

THE INDO-PACIFIC: BRITISH AND VIETNAMESE PERSPECTIVES

EDITED BY JAMES ROGERS AND MATTHEW HENDERSON



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About Us



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About The Henry Jackson Society

The Henry Jackson Society is a think-tank and policy-shaping force that fights for the principles and alliances which keep societies free, working across borders and party lines to combat extremism, advance democracy and real human rights, and make a stand in an increasingly uncertain world.



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The Asia Studies Centre is a research centre within the Henry Jackson Society that aims to educate the public about the structural shifts, regional complexities and historic tensions that exist alongside the economic and social growth that constitutes the “rise of Asia”. It also advocates a British role in the broader Indo-Pacific region, commensurate with Britain’s role as a custodian of the rules-based international system.



About The Global Britain Programme

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

List of Acronyms

ADMM	ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMM	ASEAN Ministerial Meetings
AOIP	ASEAN Outlook for the Indo-Pacific
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEM	Asia-Europe Meeting
AUKMIN	Australia-United Kingdom Ministerial Consultations
BBC	British Broadcasting Corporation
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
EAS	East Asia Summit
EU	European Union
EVIPA	EU-Vietnam Investment Protection Agreement
FPDA	Five Power Defence Arrangements
FOIP	Free and Open Indo-Pacific
FONOP	Freedom of Navigation Operation
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
HMS	Her Majesty's Ship
MENA	Middle East and North Africa
NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organisation
PLAN	People's Liberation Army Navy
PMM	Post Ministerial Meetings
PRC	People's Republic of China
SEATO	Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation
SDSR	Strategic Defence and Security Review
UK	United Kingdom
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UN	United Nations
UNSDG	UN Sustainable Development Goals
US	United States
USSR	Union of Soviet Socialist Republics
WEF	World Economic Forum
WTO	World Trade Organisation

1. Introduction: What is the ‘Indo-Pacific’?

By James Rogers and Matthew Henderson

What is meant by the term ‘Indo-Pacific’? 15 years ago, the concept was unheard of outside of historical circles concerned with geopolitical discourse in inter-war Germany or 1960s Britain. The term *Indopazifischer Raum* [Indo-Pacific space] was first deployed by Karl Haushofer, a German geostrategist, in his book *Geopolitics of the Pacific Ocean* in 1924; laid dormant for over forty years until invoked – albeit in a different context – by the British in 1968; and then faded from memory as the UK focused on Europe in the context of the Cold War.¹ As Rory Medcalf, Head of the National Security College at the Australian National University, pointed out in 2013: “Just a decade ago, the term Indo-Pacific was heard almost nowhere. Even just a few years ago, it could only be found sprinkled in the writings of think-tank types.”²

The term ‘Indo-Pacific’ only resurfaced when Gurpreet Khurana, a Research Fellow at India’s Institute for Defence and Security Analysis, embraced it in an attempt to broaden the meaning of ‘Asia-Pacific’ to include India more explicitly in the January 2007 issue of the journal *Strategic Analysis*.³ Later that year, Shinzo Abe, then Japanese Prime Minister, observed in a speech to the Indian Parliament that a “broader Asia” was taking shape due to the increasing “confluence of the Indian and Pacific oceans”.⁴

Since then, the term has come to saturate discussion about the vast region stretching from Suez to Shanghai, if not further on to Seoul – even on to the Pacific coast of the Americas. It has all but completely replaced the older idea of the ‘Asia-Pacific’, embraced gradually during the 1990s to account for the growing interconnectivity between the economies of East and Southeast Asia and the Americas.⁵ This is because, undoubtedly, the Indian and Pacific oceans *have* been drawn together as the internet and various means of communication via air, sea, and land have entwined these traditionally disconnected areas. Those linkages have enabled the Indo-Pacific to become – in the words of United States (US) President Donald Trump – the “most populous and economically dynamic part of the world.”⁶ Indeed, the whole region has experienced sustained economic growth since the end of the Cold War, to the extent that it has already surpassed the Euro-Atlantic region in economic and industrial significance.⁷

But it has been the return of geopolitics, animated by the rise of the People’s Republic of China (PRC) and its amorphous and intensifying challenge to the supremacy of the American security system in East and Southeast Asia, that has done most to encourage countries to embrace the ‘Indo-Pacific’ term. Established powers in the region have looked on as the PRC

¹ 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).

² 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.

³ Khurana, G. S., ‘Security of Sea Lines: Prospects for India-Japan Cooperation’, *Strategic Analysis* 31.1 (2007): pp.139-153.

⁴ Abe, S., ‘Confluence of the Two Seas’, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, 22 August 2007, available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/pmv0708/speech-2.html>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁵ See: Dobell, G., ‘Indo-Pacific versus Asia-Pacific as Makindergarten’s Mahan’, *Australian Strategic Policy Institute*, 5 June 2018, available at: <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/indo-pacific-versus-asia-pacific-as-makindergarten-aces-mahan/>, last visited: 15 November 2019 and Medcalf, R., ‘Reimagining Asia: From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific’, *The ASAN Forum*, 26 June 2015, available at: <http://www.theasanforum.org/reimagining-asia-from-asia-pacific-to-indo-pacific/>, last visited: 15 November 2019.

⁶ ‘National Security Strategy of the United States of America’, *The White House* (2017), available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, last visited: 13 November, p.46.

⁷ If the Indo-Pacific is defined solely as the People’s Republic of China (PRC), India, and Indonesia, then their collective Gross Domestic Product (GDP) has already surpassed that of the Eurozone and the United States. See: ‘GDP long-term forecast’, *Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development* (2018), available at: <https://data.oecd.org/chart/5KBZ>, last visited: 15 November 2019.

has become the world's second largest economy, expanding its influence across East and Southeast Asia, the South Pacific, and South America, as well as to other parts of the world, including Europe and Africa.

Consequently, the 'Indo-Pacific' term has been 'filled' with content to assume an increasingly geostrategic flavour – amplified further by its official adoption by the US. Ever since Hillary Clinton, the then US Secretary of State, signalled her country's intention to 'pivot' to Asia – mentioning 'Indo-Pacific' – in the magazine *Foreign Policy*, the term became a concept and a narrative in its own right.⁸ It has been actively pushed forward by the vast discursive resources of America's strategic community, including think tanks, academia, and government departments.⁹

Since then, the US, Japan and likeminded allies and partners have come to see the PRC's excessive maritime claims and assertive actions in both the South China and East China seas as not only a direct affront to their own power, but also as a challenge to the rules-based international system. The PRC is understood to threaten this order and the role played by multilateral organisations that the UK and US were instrumental in creating at the end of the Second World War, to the extent that America considers China to be a "revisionist power".¹⁰ The US asserts in the 2017 iteration of its 'National Security Strategy' that the PRC seeks to "displace" American power in the Indo-Pacific region "and reorder the region in its favour".¹¹

Under these circumstances, the 'Indo-Pacific' concept has been transformed into a geopolitical imaginary, an alternative to China's own narratives. Countries other than the US have also adopted the concept, before redefining it, with some even reorganising their foreign and defence ministries to reflect the new construction.¹²

So, just as the economic rise of Asia during the 1990s led to the perception of the emergence of an Asia-Pacific region, the return of geopolitics has driven the perception of the Indo-Pacific since the 2000s. This is where the Indo-Pacific concept differs both in function and form from the idea of the Asia-Pacific. As pushed by Washington, 'Indo-Pacific' – much like the term 'Euro-Atlantic' before it – is a sophisticated geostrategic 'ordering concept', an attempt to stamp the existence of a new geopolitical system on East, Southeast, and South Asia and remind countries in the region of the important role the US plays in upholding regional security. In short, the new Indo-Pacific order is intended to simultaneously reinforce and negate geography: it reinforces geography by connecting the Indian and Pacific oceans; and it negates geography by discursively recentralising a distant America and its peripheral and maritime Asian allies on the one hand, while marginalising a geographically centralised China on the other.

1.1 The Indo-Pacific: Competing Geostrategic Narratives

Despite the shared concern in the US and among many American allies and partners in relation to the PRC's rise and revisionism – manifested through Beijing's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) – the term 'Indo-Pacific' is not uncontested, *particularly* among the US' Asian and Australasian

⁸ Clinton, H., 'America's Pacific Century', *Foreign Policy*, 11 October 2011, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2011/10/11/americas-pacific-century/>, last visited: 15 November 2019.

⁹ See: Colby, E., 'What's the difference between Indo Pacific and Asia-Pacific? Regional control for the US or China', *Centre for a New American Security*, 24 June 2019, available at: <https://www.cnas.org/press/in-the-news/whats-the-difference-between-indo-pacific-and-asia-pacific-regional-control-for-the-us-or-china>, last visited: 15 November 2019 as well as Kapur, K., 'The Indo-Pacific: What's in a name?', *Centre for Strategic and International Studies*, 25 July 2019, available at: <https://amti.csis.org/the-indo-pacific-whats-in-a-name/>, last visited: 15 November 2019.

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: 15 November 2019, p.25.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Scott, D., 'Australia's embrace of the "Indo-Pacific": new term, new region, new strategy?', *International Relations of the Asia-Pacific* 13.3 (2013): pp.4-7.

allies and partners. Through its 2019 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' strategy, the US wants to involve India, Japan, and Australia in the region to mitigate against direct persistent pressure from China.¹³ In this effort, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue – the 'Quad' – a security group consisting of the US, Japan, Australia, and India, formed in 2007, but was suspended in 2009 due to Australia's withdrawal. It was reinstated in 2017 after several years of inactivity.¹⁴

Recognising the significance of the Indo-Pacific, various countries including Japan, Australia, and India, have put forth their own visions of the Indo-Pacific. Those who live in the 'Indo-Pacific' and those who view it from outside will inevitably have different interpretations. Each perspective has a different geographical scope and area of cooperation. Japan visualises the Indo-Pacific as two separate continents and oceans, focusing its cooperation on the rule of law, economic prosperity, and commitment to peace and stability.¹⁵ India views the Indo-Pacific as a sprawling area that stretches from the shores of Africa to America, where it seeks to promote cordial economic relations and defence cooperation.¹⁶ Australia, on the contrary, views the Indo-Pacific from a narrower perspective; seeing it as ranging from the eastern Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean, with an emphasis on investment, economic relations, and defence relations with allies and partners.¹⁷

1.2 British and Vietnamese Perspectives

But what perspectives do other countries have of the Indo-Pacific, especially those smaller than the most powerful states, or those 'extra-regional' in character? This report is designed to answer that question, or at least part of it. It looks at the Indo-Pacific region from the perspectives of Vietnam and the United Kingdom (UK). While both countries might appear strange bedfellows – not least because one is central to the Indo-Pacific zone, while the other is located on Europe's north-western edge – their growing engagement with one another and their mutual interest in preventing revisionists from undermining the rules-based international system means that they have increasingly similar interests. For this reason, the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam and the Henry Jackson Society decided to work together to undertake research to deepen each country's understanding of the other in relation to the Indo-Pacific one.

The result is this edited collection of essays – the outcome of several months of research, culminating in a workshop held at the Henry Jackson Society on 25 September 2019, attended by British and Vietnamese experts from government, academia, and civil society. The report aims to provide a broad overview of the Indo-Pacific region from a shared standpoint, while simultaneously contrasting the two nations' perspectives. Written by leading thinkers from Vietnam and the UK, the report is divided into six sections.

Besides this first introductory section, presenting the idea of the Indo-Pacific, the second section, by James Rogers, examines Indo-Pacific geopolitics from a British standpoint. Since

¹³ See: 'Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region', *US Department of Defence* (2019), available at: http://www.andrewerickson.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/DoD_Indo-Pacific-Strategy-Report_201906.pdf, last visited: 13 November 2019; and 'A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision', *US Department of State* (2019), available at: <https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/Free-and-Open-Indo-Pacific-4Nov2019.pdf>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

¹⁴ Marlow, I., 'US Security Bloc to Keep China in "Proper Place" Pompeo Says', *Bloomberg*, 23 October 2019, available at: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2019-10-23/u-s-security-bloc-to-keep-china-in-proper-place-pompeo-says>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

¹⁵ 'Towards Free and Open Indo-Pacific', *Government of Japan* (2019), available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000407643.pdf>, last visited: 13 November 2019. p.2.

¹⁶ Modi, N., 'Prime Minister's Keynote Address at Shangri La Dialogue', *Indian Ministry of External Affairs*, 1 June 2018, available at: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/29943/Prime+Ministers+Keynote+Address+at+Shangri+La+Dialogue+June+01+2018>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

¹⁷ '2017 Foreign Policy White Paper', *Australian Government* (2017), available at: www.fpwhitepaper.gov.au/, last visited: 13 November 2019.

the Second World War, America and its allies, local and extra-regional, have dominated the region through military deployments and economic engagement on a scale that has sustained the geopolitical and geo-economic status quo. However, the accelerating emergence of East Asia as the manufacturing workshop of the world has challenged this ascendancy. The PRC's BRI and new military capabilities have begun to compete with the rules-based order and aspire to global pre-eminence. Competition for control of key maritime chokepoints and port facilities creates strategic stress. New regional security partnerships, notably the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), have emerged, but these still leave Southeast Asia vulnerable at the core of a transforming Indo-Pacific.

In the third section, Dr Tuan Anh To explores how Vietnam can be an important actor at the centre of the Indo-Pacific, principally as a member of ASEAN. He explains how Vietnamese strategic thinking has developed since the end of the Cold War, before describing how Vietnam's strategic objectives chime with ASEAN's. Vietnam's ongoing vision for ASEAN assigns it a central role in the Indo-Pacific dependent on seeking neither to confront China nor to abet the US. Pressure to align with one or the other would undermine Vietnam's preferred role as a friend to all states with interests in the Indo-Pacific. Dr To argues that Vietnam should seek to manage any regional conflicts through ASEAN and with reference to the UN and international law.

In the fourth section, on Britain's role as an extra-regional power, Dr Philip Shetler-Jones suggests that a new phase of the US-UK alliance is ushered in by the decline of American world leadership and recognition in Washington of China as a strategic competitor. Having decided to leave a Europe in economic decline, a new Global Britain will need to be established much further afield. The UK's role in the UN does, however, leave it as a steward of world peace and security, in which task a major challenge will be to accommodate China's aspirations without abandoning the standards of the rules-based order. The author considers that sensitive cooperation between the UK and its partners in the Indo-Pacific could help to maintain regional security while encouraging China to play a normative role - establishing new international norms, including rules governing artificial intelligence and handling data. He accords Britain and its partners a role in assuring regional security. As long as Britain builds a China policy rooted in understanding of how respective interests relate, it could establish shared principles able to moderate the PRC's use of new-found regional power.

