pacific's case, this will likely be on the one hand a dissatisfied China and its expanding clientele, and on the other the US and its traditional regional and extra-regional allies.

As the nuanced affiliations of certain Southeast Asian nations demonstrate, less capable countries will likely be forced to respond to the changing dynamics of power. At first, this tends to result in various degrees of 'hedging' - pursuing two opposite policies towards another state at the same time.¹² But in the face of growing contradictions between the economic, political, and military rise of the revisionist power on one side and the renewed interest of the leading preservationist in reviving its traditional pre-eminence on the other, even the most adroit 'hedgers' on this polarity often accept that ultimately they may face a binary choice.¹³

Other significant powers may also seek to improve their relative positions. In the Indo-Pacific, significant alignment between China and Russia means that there is a measure of linkage between them, but, for the present at least, Moscow's interests in the Indo-Pacific are primarily limited to the region's inner continental margins (though this may change if the vast energy resources of northeastern Siberia come on stream, in parallel with increased navigation through the Arctic space).¹⁴ Another power, India, may also see itself as an independent actor, though its lack of economic and political strength necessitates an element of 'balancing' - maintaining strategic autonomy - in relation to the US and China.

¹¹ Spykman, N., 'Geographic Objectives in foreign Policy, I', *The American Political Science Review* 33:3 (1939), p.395.

¹² Hemmings, J., 'Hedging: The Real US Policy Towards China?', *The Diplomat*, 13 May 2013, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2013/05/hedging-the-real-u-s-policy-towards-china/>, last visited: 17 February 2020.

¹³ See: Liu, F., 'The Recalibration of Chinese Assertiveness: China's Responses to the Indo-Pacific Challenge', *International Affairs* 96:1 (2020), pp.9-27; He, K. and M. Li, 'Understanding the Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific: US-China Strategic Competition, Regional Actors and Beyond', *International Affairs* 96:1 (2020), pp.1-7; and Tharoor, S. and S. Saran, *The New World Disorder and the Indian Imperative* (Delhi: Aleph Book Company, 2020).

¹⁴ For more information on Russia's interests in the Indo-Pacific, see: Muraviev, A. D., 'Understanding Russia's Strategic Engagement with the Indo-Asia-Pacific', *East-West Centre* (2019), available at: <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb475.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=37133>, last visited: 28 February 2020.

Section 2 seeks to shed light on how far this binary construct reflects ground truth as expressed in the respective geostrategies of the two leading powers and those of the other major regional and extra-regional actors.

2.1. China's Revisionist Agenda

During the last decade, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has devised, refined, and implemented a suite of interconnected economic, political, and military policies designed to expand China's role within and beyond the widest boundaries of the Indo-Pacific, despite the fact that it does not use the term nor have an explicit 'Indo-Pacific' strategy. During this period, China's revisionism has been activated by powerful, self-reinforcing synergies between domestic and foreign policy imperatives. The CCP – a self-avowed authoritarian regime – appears to perceive liberal states, and the international order they favour, as strategic adversaries, which need to be curtailed by the vigorous projection of power by all means available.¹⁵

2.1.1. Chinese Military Expansion

Not least in the US and Australia, the majority of critical attention and concern over China's rise has focused on Beijing's attempts to 'continentalise' the maritime regions surrounding the Chinese coast.¹⁶ 'Continentalisation' involves the development and extension of ballistic and cruise missile capabilities, which have been deployed in increasing numbers in anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems designed to cover two so-called 'island chains' – the first stretching from South Korea to Singapore, including Japan, Taiwan, and the Philippines; the second running from Japan to New Guinea.¹⁷ These missile batteries have the range to hit targets throughout the First Island Chain and well beyond, endangering not only Taiwan but also Japan, the Philippines, and Singapore. These systems pose a serious threat to practically all US military bases in the area, calling into question the resilience of the US forward presence that has hitherto been deemed to provide a sustainable deterrent. China's objective is to render the West Pacific a contested zone in the event of conflict, in direct challenge to the US and other preservationist powers.

In addition, China's 'continentalisation' strategy also includes the construction, reinforcement, and arming of artificial islands – extensions of the First Island Chain – in the South China Sea. These actions and associated territorial claims explicitly contravene the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), which Beijing took part in negotiating, before ratifying in 1996.¹⁸ This zero-sum activity runs directly counter to China's narratives of mutual advantage and peaceful regional development. It has generated complex and intractable bilateral and international difficulties and tensions over competing territorial claims, which have resulted in loss of life through violent episodes at sea, and pose a significant risk of escalation in future.¹⁹ In early 2018, two of China's nearly 30 military outposts in the South China Sea were

¹⁵ In 2013, just before the CCP held the Third Plenum of the Eighteenth Party Congress, to identify China's future trajectory, the General Office circulated a paper known as 'Document 9'. This memo described 'constitutional democracy' as an attempt by the West to 'undermine' China, politically, economically, and culturally. For a translation, see: 'Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation', *ChinaFile*, 8 November 2019, available at: <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>, last visited: 2 March 2020.

¹⁶ For more on 'continentalisation', 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.320.

¹⁷ For more on China's island chains, see: Yoshihara, T., 'China's Vision of Its Seascape: The First Island Chain and Chinese Seapower', *Asian Politics and Policy* 4:3 (2012), pp.293-314.

¹⁸ For more on this, see: Hemmings, J. and J. Rogers, 'The South China Sea: Why it matters to Global Britain', *Henry Jackson Society* (2019), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/publications/the-south-china-sea-why-it-matters-to-global-britain-2/>, last visited 17 February 2020.

¹⁹ See: 'Taiwan Protests to Philippines after fisherman shot', *BBC News*, 10 May 2013, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-22476784>, last visited: 26 February 2020 and 'Vietnam says Indonesian Navy shot its fishermen in South China Sea', *Reuters*, 24 July 2017, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-southchinasea-vietnam-indonesia-idUSKBNIA900C>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

observed being equipped with systems to jam foreign communication and radar systems, while on three others anti-ship cruise and surface-to-air missile systems had been installed.²⁰ The former missiles have a range of nearly 300 nautical miles, and the latter around 160.²¹

Concurrently, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN), militia, and coastguard presence in the South China Sea has been considerably increased.²² In contrast with initial assessments that China's activities in these waters were largely opportunistic, Beijing is now using its military and economic power in a "coordinated, methodical and strategic" manner designed to "erode the free and open international order".²³ It is clear that China possesses the capability of denying, or at least posing a dangerous threat to, freedom of navigation through considerable expanses of Western Pacific maritime space unless confronted with a very large naval fleet, backed up by significant aerial assets.

2.1.2. China's Geoeconomic Drive

Despite the significance of China's military modernisation, its economic drive is arguably more important. This drive has been enabled by the rapid expansion of the country's economic base. From 2000 to 2018, China's percentage of gross global product rose from a mere 4.3% to almost 15%, as global product itself increased by 229.5%.²⁴ Across almost all industries, China has become by far the world's foremost producer. Its energy generation doubled from just below 10% of the world's total in 2000 to 20% in 2019,²⁵ whilst its level of global steel production rose dramatically over the same period, from just 15% in 2000 to 51% in 2019.²⁶ Similarly, China went from producing 3.5% of the world's motor vehicles in 2000, to 29% in 2019.²⁷ Following two decades of rapid growth, China has surpassed the US as a larger supplier of manufactured goods to every country surrounding the Indian and Pacific Oceans, with the exception of those in North and Central America.²⁸

China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), nominally geoeconomic in character and purpose, has been pursued particularly intensively in the Indo-Pacific. The BRI is a £770 billion (US\$1 trillion) 36-year Chinese infrastructure project, first announced by Xi Jinping in 2013.²⁹ Presented as a

²⁰ Office of the Secretary of Defense, 'Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019', *Department of Defense* (United States) (2019), available at: https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf, last accessed: 26 February 2020.

²¹ Office of the Secretary of Defense, 'Annual Report to Congress: Military and Security Developments Involving the People's Republic of China 2019', *Department of Defense* (United States) (2019), available at: https://media.defense.gov/2019/May/02/2002127082/-1/-1/2019_CHINA_MILITARY_POWER_REPORT.pdf, last accessed: 26 February 2020.

²² See: Larter, D. B., 'In challenging China's claims in the South China Sea, the US Navy is getting more assertive', *Defense News*, 5 February 2020, available at <https://www.defensenews.com/naval/2020/02/05/in-challenging-chinas-claims-in-the-south-china-sea-the-us-navy-is-getting-more-assertive/>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

²³ Macias, A., 'China quietly installed missile systems on strategic Spratly Islands in hotly-contested South China Sea', *CNBC*, 2 May 2018, available at: <https://www.cnbc.com/2018/05/02/china-added-missile-systems-on-spratly-islands-in-south-china-sea.html>, last visited: 30 January 2020.

²⁴ Figures Derived from: 'GDP (Current US\$) - China', *World Bank* (2018), available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2018&locations=CN&start=1960>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

²⁵ 'International Energy Statistics: China, Key Energy Statistics', *International Energy Authority* (2018), available at: <https://www.iea.org/countries/china>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

²⁶ 'Steel Statistical Yearbook, 2019', *World Steel Association* (2020), available at: <https://www.worldsteel.org/en/dam/jcr:7aa2a95d-448d-4c56-b62b-b2457f067cd9/SSY19%2520concise%2520version.pdf>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

²⁷ '2018 Production Statistics', *International Organization of Motor Vehicle Manufacturers (OICA)* (2018), available at: <http://www.oica.net/category/production-statistics/2018-statistics/>, last visited 26 February 2020 and '2000 Production Statistics', OICA (2000), available at: <http://www.oica.net/category/production-statistics/2000-statistics/>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

²⁸ Colback, L., 'How to navigate the US-China trade war', *Financial Times*, 28 February 2020, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/6124beb8-5724-11ea-abe5-8e03987b7b20>, last visited: 1 March 2020.