The fifth section, by Dr Son Hung Nguyen, connects ASEAN's security role in the Indo-Pacific with Britain's interests and potential contributions. Confirming that adherence to the rules-based order defined by the UN is ASEAN's guiding principle, he links this to Vietnam's pragmatic focus on economic prosperity based on free trade, and its acceptance of America as essential for regional security. Dr Nguyen then postulates that the PRC's strategy seeks to undermine the existing rules-based order and impose hegemony over lands and seas which it claims fall under its traditional influence. In particular, he argues that China's military constructions in the South China Sea intimidate neighbouring states and challenges the credibility of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), setting dangerous precedents. Dr Nguyen asserts that facing this coercion, Global Britain, with its influential UN role, can work closely with ASEAN and its fellow Commonwealth members and other allies to uphold the status quo in the Indo-Pacific. Collaboration could include formulating laws in areas that currently are lacking, including cyber security, water security, climate change, and data privacy.

The sixth section, by Humphrey Hawksley, addresses defence and security cooperation between extra-regional powers in the Indo-Pacific, in the context of growing US-China competition and polarisation. He looks to the fact that British and French naval deployment in the region has countered Beijing's preferred narrative of a bilateral struggle with the declining US hegemon. Elsewhere, new security and defence alliances are linking India, Vietnam, Japan, Australia, New Zealand, and many Southeast Asian countries. The US has established military alliances with Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand. The 'Five Eyes' intelligence-sharing network links Britain, America, Australia, New Zealand, and Canada - four with homelands in the region. The Five Power Defence Arrangements (FPDA) draws together Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the UK, a multilateral alliance reinforced by renewed UK interest in the Indo-Pacific, demonstrated by the Royal Navy's renewed presence during 2018 and 2019 and the planned deployment of the Royal Navy's newest aircraft carrier to the region on joint exercises involving the US, the Netherlands, and France in 2021. France has been especially active in the Indo-Pacific, in mid-2019 carrying out exercises with Australia, India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and the US.

Hawksley assesses that this striking intensification of extra-regional and local powers reflects the limited institutional cohesion and impact of ASEAN at the sharper end of the political spectrum, including defence and national security, and the sense that the Chinese challenge in these areas requires a much wider and more powerful Western-led response. He argues that in turn, China will feel challenged by the reappearance of European powers seeking to counter its expansionist ambitions in the region and its authoritarian policies at home, and postulates the imminent likelihood of a serious conflict of values in the region.

Finally, Matthew Henderson and James Rogers draw the entire collection together with a conclusion.

2. The Geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific: A British Perspective

By James Rogers

While each major democratic power internal to the Indo-Pacific – the US, Japan, India, and Australia – has identified its own Indo-Pacific strategic topography, the region can be geographically delineated for the purposes of analysis. It is even possible to pin the Indo-Pacific concept to an objective geographic reality, outlined simply by the broad basins of the Indian and Pacific oceans. The Suez Canal and Cape Point demarcate its western extremes, while the western coastline of the Americas marks its eastern boundary; the Bering Strait connecting Northeast Asia to Alaska delineates its northern frontier, while the Antarctic Ocean symbolises its southern perimeter.

If viewed from this ‘maximal’ perspective, the Indo-Pacific includes all countries with Pacific coastlines in the Americas, every nation in Australasia, all island states in the Pacific and Indian oceans, all African countries with coastlines adjacent to the Indian Ocean, and all Asian nations – including those around the Gulf – with coastlines next to the Indian and Pacific oceans.

With hindsight, economies surrounding the Indian and Pacific oceans have been drawn together for many years. Since the end of the 1970s, de-industrialisation in North America, the British Isles, and Western Europe has led to the transfer of manufacturing to East and Southeast Asia. In fact, this process began in the 1960s as Japan, followed closely by Hong Kong, Singapore, South Korea, and Taiwan emerged economically as Asia’s ‘tiger economies’, but it did not get fully underway until after the Cold War. Today, East and Southeast Asia are the workshop of the world.

Indeed, if the Asian tiger economies were the harbinger of the shape of things to come, the PRC is where industrialisation has occurred at a scale and speed unequalled not only in the Indo-Pacific, but in human history. In little more than 15 years, the PRC has gone from having an economic output – in terms of GDP – comparable to that of Italy to becoming by far the world’s second largest economy.¹⁸

But even that does not emphasise the scale of the change in the economic fortunes of the PRC. In almost every category of industrial activity, the PRC has become the world’s leading manufacturer. The growth in China’s share of world steel production has been particularly evident: in 2000, the country produced approximately 15% of the world’s steel; by 2018, it produced almost 50%.¹⁹ Likewise, the Chinese share of global car production rose from 1.5% of the world’s total in 2000 to 33.4% in 2018,²⁰ while the PRC’s share of world energy production expanded from just over 10% in 2000 to just over 18% in 2016.²¹ The industrial expansion of the PRC has been so transformative since 2000 that China has completely supplanted the

¹⁸ In 2003, China’s economy generated US\$1.66 trillion per year, compared with Italy’s US\$1.57 trillion and America’s US\$11.5 trillion. In 2018, China’s economy generated US\$13.6 trillion per year, compared with Italy’s US\$2.1 trillion and America’s US\$20.5 trillion. See: ‘GDP (current US\$) – China, Italy, United States’, *World Bank* (2019), available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.CD?end=2018&locations=CN-IT-US&start=2003>, last visited: 15 November 2019.

¹⁹ See: ‘Steel Statistical Yearbook 2001’, *International Iron and Steel Institute* (2001), available at: <https://www.worldsteel.org/en/dam/jcr:08b20e40-78a2-4971-bcb2-7a99ee2c7b99/Steel%2520statistical%2520yearbook%25202001.pdf>, last visited: 15 November 2019 and ‘Steel Statistical Yearbook 2018’, *World Steel Association* (2018), available at: https://www.worldsteel.org/en/dam/jcr:e5a8eda5-4b46-4892-856b-00908b5ab492/SSY_2018.pdf, last visited: 15 November 2019.

²⁰ See: ‘2000 Production Statistics’, *OICA* (2019), available at: <http://www.oica.net/category/production-statistics/2000-statistics/>, last visited: 15 November 2019 and ‘2019 Production Statistics’, *OICA* (2019), available at: <http://www.oica.net/category/production-statistics/2018-statistics/>, last visited: 15 November 2019.

²¹ See: ‘International Energy Statistics – Total Primary Energy Production’, *EIA* (2019), available at: <https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/data/browser>, last visited: 15 November 2019.

US as the leading goods supplier to the majority of the world's countries.²² Based on current projections, the continued growth of the Chinese economy means that – in terms of nominal GDP – it is likely to exceed that of the US by the mid-2020s, and be comparable in size to the leading three Western economies (the US, Japan and Germany) combined by 2050.²³

Consequently, however it is defined, the Indo-Pacific is fast becoming to the 21st century what the Mediterranean was to the Ancient era, or the North Atlantic was to the 19th and 20th centuries. In other words, not only is the Indo-Pacific becoming an increasingly integrated economic space, but it is also, and more importantly, emerging as the core of the global political economy. Today, this vast space includes most of the world's leading economies – the US, the PRC, Japan, India, South Korea, and Indonesia among them – and at least half of the world's population.²⁴

As new centres of economic power have taken hold in the Indo-Pacific, there has been a renewed interest in maritime communication lines, both for the export of manufactured goods and the import of energy and raw materials. Much of this trade has to pass through a handful of strategic choke points. The geostrategic significance of the Strait of Hormuz – through which the majority of the world's oil flows – was amplified by the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s, but the rise of non-state piracy in the 2000s led to renewed interest in the Strait of Malacca, and later, the Bab-el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden.²⁵ The Royal Route, the world's premier maritime communication line – linking Europe to East Asia – flows through these passageways, but the Indo-Pacific is also the location of others. Additional choke points include the Suez Canal and broader Red Sea – of which the Bab-el-Mandeb and the Gulf of Aden form part – and the Taiwan Strait, as well as the Makassa, Lombok, or Sunda straits, which can be used as alternatives to the Strait of Malacca.

2.1 Competing Indo-Pacific Geostrategies

From a geopolitical standpoint, the US has upheld an unrivalled position in the Pacific since the end of the Second World War. It has carved this position out through the construction of a vast logistical apparatus of naval bases and air stations to ease the projection of its power from North America into East and Southeast Asia. This strategic system includes Pearl Harbour in Hawaii, the midpoint between Asia and North America, Apra Harbour on Guam, an array of large naval bases and air stations in Japan and South Korea, and berthing rights in US 'major non-North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) allies' like Australia, the Philippines, and Thailand.²⁶ Taiwan also acts as a point of influence – potentially backed by the US – just off the coast of the PRC.²⁷ Beyond this static system of military facilities are the nuclear supercarriers,

²² In 2000, the vast majority of the world's nations imported more goods from the US than any other nation; by 2019, the roles had reversed, with the only large economies still within the 'Americasphere' being Mexico, Canada, France, and the UK. See: Johnson, S., 'The great haul of China, illustrated', *Financial Times*, 19 November 2019, available at: <https://www.ft.com/content/4975eb8a-0ab6-11ea-bb52-34c8d9dc6d84>, last visited: 19 November 2019.

²³ 'The World in 2050', *PricewaterhouseCoopers*, February 2017, available at: <https://www.pwc.com/gx/en/issues/economy/the-world-in-2050.html#data>, last visited: 15 November 2019.

²⁴ In terms of population, just nine countries in the Indo-Pacific – Australia, Bangladesh, the PRC, India, Indonesia, Japan, South Africa, South Korea, the US – hold just under half of the world's population. See: 'Total Population by sex (thousands)', *United Nations World Population Prospects* (2019), available at: <https://population.un.org/wpp/DataQuery/>, last visited: 19 November 2019.

²⁵ On piracy in the Strait of Malacca, see: Raymond, C. Z., 'Piracy and Armed Robbery in the Malacca Strait', *Naval War College Review* 62.3 (2009): pp.1-12. For piracy in the Bab-el-Mandeb and Gulf of Aden, see: Ho, J., 'Piracy around the Horn of Africa', *EchoGéo* 10 (2009): pp.1-16.

²⁶ For more on America's strategic system, see: Krepinevich, A. and Work, R. O., 'A New Global Defence Posture for the Second Transoceanic Era', *Centre for Strategic and Budgetary Assessments* (2007), available at: <https://csbaonline.org/uploads/documents/2007.04.20-New-Global-Defense-Posture.pdf>, last visited: 15 November 2019.

²⁷ See: Rehman, I., 'Why Taiwan Matters', *The National Interest*, 28 February 2014, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/why-taiwan-matters-9971>, last visited: 18 November 2019; Bosco, J. A., 'Taiwan and Strategic Security', *The Diplomat*, 15 May 2015, available at: <https://thediplomat.com/2015/05/taiwan-and-strategic-security/>, last visited: 18 November 2019; and Copper, J. F., 'Why We Need Taiwan', *The National Interest*, 29 August 2011, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/commentary/why-we-need-taiwan-5815>, last visited: 18 November 2019.

amphibious ships, and expeditionary mobile bases of the US Navy – the spearheads of the system – allowing for the further projection and manifestation of American power.

In the Indian Ocean region, the US – as well as the UK – has retained the ability to deny other countries access through an additional array of naval bases, air stations, and other military logistics facilities. These serve as control points to enable the extension of American power from across Southeast Asia, or British power from the Mediterranean, into the Gulf and the broader Indian Ocean space. Djibouti, Bahrain, Oman, the United Arab Emirates, the British Indian Ocean Territory, and Singapore all host American and/or British naval bases, air stations, and other facilities.²⁸

This large, interlocking geostrategic system has provided the US and UK with the means to contribute to the emergence of a rules-based international order. Indeed, the two countries have used it to:

1. Dissuade potential peer and near-peer competitors from taking actions that might undermine the geopolitical status quo in the Middle East, as well as South, Southeast, and East Asia.
2. Deter peer and near-peer competitors from taking actions considered incompatible with American or British interests.
3. Intervene in regional crises, not least those that have plagued the Middle East since the end of the Cold War.
4. Underpin international rules and norms, such as UNCLOS.

The so-called ‘Revolution in Military Affairs’ in the 1990s bolstered UK and US global reach, to the extent that their maritime power effectively became a pervasive feature in both the Indian and Pacific oceans.

However, the rise of the PRC during the early 21st century has altered the strategic balance. The growth of the Chinese economy has provided the PRC with greater means to develop strategic resources, which it is using to amplify its own reach around the world. It has even adopted an increasingly ‘geo-economic’ approach, utilising ‘coercive economic measures’ to establish an exploitative relationship over a plethora of developing nations.²⁹

As Box 1 shows, the PRC’s economic expansion has culminated in the BRI – a US\$1 trillion project – the idea for which was first pronounced by Xi Jinping, General Secretary of the Chinese Communist Party, and de facto leader of the PRC, in a speech in Nur-Sultan (then Astana) in Kazakhstan in September 2013.³⁰

The PRC has also begun to translate its economic power into geostrategic reach. Militarily, the Chinese armed forces have gained impressive new capabilities, including long-range ballistic and cruise missiles, military bases in the South China Sea, and a build-up of corvettes and other coastal patrol vessels. These are deliberately designed to deny potential opponents access to adjacent seas; more recently, Beijing’s focus has been extended to include the construction

²⁸ Rogers, J., ‘European (British and French) geostrategy in the Indo-Pacific’, *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region* 9.1 (2013): pp.69-89.

²⁹ Harrell, P., Rosenberg, E. and Saravalle, E., ‘China’s Use of Coercive Economic Measures’, *Centre for a New American Security* (2018), available at: <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/chinas-use-of-coercive-economic-measures>, last visited: 18 November 2019.

³⁰ Xi, J., ‘Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future’, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People’s Republic of China*, 8 September 2013, available at: https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/mfa_eng/wjdt_665385/zyjh_665391/t1078088.shtml, last visited: 18 November 2019.