²⁹ Yao, K., 'China's Belt and Road Investments since 2013 total \$60 billion: state planner' *Reuters*, 12 May 2017, available at: <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-silkroad-investment/chinas-belt-and-road-investments-since-2013-total-60-billion-state-planner-idUSKBN1880ME>, last visited: 12 May 2017 and 'How will the Belt and Road Initiative Advance China's Interests?' *China Power*, 8 May 2017, available at <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-belt-and-road-initiative/>, last visited: 18 October 2019.

'win-win' opportunity for developing nations surrounding China, Beijing contrasts the project to American and other Western countries' protectionism. The BRI envisages a series of routes connecting China to other parts of Eurasia using maritime and terrestrial communication systems. The BRI is not a coordinated and formally planned programme, but rather a systematic network of nodes with concurrent activities and converging objectives. It was the identification of under-investment in China's peripheral provinces like Xinjiang, and the dangers this posed to national security, that gave birth to the BRI policy. This is driving trade routes through these regions to link them to the outside world, generate growth, and increase integration with the rest of China's economy.

However, in reality, the programme includes less benign objectives, to redraw the economic geography of Eurasia and recalibrate China as the central driver of global growth and development. The initiative has an increasingly explicit geostrategic significance; in effect BRI in the Indo-Pacific has developed into a classic example of the geostrategic use of economic power. This has now superseded whatever the BRI's aims and ambitions, many of them linked to domestic issues, may originally have been. The vision of Xi Jinping, the Chairperson of the CCP, is hegemonic; he envisages China as the engine at the head of the world order, and himself as the benevolent leader.³⁰

Other objectives include the transfer of over-capacity in China's construction sector into more profitable regions abroad. The BRI is driven by a massive surge of capital from the Chinese state banking sector, projecting Chinese economic power into some 140 partner countries. The project is linked by chains of networked trade routes, by land from west to east across continental Asia, and by sea across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. This continentalised structure directly challenges the maritime foundation of the strategic framework of the Indo-Pacific.

Among the activities involved in the roll-out of BRI in the Indo-Pacific are a growing number of transactions designed to consolidate China's strategic interests in the region. Inevitably there is debate as to whether this nexus of development, including the establishment of ports accessible to the PLAN, was based on an orderly plan, or developed organically.³¹ Again it is arguably the significance of the resulting developments that deserves more focused attention than the initial stages of the process.

Over time, the strategic, diplomatic, and economic benefits of the BRI have become clear. Establishing alternative trade routes has enhanced China's energy security by reducing dependence on strategic maritime choke points, especially the Strait of Malacca. The BRI has also diversified China's sources of raw materials, with Beijing now a major importer from Africa and South America. Meanwhile, Chinese and Russian cooperation has expanded under the BRI, especially regarding trade routes and energy in the Arctic and eastern Siberia. Moreover, countries from the Pacific Islands to Central America that wish to become partners to the scheme, have abandoned relations with Taiwan.³² Nations that cannot manage BRI debt from

³⁰ 'China wants to put itself back at the centre of the world', *The Economist*, 6 February 2020, available at: <https://www.economist.com/special-report/2020/02/06/china-wants-to-put-itself-back-at-the-centre-of-the-world>, last visited: 1 March 2020.

³¹ See: Miracola, S., 'The Indo-Pacific "Encirclement": How is China Reacting?', *Istituto Per Gli Studi Di Politica Internazionale*, 4 June 2018, available at: <https://www.ispionline.it/it/pubblicazione/indo-pacific-encirclement-how-china-reacting-20716>, last visited: 4 June 2018; Manthorpe, J., 'China targeting Pacific isles for strategic bases', *Asia Times*, 8 June 2019, available at: <https://asiatimes.com/2019/06/china-targeting-pacific-isles-for-strategic-bases/>, last visited: 8 June 2019; and Johnson, J., 'US needs new bases and new bases and new capabilities in Asia to counter China threat, defense chief nominee says', *Japan Times*, 17 July 2019, available at: <https://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2019/07/17/asia-pacific/u-s-needs-new-bases-new-capabilities-asia-counter-china-threat-defense-chief-nominee-says/#.XIVNT6j7RPY>, last visited: 18 July 2019.

³² For example, Kiribati severed ties with Taiwan in September 2019, before moving to sign up to the BRI in January 2020. See: Lyons, K., "'On right side of history": Xi Jinping praises Kiribati for switch to China', *The Guardian*, 7 January 2020, available at: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/jan/07/china-xi-jinping-praises-kiribati-for-switch-taiwan>, last visited: 22 February 2020.

large-scale infrastructure projects have given China access to (and even sole ownership of) ports, whose strategic locations constrain Indian or American influence.

The 'Digital Silk Road', operating in parallel with the BRI, gives China's client states access to various Artificial Intelligence (AI) technologies. Although improved telecommunications and other systems may bring some local benefits, such infrastructure also serves to reinforce undemocratic regimes complicit with China's geopolitical agenda, as well as giving Beijing covert access to valuable strategic intelligence. Having acquired or developed sophisticated digital collection, monitoring, and assessment systems for use in domestic surveillance and security networks, China has encouraged foreign governments, including in Malaysia, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam, as well as Saudi Arabia, to buy and install similar capabilities, which potentially continue to give China access to the data they assemble.³³ At the macro level, this activity consolidates transactional relations between China and partner states who do not identify with the values of the rules-based system, further polarising the international community in favour of the CCP's geostrategic agenda. And by challenging the primacy of the discourse of liberal democracy, China's actions may further entrench illiberal political regimes.³⁴

Chinese investment in BRI infrastructure in Southeast Asia and its consequent political leverage exerts both physical and psychological pressure to accept China's expansionist territorial claims. Commercial and other practices associated with the BRI in and of themselves actively erode parts of the hitherto international rules-based order. As a result, Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea becomes a challenge which the indebted countries are less able to resist, either alone or in cooperation with regional partners.

2.1.3. China's Primary Geostrategic Objective

Assertion and eventual achievement of full sovereignty over Taiwan is a fundamental geostrategic objective of the CCP.³⁵ It is pursued with increasing energy across the spectrum of geostrategic engagement from overt military threats to 'grey zone' warfare, human and digital espionage, interference in democratic processes, disinformation, and coercive political and economic diplomacy world-wide, leveraging economic power to erode support for Taiwan's de facto independence and autonomy.³⁶ While the 'Taiwan question' is a discrete entity, it sits at the heart of China's contest with the international rules-based system, and is thus geographically, militarily, and politically central to the challenge China poses in both the Indo-Pacific and in the wider international sphere. China cannot create sufficient room for manoeuvre in the Indo-Pacific without removing the thorn of Taiwan. As such, and given the intense sensitivity of the issue to the CCP leadership, this is a potential flashpoint for military conflict that could escalate to draw in the US and other regional powers.

In sum, China's evolving geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific has followed very closely the geopolitical phases of a major power's maturation, as described by George Friedman, Chairman of Geopolitical Futures; firstly, consolidating national territory; secondly, extending

³³ See: Wang, S. and T. Lahiri, 'A Future AI Park in Malaysia shows how criticism is changing China's foreign investment', *Quartz*, April 2019, available at: <https://qz.com/1602194/an-ai-park-in-malaysia-shows-chinas-belt-and-road-is-evolving/>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

³⁴ Hemmings, J., 'Reconstructing Order: The Geopolitical Risks in China's Digital Silk Road', *Asia Policy* 15:1 (2020), pp.5-21.

³⁵ Buckley, C. and C. Horton, 'Xi Jinping warns Taiwan that Unification is the goal and force is an option', *New York Times*, 1 January 2019, available at: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/01/01/world/asia/xi-jinping-taiwan-china.html>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

³⁶ For more on 'grey zone' warfare, see: Carter, N., 'Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture 2018', *Royal United Services Institute*, 11 December 2018, available at: <https://rusi.org/event/annual-chief-defence-staff-lecture-and-rusi-christmas-party-2018>, last visited: 17 February 2020 and Carter, N., 'Annual Chief of the Defence Staff Lecture and RUSI Christmas Party 2019', *Royal United Services Institute*, 5 December 2019, available at: <https://rusi.org/event/annual-chief-defence-staff-lecture-and-rusi-christmas-party-2019>, last visited: 17 February 2020.

influence into neighbouring zones; thirdly, taking control of maritime approaches; and finally, seeking influence over strategic global nodes and building a lasting political presence in the international system.³⁷ In this revisionist process, China actively challenges and seeks to supplant the broadly rules-based system underpinned by US leadership. Unless this challenge is met and managed effectively, in a future scenario of heightened domestic or international tension China might rapidly move to seize control of Taiwan, or, perhaps more credibly, territory contested with Japan, before the US and other preservationist powers could respond to prevent it.³⁸

2.2. Proponents of the Indo-Pacific

In their various ways, the US, Japan, Australia, India, Taiwan, the UK and France share a geostrategic commitment to preserving the rules-based international system in the Indo-Pacific. This informally-aligned interest group broadly seeks to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific and to defend democracy and the rule of law in the face of threats from the rising China and its authoritarian clients. Their combined geostrategic agendas add up to a significant weight of support for the US-led order, but considerable differences of emphasis exist between them, while some smaller states – particularly within ASEAN – who align themselves with US geostrategy also hedge to some degree in the direction of China. This reflects the paradox that numerous countries in the region rely on the US to provide strategic security while their economies are largely powered by China. There is also a perception that China is revising the Indo-Pacific, while US interest and commitment is flagging. This both reflects and reinforces the lack of a security and defence mechanism in the Indo-Pacific capable of deterring China's rising power. ASEAN manifestly neither seeks to realise this, nor is capable of doing so.