Box 1: The PRC's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)*By Matthew Henderson*

The BRI is a portmanteau term for China's current policy of aggressive economic globalisation. It is closely associated with Xi Jinping and underpins his strategic vision of China as a global driver of development and growth. As presented by Xi, the BRI presents a 'win-win' opportunity for developing countries and global free trade. This is contrasted with US and other Western protectionism. In Xi's eyes, this creates a Utopian picture of the PRC as benevolent leader of a new world order no longer subservient to the West.

BRI is best understood less as a formally planned and coordinated programme, and more as a broad range of concurrent activities with converging objectives. BRI began as a policy intended to correct dangerous under-investment in outlying Chinese territories such as Xinjiang by driving trade routes through them to the outside world. Other objectives included moving over-capacity in the Chinese construction sector out into more profitable environments abroad. Backed by a massive surge of capital from the state banking sector, BRI has projected Chinese economic power into some 140 partner countries increasingly linked by a network of trade corridors; on land from east to west across continental Asia, and by sea across the Indo-Pacific and beyond. This poses a direct challenge to the maritime foundation of the Indo-Pacific strategic framework.

New or improved trade routes have helped China to improve its energy security by reducing dependency on strategic maritime choke points, in particular the Strait of Malacca. Access to vital supplies of raw materials has also been improved and diversified, with the PRC emerging as a major importer from both Africa and South America. Under the banner of BRI, China and Russia are expanding their asymmetric cooperation on trade routes and energy into Arctic and Eastern Siberian space. In parts of Eurasia, Chinese BRI activity arguably has a more competitive element.

A pattern has gradually emerged whereby the PRC derives important political and military as well as economic benefits from BRI. Aspiring partner countries are required to abandon relations with Taiwan. Host countries unable to manage BRI-related debt linked to large-scale infrastructure projects have given China access to, or outright ownership of, strategically-sited ports, where a Chinese presence constrains the influence of major powers including India and the US. The so-called Digital Silk Route, operating in parallel with BRI, provides China's client states with various artificial intelligence (AI) technologies. While improved telecommunications and other systems may bring some social benefits, they can also serve to reinforce undemocratic regimes, and can give China covert access to valuable strategic intelligence.

In Southeast Asia, BRI infrastructure investment and its associated political and economic leverage coincides physically and psychologically with pressure to accept the PRC's expansionist territorial claims. Commercial and other practices associated with BRI in themselves erode aspects of the international rules-based order. This is exacerbated by Chinese expansionism in the South China Sea, a challenge which countries indebted through BRI are less able to resist, whether alone or in cooperation with regional partners.

of overseas naval facilities, aircraft carriers, and destroyers.³¹ These new weapons systems have been put to work most energetically in the South China Sea, where the PRC's vision of international relations has become most apparent, based primarily on 'continentalisation' and

³¹ 'How is China modernizing its navy?', *China Power* (2019), available at: <https://chinapower.csis.org/china-naval-modernization/>, last visited: 19 November 2019.

the enforcement of arbitrary control.³² These actions are deliberately designed to undermine the existing rule of law.³³

The expansion of Chinese power can also be seen in Beijing's attempts to assert regional 'hierarchy' by attempts to coax and coerce surrounding countries into new forms of geopolitical alignment.³⁴ What this shows is that far from becoming a 'responsible stakeholder' in the liberal, globalised economy, the PRC is acting more like an old-fashioned terrestrial power. As its available resources have grown, Beijing has attempted to expand its power step by step, in a bid to press down and control surrounding countries and reshape nearby regions.³⁵

The PRC's thrusts have not gone unnoticed. Besides the US with its 'pivot' or 'rebalancing' towards Asia, other Indo-Pacific powers – Japan, India, Australia, Vietnam, even France and the UK – have begun to respond. To deny illegal and illegitimate Chinese claims over the South China Sea, Freedom of Navigation Operations (FONOP) and other maritime manoeuvres have been launched; 'defence diplomacy' has been stepped up; and new military capabilities have been ordered and procured.³⁶

2.2 The World's New Geopolitical 'Pivot'?

What is significant is that the regional powers' competing geostrategies appear to be meeting and rubbing against one another in Southeast Asia. Although this region has always sat at the geographical juncture of the Indian and Pacific oceans the return of major power competition has transformed it into a *geopolitical* intersection.

In the same way that various parts of Europe – the North Sea and Low Countries in the 1900s and Eastern Europe in the 1940s – became geopolitical shatter-zones in the early 20th century, Southeast Asia appears to be becoming the focal point for geopolitics in the 21st century.³⁷ Much as Eastern Europe was sandwiched between the power centres of Russia – later, the Soviet Union – Germany, and, through the Baltic and Black seas, the UK and US, Southeast Asia is increasingly squeezed in between all of the Indo-Pacific's contemporary powers. This has been compounded by the strategic interest of all countries in East Asia in Middle Eastern and East African energy supplies, which can only be accessed via the Strait of Malacca (or, less directly, the Straits of Makassa and Sunda or Lombok).

³² 'Continentalisation' refers to attempts by large continental powers to project a norm that involves looking at the sea as if it were land, with borders, barriers and the primacy of land-based 'anti-access' and 'area-denial' weapons systems.

See: Lambert, A., *Seapower States: Maritime Culture, Continental Empires and the Conflict that Made the Modern World* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 2018), p. 318. On the PRC's ambitions in the South China Sea, see: Sun, Y., 'China's New Calculations in the South China Sea', *Asia Pacific Bulletin* 267 (2014): pp.1-2 and Ott, M. C., 'China's Ambitions in the South China Sea', *Asia Pacific Bulletin* 71 (2010): pp.1-2.

³³ Kuok, L., 'How China's actions in the South China Sea undermine the rule of law', *Global China* (2019), available at: https://www.brookings.edu/wp-content/uploads/2019/11/FP_20191118_china_scs_law_kuok.pdf, last visited: 21 November 2019.

³⁴ Grace, A., 'Comprehensive national power with Chinese characteristics: Regional security partnerships in the Xi era', *Brookings Institution*, 22 January 2019, available at: <https://www.brookings.edu/articles/comprehensive-national-power-with-chinese-characteristics-regional-security-partnerships-in-the-xi-era/>, last visited: 18 November 2019.

³⁵ Nicholas Spykman, a Dutch-American geostrategic theorist, best explained the very different orders pursued by "maritime" and "terrestrial" powers: "Their differing conceptions of space and of the conquest of space indicate one of the outstanding differences between land and sea powers. A sea power conquers a large space by leaping lightly from point to point, adjusting itself to existing political relationships wherever possible, and often not establishing its legal control until its factual domination has long been tacitly recognized. An expanding land power moves slowly and methodically forward, forced by the nature of its terrain to establish its control step by step and so preserve the mobility of its forces. Thus a land power thinks in terms of continuous surfaces surrounding a central point of control, while a sea power thinks in terms of points and connecting lines dominating an immense territory." See: Spykman, N., 'Geography and Foreign Policy II', *The American Political Science Review* 32.2 (1938), p.224.

³⁶ Espenilla, J., 'The Rise of Defence Diplomacy in the South China Sea', *Asia Pacific Bulletin* 349 (2016): pp.1-2.

³⁷ In relation to Eastern Europe, Halford Mackinder created a dictum: "Whoever rules East Europe commands the Heartland; whoever rules the Heartland commands the World-Island; whoever rules the World-Island commands the World" – with the 'Heartland' being Central Eurasia and the 'World-Island' being Eurasia. See: Mackinder, H. J., *Democratic Ideals and Reality* (London: Constable and Company, Ltd., 1919), p.194.

Consequently, the PRC, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, and Taiwan have each looked to Southeast Asia – and the South China Sea and Strait of Malacca – with increasing unease. Tokyo and Seoul are ever more restless in relation to Beijing's long-term intentions and capabilities, just as the PRC is nervous of its so-called 'Malacca dilemma', not least because the Western powers still have the naval ability to close off the strait and constrain China's industrial economy.³⁸ Moreover, Southeast Asia is the natural geographic confluence for Indian and Chinese competition, exacerbated by New Delhi's growing concerns over the expanding reach of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) and Beijing's unease over India's 'Look East' policy.³⁹

As the PRC grows further in power, and its revisionist actions become more resolute, it is not clear how Southeast Asia will fare. In the early 20th century, the alliances between the European powers – multi-dimensional and contradictory prior to the First World War and weak and ineffective during the run-up to the Second – failed to prevent smaller countries in the two geopolitical shatter-zones of the day from being crushed and then overrun. In the aftermath of the Second World War, the UK and US showed more foresight. They established an alliance – the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) – backed by nuclear weapons and forward-deployed conventional forces to signal to potential revisionists that the sovereignty of the smaller Western European countries was absolute.

Today, no such alliance or geopolitical framework exists in Southeast Asia. While the region's nations have sought some degree of economic and political coordination through ASEAN and – through historical accident, the FPDA with the UK, and an assortment of bilateral agreements with the US – they remain unorganised and therefore vulnerable to revisionist pressure. Consequently, given the Indo-Pacific's changing economic and political circumstances, Southeast Asian countries would do well to think harder about how they might strengthen their cooperation, standing as they do in an emerging era of intense state competition at the geopolitical centre of the Indo-Pacific. Likewise, the major powers committed to upholding the rules-based international order – even those partially external to the Indo-Pacific, like the UK (and France) – would do well to consider the penalties of insufficient or botched engagement.

³⁸ For an overview of the PRC's so-called 'Malacca dilemma', see: Lanteigne, M., 'China's Maritime Security and the "Malacca Dilemma"', *Asian Security* 4.1 (2008): pp.143-161.

³⁹ On India's concerns over China's naval modernisation, see: Singh, A., 'India needs a better PLAN in the Indian Ocean', *Observer Research Foundation*, 14 May 2018, available at: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-needs-a-better-plan-in-the-indian-ocean/>, last visited: 18 November 2019. On China's perspective of India's 'Look East' Policy, see: Ghoshal, B., 'China's perception of India's "Look East Policy" and its implications', *Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis* (2013), available at: <https://idsa.in/system/files/monograph26.pdf>, last visited: 18 November 2019.

3. Vietnam: The Indo-Pacific Linchpin?

By Dr Tuan Anh To

Vietnam is geopolitically central to the Indo-Pacific, placing the country in the crossfire of multiple conflicts throughout its history. This nurtures Vietnam's ardent desire for peace. Indeed, since Vietnam initiated *doi moi* – a policy of national reforms over 30 years ago – the country's top priorities have consistently been peace, cooperation, and economic development.

Doi moi has translated into numerous achievements, consolidating Vietnam's status as an ascending actor in the Indo-Pacific through its robust economic growth and strong partnerships with influential nations. Vietnam's national economic output has grown from US\$18.5 billion in 1995 to US\$229.4 billion in 2018 – a 12-fold increase.⁴⁰ In 2017, its export turnover reached US\$214 billion, 40 times higher than in 1995.⁴¹ Furthermore, Vietnam has 13 free trade agreements in effect and is negotiating three more. Politically, Vietnam has diplomatic relations with most countries in the world. The country has expanded its network of defence relations to 80 countries, including all permanent members of the UN Security Council. It has also established strategic or comprehensive partnerships with 30 countries, including major powers such as Australia, France, India, Japan, the PRC, Russia, the UK, and the US.⁴²

Although it cannot yet claim to be a traditional linchpin in Indo-Pacific geopolitics, Vietnam is a large and dynamic country, which is likely to play an important role in ASEAN in the years ahead.

3.1 Vietnam's Foreign and Defence Policy Concerns and Objectives

In 1996, the eighth Congress of the Communist Party of Vietnam assessed that there were five major trends in international relations after the Cold War:

1. Peace, stability, and cooperation for development had become a pressing need of countries around the world.
2. Nations, large and small, were taking part in growing numbers in processes of regional and international cooperation and economic integration.
3. Countries heightened their sense of independence and sovereignty, self-reliance, and self-resilience.
4. Progressive forces in the world strived for peace, national independence, democracy, and social progress.
5. Countries with different socio-political systems interacted through mutual cooperation and interacted in peaceful co-existence.⁴³

It also anticipated that global challenges, such as environmental degradation, booming populations, and widespread diseases, would grow in importance, and that the Asia-Pacific

⁴⁰ 'GNI, Atlas method (US\$) - Vietnam', *World Bank* (2018), available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GNP.ATLS.CD?locations=VN>, last visited: 30 November 2019.

⁴¹ Hien, V.V., 'Foreign Relations for Peace, Cooperation and Development; Proactive and Active International Integration: Reality and Experiences of Vietnam', *Communist Review*, 26 September 2018, available at: <http://english.tapchicongsan.org.vn/Home/Foreign-Relations-and-International-Intergration/2018/1149/Foreign-relations-for-peace-cooperation-and-development-proactive-and-active-international-integration.aspx>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

⁴² 'Infographics: Strategic and Comprehensive Partners of Vietnam', *The Socialist Republic of Vietnam: Online Newspaper of the Government*, 23 April 2019, available at: <http://news.chinhphu.vn/Home/Infographics-Strategic-and-comprehensive-partners-of-Viet-Nam/20194/36441.vgp>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

⁴³ Stern, L. M., 'The Military and Politics in Vietnam: The People's Army and the 8th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party', *Journal of Third World Studies* 14.2 (1997): pp.67-93.

region would become the next area of both dynamic growth and contention where unstable forces may lurk.⁴⁴ In light of this assessment, Vietnam put peace and self-defence at the heart of its national defence policy.

Vietnam has published a number of defence policy documents, including National Defence White Papers, in 1998, 2004, and 2009, as well as the 2018 Law on National Defence.⁴⁵ The core of those documents is Vietnam's 'Three Nos' policy: no allying with one country against another; no military alliances; and no permission to be granted to foreign countries to open military bases on Vietnamese soil or use Vietnam to carry out military activities against other countries.⁴⁶ To protect the country against security threats, these documents aimed to build an 'all-people' defence posture, meaning the whole population, not just the armed forces, would be responsible for defending the country.