2.2.1. The United States

The US remains the world's only superpower, as well as the leading power – geostrategically, militarily, and economically – in the Indo-Pacific.³⁹ Through America's system of naval and aerial logistics and projection across the Pacific Ocean, the Pacific has largely been rendered an American lake. With its victory at the end of the Second World War, the US began to put in place a 'grand barrier' of strategic nodes running from Japan and its outlying islands in the East China Sea – particularly Okinawa – to Taiwan, and then down to the Philippines and ultimately to Singapore.⁴⁰ With the establishment of a persistent American presence in Darwin in 2012, this barrier could be said to have been extended further still to northern Australia – with calls to make the presence permanent.⁴¹ Behind this strategic system sits the firepower of the US Air Force and the US Navy's Seventh Fleet, with its ten Task Forces, comprised of aircraft carriers, assault ships, nuclear attack submarines, cruisers, destroyers, and frigates.

However, in practical terms, the US-backed barrier system in the Indo-Pacific has largely been hollowed out, surviving chiefly in the abstract presumption that America retains superiority

³⁷ Freidman, G., *The Next 100 Years: A Forecast for the 21st Century* (London: Allison and Busby, 2010), pp.38-49.

³⁸ See: Townsend, A., B. Thomas-Noone, and M. Steward, 'Averting Crisis, Collective Strategy, Military Spending and Collective Defence in the Indo-Pacific', *United States Study Centre at the University of Sydney*, August 2019, available at: <https://www.ussc.edu.au/analysis/averting-crisis-american-strategy-military-spending-and-collective-defence-in-the-indo-pacific>, last visited: 1 August 2019.

³⁹ For more on the relative position of the major powers, see: Rogers, J., 'Audit of Geopolitical Capability: Assessment of 20 Major Powers', *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: 26 February 2020.

⁴⁰ Rogers, J., 'From Suez to Shanghai: The European Union and Eurasian maritime security', *European Union Institute for Security Studies* (2009), available at: <https://www.iss.europa.eu/sites/default/files/EUISSFiles/op77.pdf>, last visited: 26 February 2020, pp.10-14.

⁴¹ See: Aikman, A., 'Call for Australia-US force to check China's advance', *The Australian*, 20 December 2019, available at: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/nation/defence/call-for-australia-us-force-to-check-chinas-advance/news-story/90828cb6be076df62c83de548f975ed8>, last visited: 1 March 2020.

over China because of its military strength. The problem here is that China's revisionism is full-spectrum in approach, blending strategic, diplomatic, and economic components. Despite the continued commercial primacy of the US in many areas, China is gaining ground – and has bypassed America in terms of industrial output, infrastructure development, and trade with many Eurasian and Indo-Pacific countries.⁴²

Chinese military expansion and adventurism will undoubtedly remain a major threat. The most likely flashpoints are in the South and East China Seas, over contested territories (particularly between China, Vietnam, and Japan) and the issue of Taiwan, as well as challenges to freedom of navigation where China attempts to deny passage by other powers. Geostrategies designed to deny and reverse China's 'continentalist' approach must be firmly based on military ground truths. The US is highly likely to continue to provide the main military counterbalance to the rise of China in the Indo-Pacific, in the form of strategies such as the 'Joint Concept for Access and Manoeuvre in the Global Commons' – designed to enhance America's ability to punch through Chinese defences and inflict heavy, decisive blows.⁴³

But Washington has recognised that, increasingly, it cannot deliver the necessary sustained deterrent single-handedly.⁴⁴ This is because America's presence in the region is becoming more vulnerable to the growing scale of China's locally deployed air and naval power that would be unleashed in a first exchange; while sending US reinforcements would entail lengthy journey times from distant bases.⁴⁵

In these circumstances, the probability that China would succeed in the pre-emptive seizure of strategic locations in maritime space calls into question America's role as supreme guarantor of the Indo-Pacific. Consequently, the US is now considering how it can build and maintain the structures and deployments needed for an effective strategy that complements deterrence by 'punishment' with deterrence by 'denial', with the major changes this entails in terms of strengthened naval and land-based capabilities in the region and the need for collective defence cooperation with a number of allied states, notably Australia and Japan.⁴⁶ US strategy in the Indo-Pacific appears to be moving away from an assumption that US military supremacy will not be challenged, to recognition that this no longer holds true; and that it must therefore be replaced by an "Indo-Pacific collective balancing strategy".⁴⁷ It is for this reason that the US wants to join forces with India, Japan, and Australia – not least through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (often known as 'the Quad'), reactivated in 2017 – and other countries through its 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' strategy, to mitigate against direct, persistent, and growing pressure from China.⁴⁸

⁴² Rogers, J., 'Audit of Geopolitical Capability: Assessment of 20 Major Powers', *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: 26 February 2020.

⁴³ Hutchens, M. E., W. D. Dries, J. C. Perdew, V. W. Bryant, and K. E. Moores, 'Joint Concept for Access and Manoeuvre in the Global Commons: A New Joint Operational Concept', *Joint Forces Quarterly* 84:1 (2017), pp.134-139.

⁴⁴ See: Shanahan, P. M., 'The Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Protecting a Networked Region', *Department of Defense* (United States), 1 June 2019, available at: <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/1863396/dod-releases-indo-pacific-strategy-report/>, last visited: February 2020, p.16.

⁴⁵ Holmes, J. R. and T. Yoshihara, 'China's Caribbean in the South China Sea', *SAIS Review of International Affairs* 26:1 (2006), pp.79-92.

⁴⁶ Simon, L., 'Between punishment and denial: Uncertainty, flexibility, and U.S. military strategy toward China', *Contemporary Security Policy*, 21 January 2020, available at: <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/13523260.2020.1713604>, last visited: 20 February 2020.

⁴⁷ Townsend, A., Thomas-Noone, B., Steward, M., 'Averting Crisis, Collective Strategy, Military Spending and Collective Defence in the Indo-Pacific', *United States Study Centre at the University of Sydney*, August 2019, available at: <https://www.usssc.edu.au/analysis/averting-crisis-american-strategy-military-spending-and-collective-defence-in-the-indo-pacific>, last visited: 27 February 2020.

⁴⁸ 'A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a shared vision', *Department of State* (United States) (2019), available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>, last visited: 28 February 2020.

2.2.2. Japan

After more than a decade of strategic reflection, Japan released its 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' strategy in 2016.⁴⁹ This initiative, supported strongly by Prime Minister Abe, crystallises Japanese thinking in relation to the Indian and Pacific Oceans, setting up a fluid framework for development and free trade that emphasises quality in infrastructure development over the BRI's crude quantity, which it symbolically counterbalances.⁵⁰ At the same time, Japan is also willing to offer qualified engagement in BRI projects that meet its own higher standards. This balancing leads naturally to the development of wider 'conditional engagement' with Beijing.

On the other hand, Japan's role in the formation of the Quad places the country in a close-knit group designed to promote the US-led order in a relatively low-key but high-value exclusive environment. Paradoxically, this may help uphold the US focus on the Indo-Pacific and obviate the need for Japan to assume a full leadership role that Tokyo is neither ready for nor capable of fulfilling. A long view such as Japan's might suggest the possible emergence of a new order, somewhere between Beijing's revisionism and the US-led system, where the *modus vivendi* of 'middle powers' would comprise carrying on working with both. Prime Minister Abe has actively sought to rethink the regional architecture along such lines, not least through his promotion of Japan forming part of a 'Democratic Security Diamond' with the US, India and Australia and through his proposals to expand the Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) – including the UK, Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand and Singapore – to incorporate Japan.⁵¹

Whether or not such proposals could ever solidify into a new order in the Indo-Pacific is not clear. An element of ambiguity, even contradiction, in the current Japanese approach is tempered by Japan's current strong leadership and its capacity to command attention, not least in the US, China, India, Australia, and ASEAN. As such, Japan has used the Indo-Pacific concept to leverage a significant degree of strategic autonomy for itself. However, in the event that escalating tension and rivalry with China leads the US to set up a credible coalition for collective deterrence, Japan will face an existential imperative to form part of this, and would then need to abandon its current balancing strategy.

2.2.3. Australia

As Australia moved from 'Down Under' to 'Top Centre' with the emergence of the Indo-Pacific during the early 2010s, the country began to re-conceptualise its international role.⁵² Mention of the 'Indo-Pacific' was first made in the 2012 'Australia in the Asian Century White Paper' and the 2013 'National Security Strategy', but it was not until the 2013 'Defence White Paper' that the concept was delineated in more detail, namely as "a new Indo-Pacific strategic arc ... connecting the Indian and Pacific Oceans through Southeast Asia".⁵³ Australia's vision of

⁴⁹ 'Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific', *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan)* (2019), available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁵⁰ Watanabe, T., 'Japan's Rationale for the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Strategy', *The Sasakawa Peace Foundation*, 30 October 2019, available at: https://www.spf.org/iina/en/articles/watanabe_01.html, last visited: 25 February 2020.

⁵¹ Abe, S., 'Asia's Democratic Security Diamond', *Project Syndicate*, 27 December 2012, available at: <https://www.project-syndicate.org/onpoint/a-strategic-alliance-for-japan-and-india-by-shinzo-abe>, last visited: 25 February 2020.