Today, Vietnam faces a different world from that of the immediate post-Cold War period. Despite the intensity of PRC-US confrontation at present, it is not yet at the same level as Soviet-US rivalry during the Cold War. Vietnam's economic and defence capability is also now stronger and its partnership network wider. Alongside ongoing disputes in the South China Sea, Vietnam has come to face newly-emerging and non-traditional threats, which include terrorism, drug trafficking piracy, transnational organised crime, environmental degradation, and climate change.⁴⁷

As with previous strategic doctrine, the 2019 Vietnam National Defence White Paper places peace and self-defence as the cornerstones of Vietnam's approach to national defence. However, some adjustments have also been made. First, unlike the 1998, 2004, and 2009 white papers, it did not mention that world wars could be ruled out. Second, it identified a fourth 'No': a policy stipulating that Vietnam would not use or threaten to use force in international relations (except in self-defence). Previous white papers had mentioned this, but never as another 'No'. Lastly, the 2019 White Paper also added one 'depend' clause: "Depending on situations and specific circumstances, Vietnam will consider developing necessary, appropriate defence and military relations with other countries."⁴⁸

The changes in the 2019 White Paper reflect Vietnam's revised assessment of the geopolitical situation. The new 'Four Nos and One Depend' policy will give more room for Vietnam to

⁴⁴ Stern, L. M., 'The Military and Politics in Vietnam: The People's Army and the 8th Congress of the Vietnamese Communist Party', *Journal of Third World Studies* 14.2 (1997): pp.67-93.

⁴⁵ 'Vietnam Cung Co Quoc Phong Bao ve To Quoc [Vietnam: Strengthening Defence, Protecting the Country]', *Ministry of National Defence* (1998), available at: <http://www.mod.gov.vn/wps/wcm/connect/ae9e7ee6-0191-4541-9bdc-afd6ea70aa89/1998vie.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=ae9e7ee6-0191-4541-9bdc-afd6ea70aa89>, last visited: 8 January 2020, pp.1-68. See also: 'Vietnam's National Defence in the early years of the 21st century', *Vietnam National Defence* (2004), available at: <http://mod.gov.vn/wps/wcm/connect/d9939b1f-354f-49fc-ab40-28f5db9aec13/2004eng.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=d9939b1f-354f-49fc-ab40-28f5db9aec13>, last visited: 8 January 2020, pp.1-86; 'White Paper on Vietnam National Defence', *Vietnam National Defence* (2009), available at: <http://www.mod.gov.vn/wps/wcm/connect/caadf77c-2fb4-48c1-8f20-8d3216ad2513/2009eng.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=caadf77c-2fb4-48c1-8f20-8d3216ad2513>, last visited: 8 January 2019; 'Vietnam's Maritime Security Challenges and Regional Defence and Security Cooperation', *Sea Power Centre - Australia* (2018), available at: https://www.navy.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/CMDR_Anh_Duc_Ton_Vietnams_Maritime_Security_Challenges_O.pdf, last visited: 8 January 2020; and: 'Vietnam's Defense Policy of "No" Quietly Saves Room for "Yes"', *RAND Corporation*, 21 January 2019, available at: <https://www.rand.org/blog/2019/01/vietnams-defense-policy-of-no-quietly-saves-room-for.html>, last visited: 8 January 2020.

⁴⁶ 'Chinh sach "ba khong" cua quoc phong Vietnam [Vietnam's "Three Nos" policy]', *Vietnam Express*, 26 August 2010, available at: <https://vnexpress.net/the-gioi/chinh-sach-ba-khong-cua-quoc-phong-viet-nam-2173776.html>, last visited: 14 January 2020.

⁴⁷ 'Bao Cao Chinh Tri Cua Ban Chap Hanh Trung Dang Tai Dai Hoi Dai Bieu Toan Quoc Lan Thu XII [Political Report by the Central Committee at the Twelfth National Congress of the Party]', *Communist Party of Vietnam*, 31 March 2016, available at: <http://tulieuvankien.dangcongsan.vn/ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang/dai-hoi-dang/lan-thu-xii/bao-cao-chinh-tri-cua-ban-chap-hanh-trung-uong-dang-khoa-xi-tai-dai-hoi-dai-bieu-toan-quoc-lan-thu-xii-cua-dang-1600>, last visited: 8 January 2020.

⁴⁸ '2019 Viet Nam National Defence', *Socialist Republic of Vietnam Ministry of National Defence* (2019), available at: <http://www.mod.gov.vn/wps/wcm/connect/08963129-c9cf-4c86-9b5c-81a9e2b14455/2019VietnamNationalDefence.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=08963129-c9cf-4c86-9b5c-81a9e2b14455>, last visited: 12 January 2020, p.24.

manoeuvre among major powers, while remaining attached to its traditional approach based on cooperation and self-resilience. Vietnam will not give in to the PRC's assertiveness and excessive claims in the South China Sea. Neither will it bind itself to an alliance with the US against China. Instead, Vietnam will hedge and try to promote cooperation with both. The 'One Depend' implies Vietnam will also look to others, including ASEAN, Japan, Australia, India, the UK, and the EU, for greater cooperation.

3.2 Vietnam's Perception of the Indo-Pacific

Although President Donald Trump announced the US 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP) strategy in Danang in 2017, the term 'Indo-Pacific' has not been frequently used in Vietnam. This is because there are competing visions of the Indo-Pacific, put forward by America, Japan, India, Australia, and ASEAN. Therefore, Vietnam does not associate the 'Indo-Pacific' with the American FOIP strategy. Rather, for Vietnam, the concept reflects the increasing linkage and interdependence of the Indian Ocean and the Pacific. Hence, this ambiguity is why Vietnam agreed with the term 'Indo-Pacific' in joint statements made by the Vietnamese Prime Minister with his counterparts in Japan in June 2017, in India in March 2018, and in Australia and Malaysia, both in August 2019.⁴⁹ In those statements, despite an undefined scope, the term 'Indo-Pacific' prioritised cooperation, the peaceful settlement of disputes, and development.

It is clear that the PRC and the US are competing for influence in Vietnam's surrounding region, whether it is termed as 'Asia-Pacific' or 'Indo-Pacific'. In keeping with its strategic posture, Vietnam is disinclined to choose any side. The country's first-hand experience of blockades and embargoes in the 1980s serves as a constant reminder of the difficulties it would endure if it were to strike an alliance with any single power. Therefore, in keeping with its strategic doctrine, Vietnam seeks to engage the US, the PRC, and other partners to prevent the Indo-Pacific from becoming a global flashpoint as a corollary of superpower rivalry. Instead of leaning towards one country, Vietnam aims to promote cooperation, peace, and development in the spirit of independence, sovereignty, territorial integrity, peaceful settlement of disputes, and multilateralism.

Among various definitions of the Indo-Pacific, ASEAN's Outlook for the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) is the only version that Vietnam officially adheres to. The AOIP defines the Indian and Pacific oceans "not as contiguous territorial spaces, but as a closely integrated and interconnected region", with "ASEAN playing a central and strategic role".⁵⁰ Similarly to Vietnam, ASEAN's strategy is to incubate lasting peace and prosperity without taking sides in major-power rivalry. Therefore, the AOIP advocates openness, transparency, inclusivity, legality, good governance, respect for sovereignty, and respect for international law as outlined in the UN Charter and UNCLOS. The AOIP aims to deal with emerging challenges through maritime cooperation, connectivity, the UN Sustainable Development Goals (UNSDGs), economic growth, and other areas of cooperation. Vietnam shares the AOIP's interpretation because it filters out implicit confrontation underlying in other Indo-Pacific perspectives. The AOIP aims to emphasise cooperation with all countries, including the PRC and US.

⁴⁹ 'Joint Statement on Deepening the Japan-Vietnam Extensive Strategic Partnership', *Ministry of External Affairs*, 6 June 2017, available at: <https://www.mofa.go.jp/files/000262573.pdf>, last visited: 8 January 2020. See also: 'India-Vietnam Joint Statement during State Visit of President to Vietnam', *Ministry of External Affairs: Government of India*, 21 November 2018, available at: https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/30615/IndiaVietnam_Joint_Statement_during_State_Visit_of_President_to_Vietnam, last visited: 8 January 2020. And: 'Vietnam, Malaysia Issue Joint Statement', *Nhan Dan*, 28 August 2019, available at: <https://en.nhandan.com.vn/politics/external-relations/item/7856902-vietnam-malaysia-issue-joint-statement.html>, last visited: 8 January 2020. And: 'Joint Statement between Vietnam and Australia', *Prime Minister of Australia*, 23 August 2019, available at: <https://www.pm.gov.au/media/joint-statement-between-vietnam-and-australia>, last visited: 8 January 2020.

⁵⁰ 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific' *ASEAN* (2019), available at: https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf, last visited: 13 November 2019, p.2.

3.3 ASEAN's Importance to Vietnam in Relation to the Indo-Pacific

ASEAN plays a pivotal role in connecting the Indian and Pacific oceans. Established in 1967, this group of small and middle-sized powers survived the bipolarity of the Cold War and thrived to become one of the most important organisations in the Indo-Pacific. There are at least four ways to look at ASEAN's central role in the region: firstly, as a leader for regional architecture; secondly, as a convener or facilitator of regionalism; thirdly, as a hub of regional architecture; and lastly, as a driver of regional progress.⁵¹ ASEAN and various bodies led by ASEAN – such as ASEAN+1, ASEAN+3, EAS, and the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) – have therefore provided their member states with important benefits, such as a peaceful and stable environment for development, and a space for expanded cooperation.

ASEAN could change the architecture of the Indo-Pacific if it can overcome its challenges and make use of its opportunities. ASEAN has difficulty in maintaining a cohesive ten-member group and is working under heavy pressure from major powers. Therefore, ASEAN is sometimes hampered by ineffectiveness in the face of some regional issues, including geopolitical competition in the South China Sea. However, ASEAN also has many opportunities. Located at the strategic nexus between the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, ASEAN is an important force in the region's balance of power and lies at the centre of the regional architecture. Economically, it is a growing market – the fifth largest economy in the world if aggregated – which is leading initiatives to promote connectivity within itself, and between the organisation and the rest of the world.⁵² The AOIP is ASEAN's nascent response to the changing global situation. However, to make it a reality, a comprehensive action plan, including ways to gather collective support, must be implemented.

Vietnam joined ASEAN in 1995 and has twice been the organisation's chair – in 1998 and 2010. It has actively contributed to the formation and realisation of ASEAN's primary policies. These include the 2009–2015 Roadmap for the ASEAN Community, the ASEAN Community in 2015, the ASEAN Vision 2020, and the ASEAN Vision 2025.⁵³ Simultaneously, ASEAN helps Vietnam to expand its relations with the association's dialogue partners and elevates Vietnam's international presence as a representative of ASEAN. This is evidenced at the G20 Summits in Toronto in June 2010 and in Seoul in November 2010. ASEAN also serves as a protective shield to safeguard Vietnam from direct pressure of major powers. Therefore, the fates of both are inextricably intertwined, with both Vietnam and ASEAN drawing inspiration from each other.

3.4 How Can Vietnam Become an Indo-Pacific Linchpin?

Due to its strategic doctrine, Vietnam lacks the desire to become the linchpin, a traditional regional power that can drive changes, in the Indo-Pacific. However, if Vietnam acts within multilateral institutions like ASEAN or the UN, it has stronger leverage. Vietnam can persuade other members of those institutions to form closer partnerships and avoid confrontations with major powers. Holding important roles in these institutions helps Vietnam position itself more effectively to mobilise other members to act in the common interest. Therefore, 2020 will be a significant year for Vietnam; it will serve as the Chair of ASEAN as well as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council for the term 2020–2021. It will also be the year that tests ASEAN's role in the Indo-Pacific, as three ASEAN members will chair important multilateral

⁵¹ Seng Tan, S., 'Rethinking "ASEAN Centrality" in the regional Governance of East Asia', *The Singapore Economic Review* 62.3 (2017): pp.721-740.

⁵² 'Investing in ASEAN', *ASEAN* (2017), available at: <https://asean.org/storage/2017/01/Investing-in-ASEAN-2017-.pdf>, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.5.

⁵³ 'PM Attends Summit to Enhance ASEAN Solidarity', *Vietnam News*, 2 November 2019, available from: <https://vietnamnews.vn/politics-laws/537833/pm-attends-summit-to-enhance-asean-solidarity.html#OvX7toGJ91mRB7XX.97>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

institutions: Vietnam with ASEAN and the UN Security Council, Malaysia with Asia-Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC), and Cambodia with the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM).

Although the COVID-19 pandemic has hit the region hard and is preventing Vietnam from organising on-site ASEAN meetings, Vietnam's performance as the ASEAN Chair for 2020 affirm that Vietnam does have an eminent role to play within the framework of ASEAN. Vietnam could become a linchpin of cooperation in the sense that it enmeshes itself as an increasingly proactive member within ASEAN, promoting the association's centrality and deeper cooperation in the region, relying on multilateralism and international law in its activities. As it does so, Vietnam might encourage other ASEAN members and the association's partners to embrace initiatives that adhere to the principles of fairness, inclusivity, and respect for the rules-based international system.

Some of the policies that Vietnam is likely to champion in its pursuit of bolstering ASEAN, and becoming a linchpin of cooperation in the region, include:

- The promotion of ASEAN as the centre of the evolving Indo-Pacific architecture, as well as its relations with external partners such as the UN.
- Facilitation of the development of a new vision for ASEAN 2030 or a five-year review of ASEAN's community building.
- Close cooperation with ASEAN members to update and provide greater strategic clarity to the AOIP. This may include the principles laid out in the AOIP regarding other ASEAN-led platforms like the East Asia Summit (EAS), to enhance the association's convening power, and better coordinate the AOIP with other strategic plans like BRI or FOIP.
- The advancement of its foreign policy in line with the AOIP. Vietnam's foreign relations with other countries will aim to support the narrative that the Indo-Pacific is not a battlefield for major-power rivalry, but a region for the rules-based international order to thrive.
- The upholding of its legitimate rights in relation to disputes in the South China Sea. Vietnam will try to solve disputes through peaceful means in accordance with international law, including UNCLOS.

Vietnam should consistently champion a policy advocating multilateralism and respect for international law, and push forward with fulfilling ASEAN's shared goals of peace, security, cooperation, and economic development in the Indo-Pacific. It will not navigate the intricacies of strategic competition between the PRC and the US, but will work with other ASEAN members and external partners, including the PRC and the US, to find ways to enhance cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. In working through ASEAN, Vietnam can truly become a linchpin in the Indo-Pacific

4. Britain: Extra-Regional Power in the Indo-Pacific?

By Dr Philip Shetler-Jones

The UK stands at a point of geopolitical inflection. It is currently reversing the geostrategic move carried out in the late 1960s under Prime Minister Harold Wilson: withdrawal from ‘East of Suez’. In recent years, Britain has been returning as an extra-regional power in the Indo-Pacific.⁵⁴ This chapter explains in more detail what is driving this move.