⁵² Rehman, I., 'From Down Under to Top Centre: Australia, the United States and this Century's Special Relationship', *Transatlantic Academy Paper Series* (2011), available at: <http://www.gmfus.org/publications/down-under-top-center-australia-united-states-and-centurys-special-relationship>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁵³ 'Australia in the Asian Century White Paper', *Australian Government* (2012), available at: https://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/australia_in_the_asian_century_white_paper.pdf, last visited: 1 March 2020, p.74; p.17 and p.30; and 'Strong and Secure: A Strategy for Australia's National Security', *Australian Government* (2013), available at: <https://www.files.ethz.ch/isn/167267/Australia%20A%20Strategy%20for%20National%20Securit.pdf>, last visited: 1 March 2020; and 'Defence White Paper 2013', *Australian Government* (2013), available at: https://www.defence.gov.au/whitepaper/2013/docs/WP_2013_web.pdf, last visited: 1 March 2020, pp.7-8.

the Indo-Pacific is similar to America's, and not as expansive as Japan's, though, like Japan, Southeast Asia is centralised. Understandably, given Australia's location, the broader Oceania region – especially the South Pacific – is also emphasised.⁵⁴

Connected to Australia's persistent 'fear of abandonment', Canberra's engagement with the Indo-Pacific concept is linked to the perception among Australia's strategists and policymakers that US support for the prevailing order in their geographic neighbourhood is increasingly uncertain.⁵⁵ Australia wishes to uphold its defence alliance with the US; this will be put to the test if American thinking on the collective balance in the Indo-Pacific goes forward as intended, since a major new burden of Australian military commitment would be a prerequisite. While America finds in Australia a willing partner, its Indo-Pacific turn appears to be crafted in such a way as to coax Australia, like Japan, away from China and towards stepping-up regional engagement with the US and other Indo-Pacific powers – particularly Japan and India, but also Indonesia – to ensure that effective force multipliers are identified and implemented. The importance of Australia's economic relations with China is in marked tension with growing concerns in Canberra over the threat from China to Australian national and regional security. But the Australia-China economic relationship is less complex than that between China and the US, consisting of simple trading relations rather than interconnected supply chains.⁵⁶

In general, the US will continue to urge Australia to firm up its own (already nuanced) opposition to China and to improve strategic and military engagement with several Indo-Pacific partners. In this sense, Australia's support for preserving a free and open Indo-Pacific sits well with its wish to assume a more prominent role in the region, moving into alignment with major powers other than America, such as India and Japan. In this process, the Trilateral Security Dialogue and Defence Cooperation Forum – with the US and Japan – and the Quad – with the US, India, and Japan – Australia will acquire greater geostrategic weight given its central position between the Indian and Pacific Oceans, than derived from its peripheral role in relation to ASEAN. The driver of these new engagements will primarily remain the need to prevent 'abandonment' by the US, albeit articulated firmly in terms of consolidating a free and open Indo-Pacific.

2.2.4. India

Although India is still ambivalent about operationalising the Indo-Pacific concept fully in its strategic practice, Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India, has embraced an expansive vision of the Indo-Pacific similar to Japan's. At the Shangri-La Dialogue in 2018, he described the Indo-Pacific as a "natural region", stretching "from the shores of Africa to that [*sic*] of the Americas".⁵⁷ This puts India's in stark contrast with the US and Australian perspectives, which stop at the Andaman Sea. Like Japan, India considers Southeast Asia as the heart of the Indo-Pacific.⁵⁸ This reflects the country's 'Act East' policy, which aims to increase engagement with ASEAN countries in efforts to reinforce a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.⁵⁹ Naval power is the mainstay of India's avowed role as provider of security in the Indian Ocean; this visible

⁵⁴ Paskal, C., 'Strategic Overview of Oceania', *East-West Centre*, 26 March 2018, available at: https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb413_1.pdf, last visited: 27 February 2020.

⁵⁵ For an overview, see: Gyngell, A., *Fear of Abandonment: Australia in the world since 1942* (Carlton: La Trobe University Press, 2017).

⁵⁶ For an overview of Australian-Chinese trade, see: Giesecke, J., N. Tran, and R. Waschik, 'Australia depends less on Chinese trade than some might think', *The Conversation*, 2 August 2019, available at: <https://theconversation.com/australia-depends-less-on-chinese-trade-than-some-might-think-120423>, last visited: 27 February 2020.

⁵⁷ Modi, N., 'Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri-La Dialogue', *Ministry of External Affairs* (India), 1 June 2018, available at: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/>, last visited: 27 February 2020.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹ Ngaibiakching, A. P., 'India's Act East Policy and ASEAN: Building a Regional Order Through Partnership in the Indo-Pacific', *International Studies*, 15 January 2020, available at: <https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/abs/10.1177/0020881719885526>, last visited: 27 January 2020.

commitment has been enhanced by joint exercises, including with France, the United Arab Emirates, and Saudi Arabia. India will host a major multilateral naval exercise in March 2020 involving 41 Indo-Pacific nations, while excluding China.⁶⁰

There are other conceptual aspects of India's geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific that bear comparison with Japan's, most notably a cognate notion of the value of strategic autonomy. The position of Prime Minister Modi on the Indo-Pacific concept since 2014, transiting two very different US presidencies, has maintained an element of balance between exploring positive opportunities through engagement with China and maintaining engagement with mechanisms – not least with the US – to help address Chinese threats to Indian interests.⁶¹ In terms of geostrategy, this perspective has coalesced as a flexible assembly of multipolar engagement and balanced alignments, emphasising India's position as a distinct pole of power towards which others should gravitate; for example, although India is a member of the Quad, it is also a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), even as it repudiates China's BRI.⁶²

Box 1: Taiwan's geostrategic perspective

Dr Alan Hao Yang and Jeremy Huai-Che Chiang

Taiwan's New Southbound Policy (NSP), which calls for enhanced relations with 18 countries in South and Southeast Asia, has helped create the necessary groundwork for Taiwan's participation in wider debates on the Indo-Pacific for the past few years. While Taiwan's unique relationship with China has for decades made it one of the leading geopolitical flashpoints between China and the US, President Tsai Ing-wen's launch of the NSP in 2016 has enabled Taiwan to engage with aspects of America's Indo-Pacific Strategy, especially in softer and non-traditional security domains.

Both Taiwan and the US share the same regard for a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and beyond, and have clear interests in enabling good governance, democracy, and economic development within the region. In September 2019, Taiwan and the US jointly hosted the 'Indo-Pacific Democratic Governance Consultations', a new annual dialogue which seeks to encourage "freedom and openness as core values that bring order and security to the region" while also promoting Taiwan as a regional model for good governance. Other new joint projects include the 'Indo-Pacific Improvement on Energy Governance Forum' and the 'Indo-Pacific Dialogue on Protecting Religious Freedom in Civil Societies', which involve participation not only by the US and Taiwan foreign ministries but also official representation from Australia, Japan, and others. Warming US-Taiwan relations and President Trump's China policies have enabled US thinking on Taiwan to extend beyond the Taiwan Strait, something which matches Taiwan's agendas as it seeks to diversify trade from China and enhance socio-economic ties with emerging countries in South and Southeast Asia.

But despite this collaboration with America, Taiwan's upgraded regional diplomacy also reaches beyond the limits of traditional US-Taiwan relations. While China's growing assertiveness continues to concern regional countries, the Trump administration's stance on regional security has diminished the sense of assurance felt by some allies in the

⁶⁰ See: Todi, S., 'India Gets Serious About the Indo-Pacific: Can India Walk the Talk on the Indo-Pacific?', *The Diplomat*, 18 December 2019, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/india-gets-serious-about-the-indo-pacific/>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁶¹ See: Tanvi, M., 'The Pitfalls and Promise of a US-India Partnership Driven By China', *Financial Times*, 24 February 2020, available at: <https://amp.ft.com/content/a85e46aa-56e8-11ea-abe5-8e03987b7b20>, last visited: 27 February 2020.

⁶² See: Singh, A.P., 'What Shapes India's View on the Quad? Assessing the logic of alliances outside of the west', *The Diplomat*, 28 November 2019, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2019/11/what-shapes-indias-view-on-the-quad/>, last visited: 28 February 2020.

neighbourhood. This has encouraged both US allies and non-allies to strengthen self-initiated diplomatic efforts, which in turn has created room for Taiwan to progress its newfound activeness under the NSP. In this context, the NSP has become a focus for strategic cooperation between various like-minded countries in the region, as demonstrated especially by regional strategies such as India's 'Act East Policy' and Japan's 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific'. On the other hand, for NSP target countries such as the Philippines, the establishment of the 'Taiwan-Philippines Digital Corridor' has shown how Taiwan can be both a reliable and a multifaceted developmental partner.

While Taiwan cannot replace Chinese investment in the Indo-Pacific region, its strengths in key technologies and industrial know-how, and in balancing democracy and development, have continued to appeal to many within Asia. Taiwan's 'people-centred' vision for the region is a soft approach which works alongside existing ASEAN frameworks, thereby to a degree allaying concerns that Taiwan's efforts will provoke Chinese pressure on other Asian countries. Having been proven to be complementary with other like-minded countries' regional efforts, Taiwan's approach creates scope for future enhanced cooperation.

For Taiwan, the Indo-Pacific concept has been both a challenge and an opportunity. Three concerns need to be taken note of regarding Taiwan's way forward within the Indo-Pacific framework. They can be put in terms of the 'Three O's: Objectives, Ownership, and Operation'.

In order to achieve its NSP 'Objectives', Taiwan must set clear goals and calculate carefully where to concentrate its efforts. The NSP's original plans cover areas ranging from medical cooperation, agriculture, and education to e-commerce, infrastructure, and tourism. These are areas in which Taiwan's strengths lie and are deemed less politically sensitive. Cooperation with the US and other capable partners would lessen Taiwan's burden, while working in tandem with the set development agendas of other regional countries would suit Taiwan and the host country better.

In terms of 'Ownership', it is important that regional countries play a role in shaping the direction of the US's Indo-Pacific strategy (and also Taiwan's NSP). Greater emphasis on local ownership and local visions would benefit America's Indo-Pacific approach. Regional countries need to have a stake in the policy process and not just be at the receiving end of it, or else they will feel compelled to pick sides between two indifferent powers. Without this, many ASEAN countries have strong reservations concerning the US approach. Taiwan, as both an Asian country and a close US partner, can play an important network role in this regard. Furthermore, as Taiwan collaborates closely with America's Indo-Pacific strategy, it also has an interest in the former being more openly accepted within the region so that it does not cast Taiwan as a strategic outlier.

Finally, on the 'Operation' front, the Indo-Pacific should be framed less in terms of 'China versus the West' and more in terms of the rules-based order and a shared vision of prosperity for the region. Indo-Pacific nations value their territorial integrity and sovereignty, principles that are directly affronted by Chinese actions in the South China Sea. In this light, regional countries have a clear incentive to back up America's Indo-Pacific strategy. However, all-out containment efforts towards China will hardly ever generate the same level of enthusiasm. Besides the security domain, Indo-Pacific projects should also address regional countries' yearning for economic development and infrastructural improvement. President Tsai announced last year that her government was engaged with the US Overseas Private Investment Corporation in exploring ways for both US and Taiwan companies to work on infrastructural development in Southeast Asia.

As talk of US-China strategic competition continues to dominate global discourse, Taiwan is blessed but also challenged. On one hand, Taiwan now has an increasing Indo-Pacific role, which it has both taken on itself and had conferred upon it by other like-minded nations. This has amplified its importance within US policy discussions. That the US no longer sees Taiwan as merely a side issue is shown by the greater ease with which major arms sales have moved forward.

This is important for Taiwan, as heightened competition between China and the US means there is potential for it to be drawn into military tensions; Taiwan's A2/AD capabilities are evident, but they need to continue levelling up to respond to an ever-rising military threat. On the other hand, Taiwan's participation in established US-led efforts is so far still limited and fragmented, while its absent engagement with most established regional forums such as the ASEAN Regional Forum and East Asia Summit constrain its ability to influence discussions and obtain information.

2.2.5. 'Extra-Regional' Powers

Two extra-regional powers uphold a presence in the Indo-Pacific: France and the UK. Of the two, France has by far the greatest population and territories in the Indo-Pacific, concentrated in a so-called 'quadrilateral' along the eastern coast of Africa, including Reunion and Mayotte, two 'overseas departments' - considered extensions of the French homeland - with over 1 million French citizens between them.⁶³ Other significant French overseas territories are scattered across the South Pacific, including French Polynesia and New Caledonia, each containing in excess of 250,000 people.⁶⁴ To uphold sovereignty of these territories, France maintains small military facilities and a naval presence throughout its territorial network in the Indian and Pacific Oceans.

Because of its considerable territorial interests in the region, France has developed an increasingly visible role in the playing-out of Indo-Pacific geopolitics.⁶⁵ To this end, France released a paper entitled 'France and the Security of the Indo-Pacific' in 2018, followed by a formal 'Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific' in 2019, with the latter depicting the region "as an area spanning from Africa's eastern façade to French Polynesia."⁶⁶ The core of French policy in the Indo-Pacific is the expression of French sovereignty and the expansion of cooperation and economic growth, particularly in the context of weaving France's overseas territories into the increasing economic networks of prosperity.

Similarly to India, France has sought to balance between China and the US. Paris has not joined the BRI, but has expressed support should specific projects meet French criteria and not enmesh third countries in "debt traps".⁶⁷ Yet France actively asserts the right of free

⁶³ For more on the 'quadrilateral', see de Paiva, B., 'France: National involvement in the Indian Ocean Region', *Future Directions International* (2011), available at: <http://futuredirections.org.au/wp-content/uploads/2011/12/FDI%20Strategic%20Analysis%20Paper%20-%2005%20December%202011.pdf>, last visited: 17 February 2020, p.2.

⁶⁴ Mrgudovic, N., 'The French Overseas Territories in Transition' in D. Killingray and P. Clegg (eds.), *The Non-Independent Territories of the Caribbean and Pacific: Continuity or Change?* (London: University of London, 2012), pp.85-103.

⁶⁵ Scott, D., 'France's "Indo-Pacific" strategy: regional power projection', *Journal of Military and Strategic Studies* 19:4 (2019), pp.76-103.

⁶⁶ See: 'France and Security in the Indo-Pacific', *Ministry of Defence* (France) (2018), available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/layout/set/print/content/download/532754/9176250/version/3/file/France+and+Security+in+the+Indo-Pacific+-+2019.pdf>, last visited: 17 February 2020 and 'France's Defence Strategy in the Indo-Pacific', *Ministry of Defence* (France) (2019), available at: <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/layout/set/print/content/download/559602/9683963/version/1/file/France%27s+Defence+Strategy+in+the+Indo-Pacific+-+Summary+-+2019.pdf>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁶⁷ Nicolas, F., 'France and China's Belt and Road Initiative', *French Institute of International Relations*, 8 April 2019, available at: <https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/publications-ifri/articles-ifri/france-and-chinas-belt-and-road-initiative>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

navigation and aviation in the Indo-Pacific – policy statements refer obliquely to island-building in the South China Sea – and re-emphasises its support for UNCLOS against “military assertiveness” that “presents many challenges to multilateralism”.⁶⁸ However, while France, like other Indo-Pacific powers, has grown wary of Chinese intentions, it is careful to avoid pointing fingers directly. It has not endorsed America’s blunter, more confrontational response to China’s rise, but tilts towards India, Japan, and Australia, as well as Malaysia, Singapore, New Zealand, Indonesia, and Vietnam.

Meanwhile, Britain’s overseas territories and foreign military facilities in the Indo-Pacific are less numerous and populated than those of France, but arguably are more geostrategically significant. The UK maintains a ‘strategic array’ of military facilities stretching from the Persian Gulf to Brunei, a region it still often labels ‘East of Suez’.⁶⁹ Britain’s approach to this region has been similar to France’s, although, to date, no formal Indo-Pacific space has been outlined and no strategy covering the UK’s full range of interests and objectives has been delineated. Instead, Britain has bolstered its diplomatic presence, particularly in the South Pacific.⁷⁰ Various ministers have also released statements that touch on the core issues of contested space, freedom of navigation, threats to the rules-based international system, and the need to respect UNCLOS, emphasising Britain’s significant political and economic interests in the region.⁷¹ And British officials have argued that a post-Brexit ‘Global Britain’ needs to define its intentions and aims, including enhanced cooperation with its many regional partners – even China.⁷²

Alongside the renewed diplomatic and economic focus, Britain’s strategic engagement has also been amplified. The UK presence in the Persian Gulf was stepped-up during the 2010s, symbolised most vividly by the re-establishment of the Juffair naval base in Bahrain and the development of a ‘defence hub’ in Duqm as a forward-operating site for the new Queen Elizabeth class aircraft carriers. The Royal Navy also boosted its naval activity in the region during 2018 and 2019: Type 45 class destroyers and Type 23 class frigates made a number of forays into the Pacific, while HMS Albion cruised through the illegitimate straight baselines asserted by China around the Paracel Islands, making Britain’s the only navy other than America’s to undertake such an operation. This suggests that London will balance economic desires with assertions to uphold the international order.⁷³

⁶⁸ Ibid.

⁶⁹ For more on the ‘strategic array’, see: Rogers, J., ‘European (British and French) geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific’, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 9:1 (2013), p.75. For ‘East of Suez’, see: Johnson, B., ‘Foreign Secretary speech: “Britain is back East of Suez”’, *Gov.uk*, 9 December 2016, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-speech-britain-is-back-east-of-suez>, last visited: 26 February 2020 and Scott, D., ‘Britain Returns to the Indian Ocean?’, *The Round Table: The Commonwealth Journal of International Affairs* 107.3 (2018), pp.307-316.

⁷⁰ Pascal, C., ‘New Diplomatic Posts Could Give UK a Fresh Path to Influence’, *Chatham House*, 11 May 2018, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/expert/comment/new-diplomatic-posts-could-give-uk-fresh-path-influence>, last visited: 27 February 2020.

⁷¹ See: Hemmings, J., ‘Global Britain in the Indo-Pacific’, *Henry Jackson Society* (2018), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/05/Global-Britain-in-the-Indo-Pacific-WEB.pdf>, last visited: 22 February 2020.

⁷² See: Haacke, J. and H. Breen, ‘From Benign Neglect to Effective Re-engagement? Assessing British Strategising and Policies Towards Southeast Asia Since 2010’, *Contemporary Southeast Asia* 41:3 (2019), pp.329-363.

⁷³ Rogers, J. and J. Hemmings, ‘The South China Sea: Why it matters to Global Britain’, *Henry Jackson Society* (2019), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HJS-South-China-Sea-Report-web-1.pdf>, last visited: 17 February 2020.

3. The Indo-Pacific: ‘Controlled’ or ‘Free and Open’?

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

- Shinzo Abe, 2007⁷⁴

Despite having nodes of more intense competition, the Indo-Pacific comprises a near-hemisphere of geographical space in which a geostrategic contest is being played out. Insofar as there is a common thread linking different Indo-Pacific visions, it is the strategic aspiration to keep the Indian and Pacific Oceans and their surrounding basins open and free from China’s equally strategic revisionist attempts to control them. Erosive activity by China consists of two main fronts: first, increasing military occupation, capture, and denial of rights of access in contested geographical space, chiefly in the South and East China Seas; and secondly, attempts to make other countries economically dependent on China, thereby extending the boundaries of Chinese authoritarian influence beyond those of its own territory. Moreover, the scale of the geographical stage on which this contest is playing out, the diverse nature of the interests at stake, and the rapidly evolving dynamics between key elements of the contest, means that it will not be difficult for China and its clientele to stoke division and push back at attempts to constrain revisionist action.

This section sketches out what a better-focused preservationist geostrategy might hope to achieve, namely to restore an international rules-based order – a free and open Indo-Pacific – in areas where it has been eroded, and to minimise the risk of further erosion. This strategy’s principal agenda would be to counteract China’s projection of challenges, and so restore and protect freedom of navigation and trade in the region, as far as possible without provoking military escalation or other disruption of regional security and prosperity. The resilience of an Indo-Pacific preservationist strategy ‘beyond first contact with the enemy’ will depend on its capacity to foresee potential problems and flex in the face of change. This first requires exploring a number of other relevant factors, variables, and dynamics which, if not taken into account, might sooner or later test the resilience of any strategic programme.

3.1. Geopolitical Risks

The construction of a comprehensive strategy to preserve a free and open Indo-Pacific will face a number of problems and setbacks, even from countries that ostensibly support its creation. The intensification of major power competition tends to trigger a number of disparate behaviours, particularly as smaller countries seek to protect their interests and/or take advantage of a changing economic and political landscape. It is therefore vital to begin by identifying some observable latent problems, even if a study on the present scale can only touch on a few of these, and clearly cannot address all the ways in which they might interact in future.