First, the global economic and geopolitical centre of gravity is moving eastwards to the Indo-Pacific. According to the UK Ministry of Defence’s strategic forecast ‘Global Strategic Trends’: “As the economic power of Asia increases, the political and military power of China and to a lesser extent India, will grow, potentially rivalling that of the United States.”⁵⁵

The PRC is already the UK’s third largest commercial partner after the US and the EU, with around £60 billion annual bilateral trade.⁵⁶ When it comes to arms exports, between 2013 and 2017 the UK was Japan’s second largest arms provider.⁵⁷ Australia has just signed off on a £20 billion deal to procure the Royal Navy’s Type 26 frigate.⁵⁸ But the eastward shift of UK interests is only partly a function of the Indo-Pacific’s growing economic gravity. For Britain, the importance of the region is also based on a need to adapt its alliance relationship to the fact that the US sees itself – as expressed in the 2017 National Security Strategy – as being in ‘strategic competition’ with the PRC.⁵⁹ Consequently, the Indo-Pacific, and not the Euro-Atlantic, is now America’s ‘priority theatre’.⁶⁰

Second, just as the nations of Asia have been rising, Europe has also become less central both to the international order and to UK national interests. In terms of national security, the threat from Russia across Europe is much reduced in comparison to that of the USSR, and the European continent has the resources to function as a buffer against threats approaching the British Isles from the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) or the East.⁶¹ Equally, Europe is no longer the centre of economic growth that it was in the late 1960s. Decolonisation, mature economies, an ageing population, unsustainable rises in debt, and entitlement costs are the backdrop for a reduction of UK-EU trade and investment that began before the option of Brexit was even on the table. The decision to leave the EU is a tonic for strategic reassessment, prompting the UK to explore ideas such as ‘Global Britain’.

⁵⁴ Shetler-Jones, P., ‘The anniversary of Suez on the eve of Brexit: Time to ‘Reverse Wilson’ in British strategy?’, *The British Interest*, 30 October 2019, available at: <https://britishinterest.org/the-anniversary-of-suez-on-the-eve-of-brex-it-time-to-reverse-wilson-in-british-strategy/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁵⁵ ‘Global Strategic Trends: The Future Starts Today’ (6th edn), *Development, Concepts and Doctrine Centre* (2018), available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/771309/Global_Strategic_Trends_-_The_Future_Starts_Today.pdf, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁵⁶ ‘Who does the UK trade with?’, *Office For National Statistics*, 3 January 2018, available at: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/businessindustryandtrade/internationaltrade/articles/whodoestheuktradewith/2017-02-21>, last visited: 13 January 2020.

⁵⁷ ‘Trends In International Arms Transfers’, *SIPRI* (2017), available at: https://www.sipri.org/sites/default/files/2018-03/fssipri_at2017_0.pdf, last visited 13 January 2020, p.6.

⁵⁸ BAE wins multi-billion pound Australian warship contract, *BBC*, 29 June 2018, available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-44649959>, last visited, 13 January 2020.

⁵⁹ ‘National Security Strategy of the United States of America’, *The White House*, December 2017, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁶⁰ ‘Department of Defense Indo-Pacific Strategy Report’, *The United States Department of Defence*, 1 June 2019, available at: <https://media.defense.gov/2019/Jul/01/2002152311/-1/-1/1/DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE-INDO-PACIFIC-STRATEGY-REPORT-2019.PDF>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁶¹ Barry, B., Barrie, D., Beraud-Sudreau, L., Boyd, H., Childs, N. and Giegerich, B., ‘Defending Europe: scenario-based capability requirements for NATO’s European members’, *International Institute of Strategic Studies*, 10 May 2019, available at: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2019/05/defending-europe>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

Third, the US is relinquishing the kind of strategic leadership it has played since the end of the Second World War, not least in support of freedom and democracy globally. Even after the end of the Cold War, the idea of 'the West' (with America at its head) persisted, as evidenced when President Clinton's Secretary of State Madeleine Albright spoke of her country as the "indispensable nation".⁶² President Obama's notion of "leading from behind" was the first indication that this was changing.⁶³ During his inaugural address, President Trump, confirmed it: "...from this day forward a new vision will govern our land. From this day forward it is going to be only America First."⁶⁴ Although the US looks set to remain by far the most powerful nation on Earth – with considerable authority – it no longer exhibits the vision, sense of obligation and willingness to set an example or build a coalition that constitutes leadership in the full sense.

These three geopolitical changes do not fundamentally alter the importance of the UK-US alliance, but they do change the terms of the 'special relationship'. Not knowing if America will reclaim the role of leading the West – and so far there is no reason to assume it will – Britain has been obliged to adopt a stance whereby it maintains the benefits of this alliance, while making its own efforts to defend and nurture a community of like-minded countries. It is in this sense that Britain has also recognised the increasing power and shared interest of countries in the Indo-Pacific region and has responded by strengthening and updating its wider alliance network – such as quasi-alliance relations with Japan, with like-minded countries such as Australia and New Zealand, and with partner countries like Brunei, Singapore, and Vietnam.⁶⁵

4.1 Britain's Reach into the Indo-Pacific

Despite its withdrawal from 'East of Suez', the UK retained a residual footprint in the Indo-Pacific throughout the Cold War era. The UK upheld sovereign responsibilities and commitments in the region, not least on British Indian Ocean Territory and Pitcairn. Alongside Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, and Singapore, Britain has also remained central to the FPDA, as well as the 'Five Eyes' intelligence network, which – through Australia and New Zealand – extends deeply into the region.

Nonetheless, since 2012, the UK has expressed a renewed interest in the region 'East of Suez'. It has upgraded its Naval Support Facility in Manama, Bahrain and opened a Joint Logistics Support Base in Duqm, Oman. Singapore, the location of an existing naval support facility, completed a new Defence Memorandum of Understanding with the UK in 2018.⁶⁶

In addition, the UK has stepped up military and defence agreements with Indo-Pacific states (India, Australia, Japan) in the maritime domain, but also the areas of air, cyber, and defence technology. There has been more frequent participation in military exercises, such as Talisman Sabre 2019, while 2+2 Foreign and Defence Ministers' meetings with counterparts in Australia (AUKMIN) and Japan have become routine.

⁶² Interview on NBC-TV 'The Today Show' with Matt Lauer, *U.S. Department of State*, 19 February 1998, available at: <https://1997-2001.state.gov/statements/1998/980219a.html>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁶³ Carafano, J.J., 'Obama's 'lead from behind' strategy has US in full retreat', *The Heritage Foundation*, 6 February 2015, available at: <https://www.heritage.org/global-politics/commentary/obamas-lead-behind-strategy-has-us-full-retreat>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁶⁴ 'The Inaugural Address', *The White House*, 20 January 2017, available at: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefings-statements/the-inaugural-address/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁶⁵ Simon, L. and Speck, U. 'Natural partners? Europe, Japan and security in the Indo-Pacific', *Real Instituto Elcano* (2018), available at: <http://www.realinstitutoelcano.org/wps/wcm/connect/e1b07fbd-ac5f-4d8d-874c-1fe1b7ff192/Policy-Paper-2018-Natural-Partners-Europe-Japan-security-Indo-Pacific.pdf?MOD=AJPERES&CACHEID=e1b07fbd-ac5f-4d8d-874c-1fe1b7ff192>, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.15.

⁶⁶ 'Singapore and UK Strengthen Long-Standing Defence Ties for Next Bound', *Singaporean Ministry of Defence*, 2 June 2018, available at: https://www.mindef.gov.sg/web/portal/mindef/news-and-events/latest-releases/article-detail/2018/june/02june18_nr5, last visited: 14 November 2019.

Defence engagement was established as a funded task of the Ministry of Defence as a result of the 2015 Strategic Defence and Security Review (SDSR), and the importance of defence diplomacy is being backed up with new investments.⁶⁷ The UK's 2015 SDSR confirmed that:

We are establishing new British Defence staff in the Middle East, Asia Pacific and Africa, to provide a new focal point for our significant investment and activity in these regions... bringing coherence and increased impact to our defence activities in each region.⁶⁸

The priority is to build alliance networks needed to sustain broad, sustainable results. As Vice Chief of the Defence Staff General Sir Gordon Messenger put it during a visit to Singapore in early 2019: "Engage early, build alliances and commit; success will beget success."⁶⁹ The Defence Staff established in the Gulf (Dubai) and Asia-Pacific (Singapore) became fully operational in 2017.

4.2 The Indo-Pacific: British Strategic Interests

The UK's reach and operational activities aside, global strategic competition is playing out in an Indo-Pacific landscape of norms and principles guiding expectations for interaction. As a permanent member of the UN Security Council with extensive military capabilities, the UK has a 'stewardship' role in upholding international order, which cannot exclude the Indo-Pacific. This means maintaining respect for UN priorities (security, rights, and development) and principles (e.g. sovereign equality), and being prepared to enforce UN Security Council resolutions (e.g. the counter-proliferation regime, particularly in relation to North Korea). In the context of resurgent great-power rivalry, the UK has both an obligation and an interest in shaping the calculations of rising powers and dissuading those who would unilaterally seek advantage at the expense of the principles and mechanisms that provide for common security.

Economic growth and development in other Indo-Pacific countries will likely rise to the point where a PRC-centric vision of economic and security governance is no longer appropriate. However, until then, the sheer scale of its economy and population relative to other states means that the PRC's growth to middle income level, powered by an increasingly advanced industrial economy, will inevitably rebalance the global distribution of power. This may transform China into a key architect of the next generation of international norms and regulations, governing emerging areas such as climate, space, digital infrastructure and cyberspace, data rights, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and new forms of weaponry.

Making space for the 'peaceful rise' of the PRC – without selling out precious legal rights and freedoms that have been put in place at the cost of generations of blood, sweat, and tears – is the main strategic challenge of the 21st century. Here, of growing significance are the Chinese Communist Party's attempts to discursively legitimise China's interests in the Indo-Pacific. Under the rule of President Xi Jinping, the PRC has sought to develop and extend its own normative framework across the region, through key institutions of global governance such as the UN and through the promotion of concepts such as 'Community of Common Destiny'.⁷⁰ This effort is in its nascent, formative stages, and as such provides an opportunity for outside powers to join with regional partners to influence the process.

A guidebook such as 'How To Train Your Dragon' may sound patronising, but the observation – that the PRC's course will depend as much on the responses of its neighbours and other powers

⁶⁷ 'UK's International Defence Engagement Strategy', *United Kingdom Ministry of Defence* (2017), available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/596968/06032017_Def_Engag_Strat_2017DaSCREEN.pdf, last visited: 14 November 2019, p.1.

⁶⁸ 'National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: annual report 2016', *HM Government* (2016), available at: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575378/national_security_strategy_strategic_defence_security_review_annual_report_2016.pdf, last visited: 14 November 2019, p.19.

⁶⁹ Messenger, G., 'Remarks to the Fullerton Forum', *International Institute for Strategic Studies*, Singapore, 28 January 2019.

⁷⁰ Zhang, D., "'The Concept of 'Community of Common Destiny' in China's Diplomacy: Meaning, Motives and Implications', *Asia and the Pacific Policy Studies* 5.2 (2018): pp.196-207.

it interacts with further afield as it will on Chinese domestic preferences – is fundamentally sound.⁷¹ As with the implementation of the BRI, the PRC responds to feedback signals.⁷² This is as true for military-strategic questions like freedom of navigation in the South China Sea as it is for financial and environmental practices. This is one of the many reasons that the UK needs to base its Indo-Pacific policies on a clear-eyed assessment of how the foreign and strategic policies of China relate to British interests.

4.3 How Should Britain Respond?

Before thinking about joining regional institutions or achieving observer status at the East Asian Summit or other organisations, the UK would do well to establish a regular Indo-Pacific presence and demonstrate to its regional partners what it can contribute.

The character of multilateral cooperation is evolving in a way that makes an Indo-Pacific NATO-style defence alliance (with a common treaty, standing command structures, and uniform equipment standards) unlikely to emerge. In the current strategic environment, international relationships are a blend of strategic competition and shared interests on mutually advantageous policy areas such as trade, financial, climate action, and counter-terrorism or organised crime. In this context, less rigid partnerships among like-minded nations animated by joint exercises, information sharing, technology exchange, and policy coordination are more appropriate, particularly for the UK.

The decline in US leadership on the normative and ideological levels provides an opportunity to establish a new framework aligning UK interests with those of its Indo-Pacific partners, not least those with whom it shares an interest in the promotion of common principles. The old concept of a ‘rules-based international system’ might carry too much unwanted baggage for this purpose. Instead, the following principles suggest themselves as starting points for such a framework:

- Sovereign independence – no coercion over foreign policy choices such as alliances, defence cooperation partnerships, joint exercises, and bilateral or multilateral investment mechanisms.
- Sovereign equality – no difference between the rights of big powers and small nations.
- Rejection of ‘spheres of influence’ in international relations.
- Peaceful settlement of territorial disputes – no resort to unilateral solutions by force.
- To uphold treaties and agreements such as UNCLOS and the 1984 Sino-British Joint Declaration.

Indeed, alongside its defence diplomacy and capacity-building, Britain could even work with Indo-Pacific nations to assert a broader discursive framework to moderate the PRC’s understanding of how to use its new-found power.

In the context of geopolitical shifts and galvanised by the vision of ‘Global Britain’, the UK is beginning to realise its latent influence in the Indo-Pacific and is thinking with increasing seriousness about how to harness it in the national interest. There is a firm foundation ready to be built on, including the increasing British foothold ‘East of Suez’, a number of new bilateral and multilateral partnerships, and an increasingly shared strategic outlook.