3.1.1. Ideological Competition

Contestants in the Indo-Pacific are not yet starkly divided on ideological lines; unlike the Soviet Union during the Cold War, China is not a closed socio-economic system. Regional and extra-regional states include old-established democracies, new democracies, and others where a

⁷⁴ Abe, S., ‘Confluence of the Two Seas’, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs (Japan)*, 22 August 2007, available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

balance exists between democratic and centralised power. Tolerance of bribery, corruption, elite capture, nepotism, and abuses of human rights varies considerably. Even the distinction between ‘preservationist’ supporters of the rules-based international system and those who incline to a more flexible approach is nuanced and to a degree variable.

As China’s revisionist challenge intensifies, it exposes regional states to a range of coercive pressures associated with ‘grey zone’ warfare. These are designed by Beijing both to increase other countries’ dependency on China and to constrain their cooperation with preservationist powers. This process, apparent in the development of China’s bilateral relations for decades, has been accelerated by the implementation of the BRI. Rather than a binary opposition of revision and preservation, there is now a fluid interplay between what can be characterised as competing revisionist and preservationist forces.

3.1.2. Hedging and Non-Alignment

The stakes are very high in any geostrategic competition between major powers and their clients. The projection of Chinese power and the perceived contraction and dilution of America’s influence, combined with the current lack of a robust rules-based security order, leaves Indo-Pacific states – typically but not exclusively members of ASEAN – confronting a choice between siding with China or the US, with no clear assurance that positive outcomes will necessarily result. Inevitably, this leads to various types of hedging.⁷⁵

Facing probably the most acute existential threat of any regional state, Taiwan takes the most unequivocal position, grounded in reliance on US and other like-minded countries’ support, despite its degree of economic engagement with China. As indicated above, Japan pursues essentially a twin-track policy, relying on hard-power security guarantees from America and increasingly contributing to collective deterrence, yet also reaching out to Beijing to minimise bilateral tension and establish the principles of peaceful cooperation.

Other states such as Vietnam and the Philippines are exposed to some of Beijing’s most aggressive tactical challenges – particularly in the South China Sea – and yet cannot afford to lose the benefits of trade with China. India, seeking to avoid a polarised choice of great power alignment and so to maintain autonomy, has developed an Indo-Pacific geostrategy that balances contradictory elements. These and other examples illustrate how a fluid process of balancing and shifting aims continues to evolve.

3.1.3. Change and Flexibility

It is worth recalling that the most important events in world history over the last two decades – the Al-Qaeda attacks in 2001 and the 2007 Financial Crisis – were both sudden and largely unpredicted. Given what is at stake in the Indo-Pacific – no less than the preservationist powers losing control of the region on which global prosperity will depend for the foreseeable future to a new authoritarian, expansionist hegemon – it seems sensible to base any geostrategic response to this challenge on a clear understanding of the full range of existing dynamics.

Manifestly, the entire Indo-Pacific region is undergoing rapid, unprecedented change. Considerations in relation to the strategic nexus between the Indian and Pacific Oceans that do not take this fully into account tend to operate within overly limited parameters. This is particularly true of plans which concentrate on military or economic ‘solutions’ in isolation. Efforts to translate these into practice are unlikely to prosper.

⁷⁵ See: Roy, D., ‘The Rise of China: What To Watch For’, *East-West Centre* (2013), available at: <https://www.eastwestcenter.org/system/tdf/private/apb243.pdf?file=1&type=node&id=34353>, last visited: 18 February 2020.

3.1.4. Environmental Deterioration

The insular states of the Indo-Pacific and countries with dense populations in the low-lying deltas of South and Southeast Asia face imminent demographic and economic disruption due to rising sea levels caused by climate change. China bears significant responsibility for the rising levels of pollution and environmental degradation. Not only has China become the world's largest polluter,⁷⁶ but it also controls and abuses vital upstream water resources, which are likely to become another source of instability and rivalry with several of its current client states downstream.⁷⁷ Overall, while it is hard to quantify how climate change in the region as a whole will modify China's revisionist challenge in the Indo-Pacific, it seems possible that there would be unwelcome synergies with other resource-related behaviours, including likely increased territorial aggression in the South and East China Seas.

3.1.5. Fragmented International Organisations

Given the geographical scale of the Indo-Pacific region and the broad range of economic and political models of states located there, it is perhaps inevitable that multiple international organisations and hierarchies have proliferated. As long as the US serves as guarantor of regional security, the core institutional furniture of the Indo-Pacific reflects its primacy in both bilateral and multilateral organisations such as Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). More specifically intra-regional bodies such as ASEAN are designed to multiply mainly local economic synergies, but modest ambitions and disparities between members have limited their impact. Indeed, the risk of increasing US-China tension and rivalry raises the prospect of ASEAN members trying to decouple from a binary choice and pursue some form of compromise or moderation in their dealings with the two major power rivals unless obliged to align with a persuasive geostrategy.

Once considered a relic of colonial security cooperation, the FPDA has been successfully updated, linking the forces of the UK, Singapore, Malaysia, Australia, and New Zealand.⁷⁸ More ambitious and relatively new entrants to the security scene include the Trilateral Security Dialogue between the US, Japan, and Australia and the Quad. While the former is more internally aligned, the latter has so far failed to achieve its strategic objective, managing the rise of China, because of the lack of a coherent geostrategic narrative that all four participants buy fully into. This explains why the combined achievements of the Indo-Pacific international organisations, numerous as they are, fall far short of the sum of their parts and why China's revisionism presents them with a challenge likely to overwhelm them.

3.1.6. China's Unstable Economy

China's economic growth has been the major factor behind the geopolitical shift in the Indo-Pacific away from the preservationist powers. Beijing's vast new wealth has been aggressively weaponised to expand Chinese influence in and beyond Eurasia. However, for some time – not only as a consequence of the trade conflict with the US – China's growth has been slowing to a degree that has strategic implications. Just as earlier growth transformed the region, so economic stagnation and decline in China poses threats to both domestic and regional stability and security.⁷⁹

⁷⁶ Ritchie, H. and M. Roser, 'CO2 and Greenhouse Gas Emissions', *Our World in Data*, December 2019, available at: <https://ourworldindata.org/co2-and-other-greenhouse-gas-emissions>, last visited: 1 March 2020.

⁷⁷ Bernstein, R., 'China's Mekong Plans Threaten Disaster for Countries Downstream', *Foreign Policy*, 27 September 2019, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2017/09/27/chinas-mekong-plans-threaten-disaster-for-countries-downstream/>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁷⁸ For more on the FPDA, see: Huxley, T., 'Developing the Five Power Defence Arrangements', *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, 1 June 2017, available at: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2017/06/fpda>, last visited: 28 February 2020.

⁷⁹ Black, S. and A. Morrison, 'Can China avoid a growth crisis?', *Harvard Business Review*, October 2019, available at: <https://hbr.org/2019/09/can-china-avoid-a-growth-crisis>, last visited: 28 February 2020.

The evidently mixed political and economic success of the BRI may constrain achievement of China's strategic goals. This could prove disruptive to regional states whose economies and political systems have become dependent on, or weakened by, the earlier surge of Chinese economic domination. In certain scenarios, these developments could provide a stimulus to economic growth in both Indonesia and India, which are potential rivals to China as engines of Indo-Pacific economic prosperity. Another change that sooner or later could have very serious, perhaps strategic, consequences for the Chinese economy is the rapid aging and decline of China's own population.⁸⁰

In the event of serious economic recession, China's current levels of expenditure on military modernisation and deployment on an expanding maritime perimeter, including the upkeep of quickly-constructed military platforms in the South China Sea, may prove hard to sustain. But this development would not necessarily lead to a positive outcome. Under Xi Jinping, the CCP has strengthened its grip on domestic power, aided by advances in AI and surveillance technologies. The extent to which the population at large are able to tolerate such pressure will ultimately be determined by the regime's success in managing the economy.

Should the economy stagnate, increased stress and paranoia in the CCP leadership could spill over into foreign relations, a particular concern in regard to the Taiwan Strait, but also in the South and East China seas. Here the risk increases that accidents or incidents might escalate into military conflict with local states (e.g. Vietnam) or with extra-regional powers involved in freedom of navigation operations and other forward-deployed military activity on the part of Indo-Pacific preservationist powers.

3.1.7. Contested Spaces

Regional geostrategies, especially those of China and the US, are developing in such a way that the Indo-Pacific could become as contested during the 21st century as the Euro-Atlantic region was during the 20th. Then, the major powers – Germany, Russia/Soviet Union, the UK, and the US – were engaged in a struggle for supremacy, just as China, India, Japan, and the US are increasingly engaged in a scramble for influence today. In 1919, the British geostrategist, Sir Halford Mackinder, had the foresight to predict that a strategic faultline was opening up from the Baltic to the Black Seas.⁸¹ He was right: Eastern Europe became the 20th century's 'crunch zone', sandwiched as it was between the world's four greatest powers.⁸² Inevitably, in the context of modern communications technology, particularly in the cyber domain, the contest in the Indo-Pacific will take place across multiple vectors, making it more diffuse than its 20th-century variants. But insofar as today's major powers are still territorially grounded geopolitical entities, they will, like their Euro-Atlantic predecessors, continue to rub up and compete against one another in geographic space.

Today, the South and East China Seas, as well as the Bay of Bengal, appear to be increasingly contested.⁸³ Besides their location between the major powers, their importance as fishing

⁸⁰ Ferguson, A., 'Dangerous Demographics: China's Population Problem Will Eclipse Its Ambitions,' *The National Interest*, 16 September 2019, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/dangerous-demographics-chinas-population-problem-will-eclipse-its-ambitions-80961>, last visited: 28 February 2020.

⁸¹ Mackinder, H., *Democratic Ideals and Reality: A Study in the Politics of Reconstruction* (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1919), p.194.