⁷¹ Gyngell, A., ‘How to Train Your Dragon’, *The Australian*, 11 October 2019, available at: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/inquirer/how-to-train-your-dragon/news-story/1105dece48744d872e8d251f8ea5f202>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁷² ‘Chaudhury, D.R., China Admits Challenges in BRI Amid Pushback’, *The Economic Times*, 24 September 2018, available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-admits-challenges-in-bri-amid-pushback/articleshow/65928923.cms?from=mdr>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

5. ASEAN's Security Role in the Indo-Pacific: Considerations for the UK

By Dr Son Hung Nguyen

ASEAN has become one of the Indo-Pacific's eminent regional organisations due to the significant role it plays in shaping the regional and international order. An association of small and medium-sized powers, including Vietnam, ASEAN has been embraced and legitimised by much larger countries in the region and beyond; hence its acclaimed centrality in the regional security architecture.⁷³ Though recent global geopolitical shifts have challenged ASEAN's traditional role, no other multilateral alternative to ASEAN has received the same level of endorsement in Southeast Asia. For this reason alone, ASEAN has an important and growing role to play, not least because of its position at the intersection of the Indian and Pacific oceans.

5.1 ASEAN: Promoting the Rules-Based International Order in the Indo-Pacific

Most of ASEAN's member states were formed during the process of decolonisation after the Second World War. Thus, state survival and security have been of critical importance in Southeast Asia. Border issues and territorial disputes, many left by the colonial past, have never been fully resolved. Interference and meddling by the major powers in the domestic affairs of these nascent nations has been a constant threat. Consequently, despite more than five decades of ASEAN integration, upholding national sovereignty and territorial integrity have been utmost priorities for most ASEAN member states.⁷⁴

ASEAN, therefore, has promoted an order in Southeast Asia based on the UN system of state sovereignty, in which all states – big and small – possess sovereign equality, where national sovereignty is absolute, and where the use of force in resolving inter-state disputes is renounced. Since its inception in 1967, ASEAN has been diligently working to bring these new norms of international relations to Southeast Asia. Moreover, ASEAN has promoted these norms in its interactions with countries outside the region. This can be seen through the signing of the ASEAN Treaty of Amity and Cooperation to establish a code of conduct for state behaviour in Southeast Asia. The reaffirmation of such principles has become a precondition for ASEAN to engage with any of its partners.⁷⁵

In the absence of significant military power, ASEAN has utilised international law as a crucial instrument for defending and promoting its interests. ASEAN emphasises the integrity of the current international legal system and has been vociferous against its violation or modification.⁷⁶

After the Cold War, ASEAN faced fewer geopolitical challenges, allowing it to focus on economic integration and augmentation.⁷⁷ ASEAN's primary focus therefore switched from security to promoting trade and economic growth. It turned away from intra-regional issues towards developing relationships with external partners. Subsequently, ASEAN prospered in

⁷³ Ford, L., 'Does ASEAN Matter?' *Asia Society Policy Institute*, 12 November 2018, available at: <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/does-asean-matter>, last visited: 6 November 2019. See also: Gnanasagaran, A., 'Between great powers, ASEAN need not choose', *The ASEAN Post*, 28 January 2018, available at: <https://theaseanpost.com/article/between-great-powers-asean-need-not-choose>, last visited: 6 November 2019.

⁷⁴ Kvanvig, G., 'ASEAN, Sovereignty and Human Rights', *University of Oslo* (2014), available at: <https://www.jus.uio.no/smr/english/about/programmes/vietnam/docs/asean-sovereignty-and-human-rights---gisle-kvanvig.pdf>, last visited: 7 November 2019, p.1.

⁷⁵ 'Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia Indonesia', *ASEAN*, 24 February 1976, available at: <https://asean.org/treaty-amity-cooperation-southeast-asia-indonesia-24-february-1976/>, last visited: 7 November 2019.

⁷⁶ Desierto, D.A., 'ASEAN's Constitutionalisation of International Law: Challenges to Evolution Under the New ASEAN Charter', *Columbia Journal of Transnational Law* 49 (2010): p.270.

⁷⁷ 'The New Geopolitics of Southeast Asia', *The London School of Economics* (2012), available at: <http://www.lse.ac.uk/ideas/Assets/Documents/reports/LSE-IDEAS-New-Geopolitics-of-Southeast-Asia.pdf>, last visited: 7 November 2019, p.38.

the post-Cold War order, underpinned by the US and like-minded countries. ASEAN did not, and still does not, object to US dominance in Southeast Asia, and continues to see America's role as indispensable for regional security. When the US withdrew from the region after the Cold War and turned its strategic attention to the Middle East, ASEAN sought to maintain an American interest in Southeast Asia by creating the ARF.⁷⁸

ASEAN's economic rise is founded upon an export-driven economic strategy; therefore, as a matter of principle, it has always favoured free trade over protectionism. For instance, ASEAN has been engaged in promoting free trade agreements in conjunction with its Dialogue Partners – Australia, Canada, the EU, India, Japan, New Zealand, the PRC, Russia, South Korea, and the US – using World Trade Organisation (WTO) rules as the foundation.⁷⁹

ASEAN advocates a multilateralist over a bilateralist approach. Over the years, the organisation has constructed a system of mechanisms to tackle a range of regional issues and interests – each with a different set of players who share some common operating principles. These mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Ministerial Meetings (AMM) and Post Ministerial Meetings (PMM), the ARF, the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting (ADMM), the ADMM+, and the East Asia Summit (EAS), are utilised as tools to promote the 'rules' ASEAN seeks to implement in the Indo-Pacific.⁸⁰

5.2 Challenges to the Rules-Based International System in the Indo-Pacific

The rules-based system that inspired the inception of ASEAN is coming under growing threat. With the balance of power shifting in the PRC's favour, Beijing is seeking to modify and revise the regional order and reclaim what it sees as its rightful – pivotal – position in the world.⁸¹ China's vision of the world generates great concern because it is increasingly at odds with the existing rules-based international system, where demarcated borders and state sovereignty are considered sacrosanct. Conversely, the PRC has adopted a strategy aimed directly at undermining this norm, with an expansive and revisionist conception of territory and sovereignty predicated upon the supposed extent of its own political and cultural influence.⁸² Increasingly, Beijing seems to think it has a right to extend its borders to correspond with its imagined historical sphere of influence. Sovereign equality is absent when seen through Beijing's eyes; instead, a system of acquiescent states that revolve around a seminal epicentre – the 'Middle Kingdom' – pervades Chinese thought.

The escalation of PRC-US rivalry globally is primarily due to China's revisionist approach to the existing order. Major-power competition encourages unilateralism at the cost of multilateralism, threatening key institutions such as the UN, WTO, and ASEAN. Arguably, ASEAN is facing an unprecedented challenge. Although the original ASEAN member states have grappled with the ebbs and flows of geopolitics in the past, the enlarged ASEAN of today (ASEAN-10) has never had such experience. Consequently, ASEAN's cohesion has become more arduous to maintain amid disparate interests among its member states.

⁷⁸ Goh, E., 'The ASEAN Regional Forum in United States East Asian strategy', *Pacific Review* 17.1 (2004): pp.47-69.

⁷⁹ Devonshire-Ellis, C., 'Understanding ASEAN's Free Trade Agreements', *ASEAN Briefing*, 13 February 2014, available at: <https://www.aseanbriefing.com/news/2014/02/13/understanding-aseans-free-trade-agreements.html>, last visited: 7 November 2019.

⁸⁰ 'ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific', *ASEAN* (2019), available at: https://asean.org/storage/2019/06/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf, last visited: 7 November 2019, pp.1-5.

⁸¹ Heydarian, R.J., 'Beijing's Inchoate Hegemony: The Brewing Backlash in Asia to China's Resurgence', *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, available at: <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/06/24/beijing-s-inchoate-hegemony-brewing-backlash-in-asia-to-china-s-resurgence-pub-79302>, last visited: 7 November 2019.

⁸² 'China as a Selective Revisionist Power in the International Order', *Yusuf Ishak Institute* (2019), available at: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_21.pdf, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.3.

Geopolitical competition also threatens the effectiveness of international law and the maintenance of international order. The major powers are increasingly picking and choosing laws that are conducive to their own interests while ignoring laws that are not. China has shown that it is not only ready to reinterpret international law, such as UNCLOS, but also that it is prepared to undermine the international legal system by unilaterally re-interpreting how this system works.⁸³

The strategic situation in the South China Sea makes for a vivid example of China's challenge to the existing rules-based order. The PRC's militarisation of the South China Sea through rapid naval development and deployment, its construction of massive artificial islands, and its use of these facilities for 'grey zone' operations, is designed to coerce, intimidate, and subdue neighbouring countries.⁸⁴ This contravenes the 'no threat or use of force' principle the UN Charter has enshrined.⁸⁵ There is also growing concern that China might start to use its infrastructure assets along the BRI in the same way as it has been utilising the artificial islands in the South China Sea. The legal order of the sea and credibility of UNCLOS is challenged by the PRC's ambitions. Beijing disregards the Tribunal rulings against its claims in the South China Sea, while continuing to argue that it has special rights beyond UNCLOS.⁸⁶

The wider implications of the erosion of the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific should not be under-estimated. As in the past, malpractices in international relations could spread quickly if unopposed, resulting in a snowball effect, providing impetus for the revisionist power to challenge other areas or for other states to follow, arbitrarily, the same disruptive path. Unilateral interpretation and selective application of international law would then destroy the integrity of the international legal order. If the tactics of coercion and intimidation employed in the South China Sea are allowed to succeed or gain international acceptance, powerful countries may become emboldened, resorting to their power to advance their national interests, rather than engaging with one another through the use of rules and norms.

5.3 Why ASEAN Matters

ASEAN consists mostly of smaller powers with little influence to alter regional politics. Nevertheless, together the grouping has the potential to become a significant actor in its own right, comparable to a 'middle power'.⁸⁷ With an economic output of approximately US\$2.5 trillion, ASEAN's economy is the fifth largest in the world – larger than those of India and South Korea.⁸⁸ US investment in ASEAN is larger than its investments in Japan, South Korea, China, and India combined.⁸⁹ ASEAN is also of military significance due to its geostrategic location. The South China Sea, at the heart of ASEAN, is a strategic passageway internationally. The security of the Strait of Malacca, the passageway between the Indian Ocean and the

⁸³ 'China as a Selective Revisionist Power in the International Order', *Yusof Ishak Institute* (2019), available at: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_21.pdf, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.5.

⁸⁴ Singh, A., 'Deciphering Grey-Zone Operations in Maritime-Asia', *Observer Research Foundation* (2018), available at: https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/08/ORF_SpecialReport_71_Grey-Zone_3N.pdf, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.2.

⁸⁵ 'Prohibition of the threat or use of force under Article 2, paragraph 4', *United Nations: Repertoire of the Practice of the Security Council* (2018), available at: https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/sites/www.un.org.securitycouncil/files/part_iii_21st_supplement_2018_for_webposting_rev.pdf#page=10, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.9.

⁸⁶ 'China as a Selective Revisionist Power in the International Order', *Yusof Ishak Institute* (2019), available at: https://www.iseas.edu.sg/images/pdf/ISEAS_Perspective_2019_21.pdf, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.3.

⁸⁷ For a definition of 'Middle power' see: Jordaan, E., 'The concept of a middle power in international relations: distinguishing between emerging and traditional middle powers', *Singapore Management University* (2010), available at: https://ink.library.smu.edu.sg/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1393&context=soss_research, last visited: 14 November 2019.

⁸⁸ 'Investing in ASEAN', *ASEAN* (2017), available at: <https://asean.org/storage/2017/01/Investing-in-ASEAN-2017-.pdf>, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.5.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p.9.

South China Sea, now rests upon ASEAN member states to uphold. ASEAN is also a trusted convener of regional diplomacy. Only through ASEAN's created regional fora such as the ARF, the ADMM+, and the EAS, do all the major players in the region get together. The ARF, for example, is the only multilateral mechanism in place today to engage with North Korea at ministerial level.⁹⁰

The convening power that ASEAN possesses is linked to its policy of strategic autonomy and non-alignment; therefore, ASEAN is seen as non-threatening by any of the powers in the region. ASEAN does not seek 'neutrality', but instead, based on its principles and vision, tries to distance itself from foreign interference.

Due to the challenges the rules-based order is facing in the region, ASEAN has used its 'middle power' position and the regional credibility it harbours to support the rules-based order in three essential ways:

1. ASEAN continues to support an environment conducive to the maintenance of the current balance of power. Without a balance of power, there is little chance the existing rules-based order will survive, leaving China's revisionist approach more likely to prevail. ASEAN's understanding of power is comprehensive. The 'dynamic equilibrium', used in ASEAN, seeks to balance both hard and soft power, utilising political, economic, and cultural means to influence the region. With this two-pronged approach, ASEAN continues to engage extra-regional powers, the European states included, on a multitude of fronts to secure their relative 'equilibrium' footholds in the region.⁹¹
2. ASEAN is a vehement supporter of multilateralism; multilateral institutions are where rules are made, promoted, interpreted, and enforced. These processes lay down the foundations for the rules-based international system that ASEAN seeks to promote, defend, and maintain. ASEAN-led institutions have been instrumental in spreading international rules and norms in the Indo-Pacific for more than half a decade – an ASEAN function that is likely to continue. Multilateralism is also important in preventing the proliferation of unilateralism, which is often coupled with extreme nationalism and populism. Multilateralism provides the transparency needed to fuel the rules-based order and bolsters the platform for where rules are transparently made and enforced.
3. ASEAN continues to uphold international law as the fundamental backbone of the rules-based order and invests heavily to bolster the UN and its bodies, such as the Security Council, the General Assembly, and its various technical bodies.⁹² ASEAN also respects and advocates the system of UN conventions and agreements.

5.4 A Role for Britain?

The UK, as a significant power with growing interests in the Indo-Pacific, has the opportunity to work more proactively with ASEAN to uphold the regional rules-based international system, not least because several member states are also members of the Commonwealth. Already,

⁹⁰ 'ASEAN Regional Forum at Twenty: Promoting Peace and Security in the Asia-Pacific', *ASEAN* (2018), available at: <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/A-Commemorative-Publication-for-the-20th-ASEAN-Regional-Forum.pdf>, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.97.

⁹¹ 'ASEAN Regional Forum 2017 Annual Security Outlook', *ASEAN* (2017), available at: <http://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/ARF-Annual-Security-Outlook-2017.pdf>, last visited: 12 November 2019, pp.1-238.

⁹² 'Stronger Multilateralism Key to Tackling Tough Global Challenges but Not at Expense of State Sovereignty, Several Speakers Warn as General Assembly Debate Continues', *United Nations*, 28 September 2019, available at: <https://www.un.org/press/en/2019/ga12198.doc.htm>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

the UK has applied for full 'Dialogue Partnership' with ASEAN, and the association would undoubtedly welcome other creative avenues of engagement.⁹³ The UK could also explore avenues that encompass countries that are close to ASEAN but are nevertheless non-ASEAN members, such as Australia, Japan, India, New Zealand, and the US – all traditional British partners, with whom of some the UK already enjoys treaty-based relations.

Since both the UK and ASEAN are proponents of the rules-based system, the UK could also promote closer coordination and cooperation with ASEAN member states in multilateral institutions, such as the UN Security Council, where ASEAN member states often hold non-permanent seats. The UK could also continue to work with ASEAN to uphold the integrity of international law, for example through training and technical assistance to implement international laws in the Indo-Pacific. Furthermore, the UK and ASEAN could work together to promote transparency in the interpretation and application of international laws such as UNCLOS. Britain could also collaborate with ASEAN to develop new rules and regulations where existing laws are lacking, such as on cyber security, water security, climate change, and the handling of private data.

Ultimately, as the world's nexus of political and economic gravity links together in the Indo-Pacific, a 'Global Britain' ought, sooner rather than later, to start working with leading partners to secure its future in the region. With compatible visions, ASEAN and the UK need to champion the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific to foster greater international peace and prosperity.

⁹³ 'UK seeks to boost ties with Southeast Asia through ASEAN', *Gov.uk*, 5 June 2020, available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-seeks-to-boost-ties-with-southeast-asia-through-asean>, last visited: 15 September 2020 and 'Steering UK-Southeast Asia relations post-Brexit', *Medium*, 10 May 2018, available at: <https://medium.com/@lseseac/steering-uk-southeast-asia-relations-post-brexit-d4667be89465>, last visited: 12 November 2019. ASEAN has ten 'Dialogue Partnerships', with Australia, Canada, China, the EU, India, Japan, New Zealand, South Korea, Russia, and the US.

6. The Potential Role of Extra-Regional Powers

By Humphrey Hawksley

The polarisation of the China-US relationship, predating the geopolitical fallout from Covid-19, has exposed long-term misconceptions over the rise of China, mainly that its overseas investment, territorial expansion, and spreading of political influence will continue unchecked. President Donald Trump has led the way with his trade war, and the EU has followed. China's reputation has shifted from being a bottomless treasure chest for investment to being a 'systemic rival' promoting alternative models of governance.⁹⁴

As the Indo-Pacific has become more contested, European military powers have been jolted into action. The UK and France have sent their navies to the disputed South China Sea as a signal that they would be prepared to jeopardise their trade with Beijing to uphold international law and secure trade routes through the increasingly important Indo-Pacific.⁹⁵

The projection of British and French military power into the Indo-Pacific changes the narrative that Beijing had hoped to construct, namely that this was a Chinese-American contest with China representing modern, forward-looking Asian values against an outdated, fading, and floundering Western power. At this stage, Beijing does not want to overturn American power; instead, its aim is incrementally to weaken it. Nevertheless, the canvas Beijing had intended to paint has not produced the results it had desired; rather, other powers are joining a growing movement to counter-balance the rise of China.⁹⁶

India has extended its reach through the Strait of Malacca to the South China Sea to help Vietnam.⁹⁷ Japan is reaching across to India and down to Australia, strengthening strategic ties with both.⁹⁸ Australia and New Zealand are within the region, but their cultures are European, and they are already signed up to Western strategic alliances, as are many Southeast Asian countries.⁹⁹

How this unfolds in the near future revolves around three points:

1. China does not possess a sophisticated network of allies and partnerships such as that enjoyed by the US. Nor does it have experience of building and holding together alliances.
2. The Indo-Pacific itself has failed to build a universally accepted strategic defence mechanism strong enough to deal with a rising power. The region, ironically, is witnessing the return of the very same nations that oversaw its colonisation.

⁹⁴ Blockmans, S. and Hu, W., 'Systemic Rivalry and Balancing Interests: Chinese investment meets EU law on the Belt and Road', *Centre for European Policy Studies*, 21 March 2019, available at: <https://www.ceps.eu/ceps-publications/systemic-rivalry-and-balancing-interests-chinese-investment-meets-eu-law-belt-and-road/>, last visited: 14 November 2019.

⁹⁵ 'South China Sea: France and Britain join the US to oppose China', *Deutsche Welle*, available at: <https://www.dw.com/en/south-china-sea-france-and-britain-join-the-us-to-oppose-china/a-44422935>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁹⁶ Small, A., 'Why Europe Is Getting Tough on China and What It Means for Washington', *Foreign Affairs*, 3 April 2019, available at: <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/articles/china/2019-04-03/why-europe-getting-tough-china>, last visited: 12 November 2019, and: Haydarian, R.J., 'ASEAN Wants a U.S. Counterbalance to Chinese Regional Ambitions', *The National Interest*, 22 September 2019, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/asean-wants-us-counterbalance-chinese-regional-ambitions-82281>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁹⁷ 'India challenging China's influence in the South China Sea with outreach to Russia and other regional powers, analysts say', *South China Morning Post*, 8 September 2019, available at: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3026120/india-challenging-chinas-influence-south-china-sea-outreach>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

⁹⁸ Crowley, B.L., Majumdar, S. and McDonough, D., 'Responding to China's Rise: Japan and India as Champions for the Rule of Law in the Indo-Pacific', *Observer Research Foundation* (2017), available at: https://www.orfonline.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/08/ORF-MLI_OccasionalPaper_IndiaJapan.pdf, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.16.

⁹⁹ Tossini, J.V., 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements', *UK Defence Journal*, 28 February 2017, available at: <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/britain-and-regional-security-the-five-power-defence-arrangements/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

3. China's tension with the US has moved beyond the technicalities of trade and defence to a contest of values, namely between democracy and authoritarianism.

The US has five long-standing military alliances in the Indo-Pacific: with Japan, the Philippines, South Korea, Singapore, and Thailand. These arrangements are strictly bilateral. The region has only two formal multilateral alliances, both Western-led.

One is the so-called 'Five Eyes' intelligence-gathering network, comprising Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK, and the US.¹⁰⁰ Set up after the Second World War and sealed by common language and decades of trust, the 'Five Eyes' is global and not limited to the Indo-Pacific. However, four of its members sit inside the region and the UK has overseas territories – Diego Garcia and Pitcairn – in the Indo-Pacific. China possesses no equivalent, and in the past months there have been suggestions that Japan should also become a member of the Five Eyes network.

The other alliance, specific to Southeast Asia, is the FPDA created in 1971, with Australia, Malaysia, New Zealand, Singapore, and the UK.¹⁰¹ Its original aim was to dampen antagonism between Singapore and Malaysia and to protect them from any resurgent threat from Indonesia. Five years earlier, Indonesia had been staging the 'Konfrontasi' against the creation of Malaysia as an independent nation. Conflict between Singapore and Malaysia is now unthinkable, while Indonesia is unlikely to engage in outright war. Singapore-Malaysia relations are good. Indonesia has no interest in destabilising its smaller neighbours, and all three are members of ASEAN.

Under the FPDA, Britain retains a naval logistics facility at Sembawang in Singapore, while around 50 Australian Defence Force personnel are stationed at Royal Malaysian Airforce Base Butterworth, outside Penang.¹⁰² There are discussions about upgrading facilities and setting up a full British military facility in the region, with suggestions including Singapore, Australia, and Brunei – where Britain already has an infantry battalion of Gurkhas and a Jungle Training Warfare Facility.¹⁰³ Although low-profile, the FPDA has never ceased to function and has been bolstered by the UK's renewed interest in the Indo-Pacific.

A change in British policy came in 2018 when three Royal Navy vessels, the frigates HMS Sutherland and HMS Argyll, and the amphibious assault ship, HMS Albion, were deployed through the South China Sea and East China Sea. HMS Albion deliberately sailed close to the Paracel Islands in a form of a Freedom of Navigation Operation (FONOP) similar to those carried out by American warships, prompting official complaints from Beijing.¹⁰⁴

Over the decades, arguments have been put forward advocating the expansion of the FPDA with other regional governments; Shinzo Abe, the former Prime Minister of Japan, once even expressed interest in Japan joining the arrangement.¹⁰⁵ Nevertheless, the overarching view is that

¹⁰⁰ Tossini, J.V., 'The Five Eyes – The Intelligence Alliance of the Anglosphere', *UK Defence Journal*, 14 November 2017, available at: <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/the-five-eyes-the-intelligence-alliance-of-the-anglosphere/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹⁰¹ Huxley, T., 'Developing the Five Power Defence Arrangements', *International Institute of Strategic Studies*, 1 June 2017, available at: <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2017/06/fpda>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹⁰² 'RMAF Base Butterworth', *Royal Australian Air Force*, 2019, available at: <https://www.airforce.gov.au/about-us/bases/overseas/rmaf-base-butterworth>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹⁰³ Hope, C., 'Britain to become "true global player" post-Brexit with military bases in South East Asia and Caribbean, says Defence Secretary', *The Telegraph*, 30 December 2018, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2018/12/29/britain-become-true-global-player-post-brexit-new-military-bases/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹⁰⁴ Hemmings, J. and Rogers, J., 'The South China Sea: Why it matters to "Global Britain"', *The Henry Jackson Society* (2019), available at: <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/HJS-South-China-Sea-Report-web-1.pdf>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹⁰⁵ 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: 12 November 2019.

the FPDA works well with its current structure, which new members could potentially disrupt. Instead, it has attempted to show inclusivity by inviting governments to observe exercises.¹⁰⁶

The South China Sea dispute, however, is organically strengthening the FPDA. Like the rest of Southeast Asia, Singapore and Malaysia do not want to be put in a Cold War position of having to choose between superpowers. Australia and New Zealand have adjusted their policies to reflect the sea threats and benefits of China's rise.

Britain is bolstering its new Indo-Pacific policy with the planned 2021 deployment of the new HMS Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier that will underline the multilateral nature of the West's 'blue water' naval operations.¹⁰⁷ The Royal Navy strike group will be accompanied by Dutch and French warships and carry US F-35 warplanes with some American aircrews.

The aspiration to be a Global Britain is connected to the UK's withdrawal from the EU. It also acknowledges the Indo-Pacific's growing political and economic influence, and that Beijing has ambitions to reach far beyond the South China Sea.

China has plans to build an overseas base in the South Pacific.¹⁰⁸ So far, Vanuatu and the Solomon Islands, the latter of which switched recognition from Taipei to Beijing in October 2019, have turned this proposal down.¹⁰⁹

Given its reach into Africa, the Indian Ocean's strategic importance for China cannot be overestimated. In 2017, Beijing opened its first overseas military base in Djibouti on the Horn of Africa, giving it a degree of power projection into Africa and the Middle East.¹¹⁰

Britain and France both have significant national interests to protect in each of these regions. In East Asia, the UK retains a responsibility towards Hong Kong until 2047, recently challenged by China's actions in the territory, and is a signatory to the UN command that oversees the 1953 Korean War armistice.¹¹¹ In the Indian Ocean, it claims sovereignty, albeit disputed, over the remote Chagos archipelago – British Indian Ocean Territory – south of the Maldives.¹¹² Although only 23 square miles in size, it contains the Diego Garcia military base leased to the Americans, but to which the Royal Navy and Royal Air Force have access.

France has wider territorial Indo-Pacific concerns because its territories there are home to 1.5 million French citizens and account for more than 90% of the nation's exclusive economic zone.¹¹³

¹⁰⁶ Thayer, C.A., 'The Five Power Defence Arrangements: The Quiet Achiever', *Regional Security* (2007), available at: <https://www.regionalsecurity.org.au/Resources/Files/vol3no1Thayer.pdf>, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.80.

¹⁰⁷ Cone, A., 'Britain to send new Queen Elizabeth aircraft carrier to Pacific', *United Press International*, 12 February 2019, available at: <https://www.upi.com/Defense-News/2019/02/12/Britain-to-send-new-Queen-Elizabeth-aircraft-carrier-to-Pacific-2951549980444/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹⁰⁸ Torode, G. and Wen, P., 'Explainer – Possible Chinese military base in South Pacific fills gap, sends strong message to US and allies', *Reuters*, 10 April 2018, available at: <https://uk.reuters.com/article/uk-china-defence-vanuatu-base-explainer/explainer-possible-chinese-military-base-in-south-pacific-fills-gap-sends-strong-message-to-u-s-and-allies-idUKKBN1HH1FS>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹⁰⁹ 'Vanuatu denies it will host China military base', *BBC News*, 10 April 2018, available at: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-australia-43707975>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹¹⁰ Economy, E. C., 'China Strategy in Djibouti: Mixing Commercial and Military Interests', *Council on Foreign Relations*, 13 August 2018, available at: <https://www.cfr.org/blog/chinas-strategy-djibouti-mixing-commercial-and-military-interests>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹¹¹ On Hong Kong, see: 'The Sino-British Joint Declaration', *Hong Kong Watch*, 2019, available at: <https://www.hongkongwatch.org/about-the-sinobritish-joint-declaration>, last visited: 12 November 2019. On North Korea, see: Brooke-Holland, L., 'UK defence obligations to South Korea', *House of Commons* (2017), available at: <http://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-8100/CBP-8100.pdf>, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.1.