⁸² The concept 'crunch zone' was originally devised by James Fairgrieve, the strategic geographer, in 1916 to account for small states sandwiched between waxing and waning maritime and terrestrial powers. See: Fairgrieve, J., *Geography and World Power* (London: University of London Press, 1927 [1916]), pp.329-330.

⁸³ See: Cronin, P., G. Grace, D. Kliman and K. Lee, 'Contested Spaces: A Renewed Approach to Southeast Asia', *Centre for a New American Security* (2019), available at: [https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/CNAS+Report_Contested+Spaces_Asia_Final+\(2\).pdf](https://s3.amazonaws.com/files.cnas.org/CNAS+Report_Contested+Spaces_Asia_Final+(2).pdf), last visited: 28 February 2020. For more on the Bay of Bengal, see: Brewster, D., 'The Bay of Bengal: A New Locus for Strategic Competition in Asia', *East-West Centre*, 15 May 2014, available at: https://www.eastwestcenter.org/sites/default/files/private/apb263_0.pdf, last visited: 28 February 2020.

grounds, energy reserves, and transport corridors increases the pressure. China's campaign of 'continentalisation' in disputed maritime space has always included an element of competition for natural resources. The true extent of these resources is unknown, and may have been exaggerated in certain locales (e.g. in the case of the Senkaku/Diaoyu dispute) to justify assertions of sovereignty. This said, currently, according to data gathered by the Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, the South China Sea is estimated to hold around 190 trillion cubic feet of natural gas and 11 billion barrels of oil, with considerably more remaining undiscovered.⁸⁴ A growing population and economic growth in the Indo-Pacific will inevitably increase energy demand.

Extrapolating from current increases in demand for fossil fuels in the region – a 70% increase in ASEAN's energy consumption by 2040 has been predicted by the International Energy Agency – it seems likely that competition for access to and control of gas and oil in the Indo-Pacific will intensify, and with it the risk of military conflict.⁸⁵ In 2017, 40% of the world's Liquid Natural Gas (LNG) passed through the South China Sea.⁸⁶

As well as for China with its much-acknowledged 'Malacca Dilemma', free passage of energy supplies through the Indo-Pacific will remain strategically important also for Japan, Taiwan, South Korea, and their suppliers. Imported hydrocarbon fuel currently provides around 90% of Japan's energy, mainly made up of oil imported from Saudi Arabia, and LNG from Australia and Malaysia.⁸⁷ It is therefore no surprise that Japan has sold military vessels and other equipment to support efforts by Vietnam and the Philippines to police and defend their claims in disputed maritime territory against Chinese infringements. Importantly, Taiwan is around 98% dependent on imported energy and around 60% on imported food – a strategic vulnerability which renders the country effectively indefensible in the event of a sustained naval blockade.⁸⁸ Therefore, the survival of Japan, Taiwan, and South Korea as autonomous democracies to a great extent depends on freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.

3.2. Framing a Successful Indo-Pacific Geostrategy

3.2.1. Setting the Scene

The Indo-Pacific has elastic geographic boundaries, but in practical terms these extend at least from the Bering Strait to the Antarctic Ocean and the East African littoral to the Pacific coast of the Americas. The 'tyranny of distance' is key to Indo-Pacific strategic considerations, particularly as a brutal constraint on the rapid projection of military power. Between them, India, Indonesia, and China contain 40% of the world's population.⁸⁹ Natural resources are present in incalculable quantities but are uneven in terms of distribution and accessibility. Improved

⁸⁴ 'A Blueprint for Cooperation on Oil and Gas Production in the South China Sea', *Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative* (2018), available at: <https://amti.csis.org/south-china-sea-energy-exploration-and-development>, last visited: 27 February 2020.

⁸⁵ 'Southeast Asia Energy Outlook 2017: World Energy Outlook', *International Energy Authority*, October 2017, available at: <https://www.iea.org/reports/southeast-asia-energy-outlook-2017>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁸⁶ 'Almost 40% of global liquefied natural gas trade moves through the South China Sea', *US Energy Information Administration*, 2 November 2017, available at: <https://www.eia.gov/todayinenergy/detail.php?id=33592#>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁸⁷ See: 'Japan still reliant on Middle Eastern Oil', *Nippon.com*, 25 June 2019, available at: <https://www.nippon.com/en/japan-data/h00482/japan-still-reliant-on-middle-eastern-oil.html>, last visited: 26 February 2020 and, 'A Review of the Evolution of the Japanese Oil Industry', *Oxford Institute of Energy Studies*, February 2018, available at: <https://www.oxfordenergy.org/wpcms/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/A-Review-of-the-Evolution-of-the-Japanese-Oil-Industry-Oil-Policy-and-its-Relationship-with-the-Middle-East-WPM-76.pdf>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁸⁸ 'Taiwan', *US Energy Information Administration*, December 2016, available at: <https://www.eia.gov/international/analysis/country/TWN>, last visited: 26 February 2020.

⁸⁹ The World Bank's population data shows that India (1.35 billion), Indonesia (267 million) and China (1.39 billion) have a combined population of 3.01 billion, equal to 39.6% of the world's total population (7.59 billion). See: 'Population Total', *World Bank* (2020), available at https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.TOTL?most_recent_value_desc=true, last visited: 26 February 2020.

infrastructure and increased investment have resulted in spectacularly high economic growth, but issues of environmental sustainability are growing, and other associated dependencies and tensions could rapidly escalate. Other observable sources of strategic risk across and from beyond the Indo-Pacific region arise from diverse approaches to government (ranging from authoritarian to hybrid to democratic); competing narratives around national identity, territory, and history; evolving imbalances in economic, political, and military power; and shifting values and ethics in alignment with, or opposition to, the international rules-based order.

Unchecked Chinese expansionism has created a series of interlinked flashpoints from the Strait of Malacca across the South China Sea, through the Taiwan Strait and the East China Sea, and potentially further still as China's ambitions extend out into oceanic space. Across this expanse, high levels of tension and sensitivity mean that accidental or small-scale military clashes with neighbour contestants including Vietnam and the Philippines, or involving extra-regional powers and regional allies (such as the US, Australia, France, or the UK) have the potential to escalate rapidly. Concerted military action by China to enforce its supremacy over Taiwan or Japanese territory would have even more serious consequences.

So far, the forces aligned behind preservation have failed to coordinate their efforts. This has accelerated the unbalanced rise of China. Deterring its militarisation of maritime space and the export of its authoritarian influence requires massive expenditure of economic, political and military capital. But as the geopolitical environment deteriorates, the space will shrink in which to craft an expansive and effective strategy by the preservationist states – an Indo-Pacific strategy – to preserve and reinforce freedom and openness and to prevent further revisionism.

3.2.2. Fostering Cooperation between Indo-Pacific Preservationists

Crafting an effective Indo-Pacific geostrategy necessitates close assessment of the region's many geopolitical problems and possibilities. Here, an additional problem – the failure of the US to act as final guarantor and controller of peace and security in the Indo-Pacific – will only enhance the prospect that China will move to supplant it in this role. This begs numerous questions. If America is no longer willing or able to fulfil this function as regional leader, how will it best be able to unite and lead a collective deterrent? What cost/gain analysis would oblige Beijing to accept this and moderate its ambitions? Would a potential collective deterrent coalition have enough resources and a deep enough regional footprint to achieve its purpose?

There are as yet no easy answers to these questions, since at the strategic level most preservationist powers currently lack consensus on how to define the aims and objectives of their bilateral China policies, let alone the vision needed to connect these into a coherent coalition. There is growing conviction that 'something must be done' in regard to China's rapid rise, notably in the moral space around human rights abuses in Xinjiang, Tibet, and Hong Kong and against other religious and dissident minorities; but other than in the US and Australia, powerful, complacent or compromised counter-narratives focuses on the importance of maintaining good commercial relations with Beijing above almost all other considerations. This prevalent narrative makes it much harder to forge a robust preservationist maritime coalition against China's authoritarian revisionism in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. The risks and costs of such engagement are high, but arguably less than those of not acting. The alternative is the continued proliferation of talking shops, hedging, trimming, and temporising, while the opposing force steams forward unimpeded.

The answer to this challenge needs careful construction. In 1943, in a visionary article for the American periodical *Foreign Affairs*, Sir Halford Mackinder tried to imagine what would be needed to uphold peace in Europe – and the world – after the defeat of Nazi Germany. He did not hold back; he called for the formation of a new alliance – the 'Midland Ocean' – to bind

together the Western democracies and to prevent Germany from re-emerging as a strategic threat to peace or the Soviet Union from encroaching too far into Western Europe. In his words:

Without labouring the details of that concept, let me picture it again in its three elements – a bridgehead in France, a moated aerodrome in Britain, and a reserve of trained manpower, agriculture and industries in the eastern United States and Canada.⁹⁰

This vision was realised in the late 1940s under British leadership, firstly as the Western Union, and later as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), an alliance that has underwritten the peace in Europe ever since. Today, has the time come for the development of a new maritime order – a kind of ‘Indo-Pacific Treaty Organisation’? To envisage it in its ideal geopolitical form: bridgeheads in South Korea and Vietnam, moated aerodromes in Japan, the Philippines, Taiwan, and Australia, and an aggregation of industry and agriculture in India and the United States, supported further by France and the UK. Such a coalition might be a distant prospect given the countries concerned, but it may be the only way to deter China’s revisionist activity and uphold an Indo-Pacific that is both open and free. And given the challenges, pressure, and imbalances in the region, its formation surely cannot start a moment too soon.