¹¹² Oliphant, R., 'UN backs demand for Britain to relinquish Chagos island', *The Telegraph*, 22 May 2019, available at: <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/05/22/un-backs-demand-britain-relinquish-chagos-islands/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹¹³ 'The Indo-Pacific region: a priority for France', *France Diplomatie*, August 2019, available at: <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/asia-and-oceania/the-indo-pacific-region-a-priority-for-france/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

Some 8,000 French troops are stationed on islands that extend across from Reunion in the western Indian Ocean to French Polynesia's Tahiti in the South Pacific.¹¹⁴

Like Britain following the 1956 Suez crisis, France had withdrawn from much of Asia after losing Vietnam in 1954. However, this is changing. Along the same lines as the UK, France wants to take advantage of Asia's new wealth, to protect the international order, and to uphold its status as a world power. In mid-2019 the Charles de Gaulle aircraft carrier strike group, with its 18 Rafale fighters, sailed through the Indian Ocean and conducted exercises with Australia, India, Japan, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Vietnam, and the US.¹¹⁵ Florence Parly, France's Minister for the Armed Forces, stated bluntly that new 'building blocks of global confrontation' were being put in place in the Indo-Pacific.¹¹⁶

It is significant, too, that for Western governments, there lies in waiting an arms sales market, with Indo-Pacific nations spending more on defence as their economies increase in size. Australia has signed a US\$35 billion contract to buy 12 French military submarines, in a deal lasting until 2050, thus setting up a long-term defence arrangement between the two governments.¹¹⁷ Similarly, India is forging ties with Vietnam through an array of weaponry sales including submarines, frigates, and coastal patrol craft, mostly Russian-made.¹¹⁸ Israel, too, is becoming a presence with its technology-driven avionics, missile systems, and radars. About half of its defence sales are now to the Indo-Pacific.¹¹⁹

The Quad, involving Australia, India, Japan, and the US, has been strengthened by increasing China-US rivalry and is now leading a wider, looser, yet more formidable network of so-called 'like-minded' countries, motivated to consolidate the incumbent international paradigm. While the FPDA may be the only formal multilateral strategic arrangement, there has been a natural coming-together of governments with similar values to keep a check on China's ambitions.¹²⁰ From Beijing's perspective, China is looking very lonely.

The return of former colonial powers derives in part from the failure of Indo-Pacific countries to create their own internal defence alliance. The only serious attempt was the Southeast Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) set up in 1955.¹²¹ The idea was to create a NATO-esque alliance but, tellingly, the only states that signed up were the Philippines and Thailand. The US, the UK, and France supported the creation of the group, but it did not work, and was terminated in 1977.

¹¹⁴ Rogers, J. and Simon, L., 'The Status and Location of the Military Installations of the Member States of the European Union and their Potential Role for the European Security and Defence Policy (ESDP)', *European Parliament* (2009), available at: http://www.europarl.europa.eu/meetdocs/2004_2009/documents/dv/sede300309studype407004_/SEDE300309StudyPE407004_en.pdf, last visited: 12 November 2019, pp.11-12.

¹¹⁵ Axe, D., 'France promises a presence in the Pacific amid an anticipated 'global confrontation'', *The National Interest*, 25 February 2019, available at: <https://nationalinterest.org/blog/buzz/frances-only-aircraft-carrier-back-action-and-headed-asia-45592>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹¹⁶ Parly, F., '18th Asia Security Summit: The IISS Shangri-La Dialogue', *International Institute of Strategic Studies* (2019), available at: https://www.iiss.org/-/media/files_shangri-la-dialogue/2019/speeches/plenary-3---flo-ence-parly-minister-of-the-armed-forces-france.pdf, last visited: 12 November 2019, p.1.

¹¹⁷ Mackenzie, C., 'Naval Group clinches \$35 billion Australian submarine deal', *Defense News*, 11 February 2019, available at: <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2019/02/11/naval-group-clinches-35-billion-australian-submarine-deal/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹¹⁸ Pubby, M., 'India Firming up military ties with Vietnam', *The Economic Times*, 12 July 2018, available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-firming-up-military-ties-with-vietnam/articleshow/53014998.cms?from=mdr>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹¹⁹ 'Israel to Supply Missile Defence Systems to India for \$777m', *The Economic Times*, 24 October 2018, available at: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/israel-wins-777-mn-indian-missile-defence-order/articleshow/66347348.cms?from=mdr>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹²⁰ Grotto, A. and Schallbruch, M., 'The Great Anti-China Tech Alliance', *Foreign Policy*, 16 September 2019, available at: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2019/09/16/the-west-will-regret-letting-china-win-the-tech-race/>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

¹²¹ 'Southeast Asia Treaty Organization (SEATO), 1954', *United States Department of State* (2019), available at: <https://history.state.gov/milestones/1953-1960/seato>, last visited: 12 November 2019.

ASEAN, created in 1967, carries an ambitious slogan: “One Vision, One Identity and One Community”.¹²² Yet, in terms of political regime, ASEAN is comprised of a diverse plethora of states. Its institutions are weak, and it works on consensual decision-making and mutual non-interference. In short, unless it is willing to risk fragmentation, it cannot punch too hard, particularly in the areas of high politics that bear on national sovereignty – such as defence and national security.

In Northeast Asia, Japan and South Korea – two economic and democratic success stories – should have been well-placed to lead the creation of a wider local alliance. Their efforts have failed, however, because, unlike in Europe, wartime historical grievances have not been overcome.

More time might have enabled the Indo-Pacific’s institutions to strengthen and mature. But China’s push has brought an urgency and with it the return of former colonial powers.

Smaller nations are familiar with living under superpower influence. For many, an Indo-Pacific watched over by the US, the UK, and France is preferable because it represents a predictable status quo. For Beijing, however, the sight of a British gunboat violating supposed Chinese sovereignty to uphold international maritime law carries echoes of the Opium Wars. China’s Century of Humiliation ran from its defeat by Britain in 1842 to Mao Tse-Tung’s victory in 1949, exacerbating unease from smaller states over the Chinese Communist Party’s pledge that no such humiliation can be allowed to happen again. Nor is China helping itself by flaunting its authoritarian values in a manner that puts it on a collision course with the West’s liberal democratic norms.

It could be argued that China’s breaching of international law with the construction of its bases in the South China Sea is a policy that any rising power would have to carry out to protect its own coastline and maritime communication lines.¹²³ But rounding up at least one million Uyghur Muslims in Xinjiang, forcing them into camps amid reports of torture and rape, and bulldozing mosques, conjures up a picture of repression that is the antithesis of civilisation.¹²⁴ The Xinjiang policy is buttressed by a general increase in repression and surveillance, erosion of freedom in Hong Kong and increased threats against Taiwan. This techno-authoritarian approach by China has emerged rapidly and shows no signs of abating.

In 2017, Xi Jinping captured global attention at the World Economic Forum (WEF) in Davos when he referred to humanity marching ‘arm-in-arm toward a bright future’.¹²⁵ That vision and the glamour of the BRI is becoming stained and diminished as geopolitical confrontation intensifies

A decade ago, the rise of China was being compared to the dynamics of the early 20th century before the First World War. Now, the comparison lies more with Nazi Germany in the 1930s. In November 2019, *The Washington Post* headlined a report from Xinjiang “In China, every day is Kristallnacht”, referring to the November 1938 onslaught against the German Jewish community.¹²⁶

¹²² ‘ASEAN Motto’, *ASEAN*, 2019, available at: <https://asean.org/asean/about-asean/asean-motto/>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

¹²³ Wang, S., ‘International Law is Failing the South China Sea’, *The McGill International Review*, 1 October 2019, available at: <https://www.mironline.ca/international-law-is-failing-the-south-china-sea/>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

¹²⁴ “‘Eradicating Ideological Viruses’ China’s Campaign of Repression Against Xinjiang’s Muslims”, *Human Rights Watch*, 9 September 2018, available at: <https://www.hrw.org/report/2018/09/09/eradicating-ideological-viruses/chinas-campaign-repression-against-xinjiangs>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

¹²⁵ Jinping, X., ‘Full Text of Xi Jinping keynote at the World Economic Forum’, *America*, 17 January 2017, available at: <https://america.cgtn.com/2017/01/17/full-text-of-xi-jinping-keynote-at-the-world-economic-forum>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

¹²⁶ Hiatt, F., ‘In China, every day is Kristallnacht’, *The Washington Post*, 3 November 2019, available at: <https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/2019/11/03/china-every-day-is-kristallnacht/?arc404=true>, last visited: 13 November 2019.

For Western governments dealing with voter opinion and 24-hour news cycles, a pivotal clash of opposing values could arrive sooner rather than later. At that moment, issues about trade and economics with China will melt away against television pictures of concentration camps, brutality, and ethnic cleansing.

The array of nations lined up behind the US sends an unequivocal message that China's time has not yet come, and that it may be more prudent for China to work within the frameworks of the current world order than challenge it and fail.

7. Conclusion

By Matthew Henderson and James Rogers

This collection comprises a series of essays whose combined purpose is to shed light on how Britain and Vietnam understand the evolving Indo-Pacific geostrategic concept. In particular, the report highlights how the concept is maturing as a mechanism for defending and strengthening the established international order, not least in the face of the deep and expansive economic and political changes that are affecting the region.

Both Britain and Vietnam clearly understand that the simultaneous impact of the PRC's surge in geo-economic and geopolitical power through the BRI, combined with the geostrategic threat posed by its militarised territorial expansion in the South and East China seas, represents a major challenge to the security and political autonomy of several countries surrounding the South China Sea; the authority of the established multilateral system in the Indo-Pacific; and US military primacy in the Indo-Pacific, more broadly.

Both countries also appear to accept that the Indo-Pacific, as a geographic space and geopolitical concept, will continue to experience both cooperation and rivalry. Britain and Vietnam prefer an Indo-Pacific founded on expectations of peaceful change, structured under a rules-based international system. Both appear concerned with the prospect that many Indo-Pacific states, when confronted by PRC-US bilateral tension – expressed currently as a trade war, but with increasing geopolitical undertones – might be induced to view their strategic cost/benefit in terms of the need to hedge, if not to make a choice between siding with either Beijing or Washington.

Yet, there are a number of issues where the two countries' interests may not entirely align in the Indo-Pacific, which is natural given their different geographic locations and vantage points. Projecting forward from the assortment of perspectives explored in this paper, three key issues emerge: firstly, to what extent will Britain and Vietnam – due to their respective geographic locations – prioritise the Indo-Pacific in their own strategic thinking? Secondly, will both countries respond to superpower rivalry between the PRC and US in different ways? And, finally, to what extent will both countries support ASEAN as an ordering mechanism for the Indo-Pacific?

7.1 Differing Interests in the Indo-Pacific

Due to geography, Britain and Vietnam view the Indo-Pacific space somewhat differently. As the centre of gravity of the world's economy has moved from the Euro-Atlantic region to South, Southeast, and East Asia, interconnectivity between the Indian and Pacific oceans has dramatically increased. This has reinforced the practical reality of the 'Indo-Pacific' concept, with different consequences for Vietnam and the UK.

For Britain, despite holding overseas territories in the Indo-Pacific zone – British Indian Ocean Territory and Pitcairn – the movement of the world's economic core has geopolitically 'de-centred' the country. Consequently, the UK generally looks at the region as a distant, albeit invested, outsider. Conversely, due to its geographic location, Vietnam has been progressively 'centred'. Moreover, not only has Vietnam been 'centred', but it has also – due to its location – become increasingly central to the world's economic core. Vietnam sees the Indo-Pacific region as an insider.

So while Vietnam's location at the centre of the Indo-Pacific is likely to ensure it continues to place the region at the crux of its strategic policy, the same cannot be said of Britain. With

deep strategic interests in Europe, Africa and the Middle East, the UK will always be forced to balance a growing set of competing geopolitical interests (further magnified by its standing as a great power).

7.2 The Indo-Pacific and Superpower Rivalry

Despite attempts to enhance the regional multilateral architecture, such as the inclusion of more parties – including the UK – into the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia, and new multilateral trade initiatives, such as the CPTPP, it is not clear at this stage the extent to which such enterprises will dampen the growing strategic rivalry between the PRC and the US.

With the ascendancy of Xi Jinping, the PRC has – despite the emphasis it gives to ‘win-win’ and ‘mutual advantages’ – adopted an increasingly confrontational and transactional approach in its foreign relations, with explicit military and economic threats brought to the fore when passive compliance is not achieved. Consequently, some Indo-Pacific states may be heading into a transition from close economic and security relations with the US and the West, first towards economic dependence on China, and finally to reliance on the PRC for both security and prosperity. To varying degrees, the same may be true much further afield, as Europe’s economy falters and the UK faces a different future with Brexit.

Here, a particular tension is apparent between the ways that Vietnam and the UK might lend their support to the Indo-Pacific concept as a device to rally countries in the region behind a refocused and re-armed US, despite the concurrent erratic nature of America’s diplomatic and economic policy. This may prove easier for the UK, with its ‘special relationship’ with America, than Vietnam, which disfavours alliances against specific countries.

7.3 Importance of ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific

Vietnam and Britain both share many economic, political, security, and defence-based interests with ASEAN as a multilateral body and as a consortium of individual nations. However, for obvious reasons of history and geography, Vietnam views ASEAN from the perspective of an insider, as a bulwark against revisionist challenges, a promoter of free regional trade and security, and a keeper of regional peace. Similarly, ASEAN and UN membership engagements together provide Vietnam with a multilateral and international base to showcase its moderate, collegiate line, linking it firmly with the wider family of free world norms, values, and interests. As a medium-sized power under direct, at times fierce, pressure from its revisionist northern neighbour, Vietnam embodies and depends on the unity and resilience of ASEAN – a fact powerfully reflected in the theme for its ASEAN Chairmanship slogan, ‘Cohesive and Responsive’.

For the UK, ASEAN provides a stabilising, rules-based, multilateral vehicle in the region in key areas where Global Britain can become a reality and where it can play a visible, active, and instrumental role, ranging from expanding bilateral trade (including defence sales) to the active upholding of free navigation and challenging revisionist and territorial expansion. It is for this reason that the UK applied for ‘Dialogue Partner’ status with the association in June 2020, building on the appointment of an Ambassador to ASEAN in December 2019. The UK is also likely to continue to participate in US-led military activity, while simultaneously increasing the depth of its engagement on the bilateral and multilateral fronts. In this evolving contest and competition with China, ASEAN is a key partner in the UK’s continued role in defending the rules-based international system.

However, the sheer scale and diversity of the Indo-Pacific region has constrained the effectiveness of existing international organisations, whose underlying reliance on multilateral institutions and ideals have proved insufficient in themselves to push back China’s expansionist surge. Although Vietnam places great emphasis on the importance of ASEAN, it is not clear

that the organisation, for all its determination, has, as it stands, the cohesion to resist growing superpower rivalry.

That said, relations between Vietnam and the UK and the UK and ASEAN have prospered throughout the course of 2020 - no doubt because Hanoi has held the ASEAN Chairmanship. To preserve and reinforce ASEAN, Vietnam and the UK could do no better in the Indo-Pacific than to continue to tighten and expand their economic, political, and strategic cooperation.

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