The shared mission of this ‘Indo-Pacific Treaty Organisation’ would require clear statements on the need to provide active support, not just lip service, to the rules-based international system. It must also take full account of the interests of individual members of the coalition. Not all countries supportive of the Indo-Pacific concept will necessarily wish to sign up. Some (including perhaps France) may be able to moderate their interest in conflicting goals. Japan would also have to make a brave choice; and great care would be needed not to destabilise the increasingly delicate situation in which Taiwan finds itself. India remains a substantial imponderable which could be an extremely important force-multiplier and beneficiary of success, not least in its own ocean, but may prove difficult to unite behind an unequivocal challenge to the CCP’s ambitions. Here the emphasis should not be on contest and containment, but on the genuine value of the rules-based order, and its vital importance to free trade and the freedom of the seas that this depends on – including to China itself.

However, given that the existing economic order in the Indo-Pacific is an evolving hybrid of rules-based and Chinese agendas whose major energies are based on its economic rise, no preservationist Indo-Pacific geostrategy can hope to frame resistance to China predominantly in terms of military deterrence. Because of the intrinsic fragility of ASEAN, an overly military-based geostrategy could alienate the very coalition which it hoped to unite and protect, by forcing a choice between opposed poles of power without a credible guarantee that economic prosperity would survive the contest. In order to succeed, the preservationist agenda must strengthen what is good in terms of the Indo-Pacific’s economic miracle while rebuilding and maintaining its currently eroded rules-based strategic element.

Therefore, the preservationists in the Indo-Pacific also need to build resilient structures to facilitate cooperation in the economic and political spheres and reverse the trend towards a new order built on Beijing’s terms. This requires an unprecedented level of strategic economic engagement and coordination between the US, India, Japan, and their regional allies and partners, particularly ASEAN. In assessing these prospects, varying factors affecting the focus and scope of the preservationists’ approach to the challenge of China in the Indo-Pacific need to be taken into account.

Perhaps, therefore, what is also needed is a new economic grouping to run parallel to the ‘Indo-Pacific Treaty Organisation’, aligning economics with the military deterrent aspect of the

⁹⁰ Mackinder, H., ‘The Round World and the Winning of the Peace’, *Foreign Affairs* 21:4 (1943), p.604.

geostrategy. Sustainable, high-quality economic development, under the rule of regulatory laws, after all, is the purpose for which guarantees of free navigation and access are required. The Indo-Pacific is a vast, globalised free trade zone which cannot survive if China asserts territorial rights and control over the shipping lanes that fuel and feed the region. At the same time the importance of infrastructure development in sustaining future regional growth cannot be neglected by its international beneficiaries if the tide of BRI investment, with all its flaws and dangerous dependencies, begins to recede, whether of itself or in consequence of a successful rules-based counter-strategy.

The region is awash with an alphabet soup of economic coalitions designed to encourage trade. Of these, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership and the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, might make for acceptable models for the future of the Indo-Pacific economic architecture that would unite all sides to promote trade and investment liberalisation across the region. But to deconflict and unite, such agreements must be engineered to allow all major economies to participate, increasing general interconnectivity with the rest of the Indo-Pacific powerhouse. An economic institution on this grand scale, tempered by realistic ambitions and objectives, is essential to the success of a preservationist geostrategy, not least to prevent the further erosion of freedom and openness in the Indo-Pacific.

Box 2: How the Indo-Pacific preservationists could support Taiwan

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The UK, the US, and like-minded partners should support Taiwan's participation in multilateral forums (whether governmental or non-governmental), while also actively incorporating Taiwan within US-led events. For example, the 'Quad-Plus Dialogue' had representatives from Taiwan's Institute for National Policy Research as the Dialogue's Plus-partner in 2018.

Such practices should increasingly be the norm, while military cooperation between Taiwan and the UK and US should continue to be advanced and deepened. Only by moving in these directions will a democratic and prosperous Taiwan be able to assert itself properly in the Indo-Pacific. This will be highly beneficial for regional countries looking for a viable partner in Taiwan, and also positive for a free and open Indo-Pacific in the face of an increasingly assertive China.

3.2.3. A Greater Role for the United Kingdom?

Although the British home islands will always be geographically distant to the Indo-Pacific, a post-Brexit 'Global Britain' is likely to want to play a role in the establishment of a renewed preservationist system. As the reach of China's BRI penetrates further into Europe, the continent is likely to itself become progressively enveloped by the geopolitics of Indo-Pacific space.⁹¹ In the event that China's economy continues to grow, even if it faces disruption or a slowdown along the way, the country's continued growth as a pole of power might lead to the emergence of a 'Euro-Pacific'. The two ends of Eurasia might end up connected, unlike at any time since the colonial era. The only difference may be that power would not flow primarily from west to east, but from east to west.

In such a world, it would be untenable to imagine that the UK could isolate itself from Indo-Pacific geopolitics. As Europe is drawn further into the Indo-Pacific zone, the UK will need

⁹¹ For more on this trend, see: Rogers, J., 'Defending Europe: "Global Britain" and the Future of European Geopolitics', *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: 26 February 2020.

to assess the extent to which it will play a role to preserve the very rules-based international system it has played a definitive part in bolting together.

One option would be to continue to expand the British presence in the Indo-Pacific, building on the established trend. But if the evolving pattern of Chinese naval presence (and port acquisitions) in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic coast, and joint Chinese exercises with the Russians in the Baltic, becomes stronger and more pronounced, the UK may be forced to do more to resist revisionist activities closer to its own homeland. Under such circumstances, a future US president could not be criticised for suggesting that Britain would be better advised to concentrate on keeping its own neighbourhood in check rather than pursuing a greater role in the Indian or Pacific Oceans. A greater British commitment to the wider European space, including the Gulf, would free up US forces to tackle the Indo-Pacific together with core regional allies, chiefly Japan, Australia, and India.

These two foci – a greater presence in the Indo-Pacific or a more pronounced effort in the wider Europe – may not be mutually exclusive. But unless British military and diplomatic resources are increased, spreading what remains too thinly cannot be wise. Britain can and should throw its full weight behind the establishment of an ‘Indo-Pacific Treaty Organisation’; after all, it is the only extra-regional power with membership of a strategic grouping – the FPDA – in the region. But to claim its right to do so first requires the British government to work out and implement an Indo-Pacific strategy, with a proper policy on China at its heart.⁹² As matters stand, Britain has a long way to go to achieve these essential prerequisites. Until this is addressed, any heightened British engagement with Indo-Pacific partners is likely to remain at best ad-hoc and disjointed.

⁹² For more on the problems surrounding the UK-China relationship, 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: 27 February 2020 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: 27 February 2020.

4. Conclusion

That China – with its vast territory and economy, and its billion-strong population – might eventually become the world’s most geopolitically influential power is not a new idea. The CCP under Xi Jinping propounds a nebulous ‘China Dream’ hinting at aspirations of this sort. Nor is it impossible, given the subjugation of such huge resources to the will of a ruthless autocracy; though China’s economic imbalances may soon constrain such grand ambition. Either way, the spectacle of how Beijing has pursued its goals in the Indo-Pacific up to now hardly encourages optimism about what a new world order dominated by China might look like. Hong Kong and Taiwan can hardly relish the prospect of ‘marching arm in arm’ with the CCP ‘towards a bright future’ of authoritarian repression.

Beijing’s true vision of the world gives the lie to Davos-friendly pieties about ‘win-win’ outcomes. As stated explicitly in ‘Document 9’ of 2012, free, democratic societies and their values are anathema to the CCP, not least because they might inspire similar hopes in China and so threaten the regime’s survival.⁹³ But this is the real ‘China Dream’, in which the CCP projects its power, step by step, out from the Chinese heartland across Eurasia, en route continentalising and so destroying the free and open Indo-Pacific and replacing it with a hierarchy of dependent client states.

Strategists and policymakers should not misunderstand the challenge confronting the world. The preservationist powers – primarily democracies of various shades, together with countries supportive of a free and open Indo-Pacific space – should resist China’s revanchist advance. To achieve this, the remaining regional countries should first define a vision of their own specific intersection with the Indo-Pacific concept, before synchronising this with other preservationist powers. National perspectives will vary, but there is no reason why with care they cannot be integrated into a coherent Indo-Pacific whole. The Indo-Pacific may be a geographic space – but it is also an ordering idea.

At the heart of this idea is the rules-based international system, predicated on freedom, openness, and democracy. This is why Taiwan is a barometer for the future peace and stability of the region. If China’s zero-sum authoritarian model gains further ground, Taiwan will become more vulnerable. Other preservationist democracies – the US, India, Japan, Australia, France and the UK chief among them – have a specific duty to ensure that Taiwan remains free and secure.

Above all else, restoring and protecting a free and open Indo-Pacific needs to be grounded in geopolitical reality. Good intentions alone, confronted by determined opposition backed by great force, cannot hold. When confronted by the Soviet Union in the late 1940s, the democracies of Western Europe organised in a similar way, resulting in the Western Union, then NATO – the most successful defensive alliance in modern history. Thus, sooner rather than later, Indo-Pacific preservationists will need to forge a formal alliance to resist being picked off by Chinese aggression one by one and unite to ensure the success of the common cause.

Given the differences between even the countries that support a free and open Indo-Pacific, prospects for an ‘Indo-Pacific Treaty Organisation’ may seem remote. But if China’s influence continues to grow, even at a slower pace, such an alliance is likely to become more and more attractive. Damage to the rules-based order inflicted by the rise of China is worsening, even though its aspirations to supplant the US as the world’s greatest power will be difficult to realise. Robust deterrence is vital for continued security and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

⁹³ ‘Document 9: A ChinaFile Translation’, *China File*, 8 November 2019, available at: <https://www.chinafile.com/document-9-chinafile-translation>, last visited: 2 March 2020.

Achieving this will require participating nations, great and small, inside and outside, to share in reallocated hegemonic responsibilities, to renounce some of their strategic autonomy, and to preserve the region from authoritarian revisionism, while also maintaining durable relations with China.

This means that as the geopolitical centre of gravity tilts further towards the Indo-Pacific space, the aspirant 'Global Britain' needs to decide which Indo-Pacific strategic aims would further the national interest and those of its allies and partners. It then needs to embrace the Indo-Pacific concept fully and work with other preservationists to forge and implement a coherent regional geostrategy.

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