

The United Kingdom and the Pacific: Possible Paths for Active British Engagement

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Executive Summary

British interests in the Indo-Pacific have become increasingly threatened, through dangers to supply chains and displacement of British Nationals in the region. In turn, the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt, as outlined in the Integrated Review, has led to greater UK involvement in the region but it is currently lacking the clear diplomatic trajectory of British European engagement under the alliance and treaty structures, including NATO and the JEF. This paper looks at the diplomatic pathways to alliances that the UK can utilise, with a view to facilitating a greater British reach in the Indo-Pacific, as well as enabling UK's military, intelligence and economic involvement in the region.

The paper looks into the existing diplomatic vehicles and alliances for delivering a greater British presence in the Indo-Pacific. The value and implications of the reciprocal agreements with Japan are considered. Their limitations and benefits to UK military operations are discussed. The paper also considers the Five Eyes alliance, presenting a brief history of its development and benefits to UKs continued participation as a contributor and user of the shared intelligence data. British participation in the AUKUS, as well as its possible increase, together with benefits and limitations are also considered.

The paper posits the possibility of the UK's membership of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), now comprised of the US, Australia, Japan and India. With Britain enjoying a strong, and growing, relationships with Quad member states in many diplomatic, economic and military spheres, there is a strong argument for UK's membership. This move will also create a diplomatic framework for greater UK military trade and presence. At the same time, there are stronger arguments for other states, such as countries located in the Indo-Pacific, to join the Quad. There is also a question of whether existing members will allow for a British membership and if such a move is beneficial to the UK.

Finally, the paper proposes an expansion of the Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF), both in terms of operations and membership, into the Indo-Pacific. With a global operational capability, as well as with no obligations for member states to take part in any of the JEF activities, the Force offers a versatile platform. It is also a British led initiative, the introduction of which would inject a new perspective on the geopolitics of the area.

Moreover, existing JEF members have already expressed concerns with the dominant power of the Asian Indo-Pacific, with some nearly severing ties.

Intro

Having stood shoulder to shoulder with Ukraine in its hour of need, the UK is letting its Far-East Asian interests slip into the hands of geopolitical competitors. With growing anticipation of a British, if not global, financial crisis¹ following the start of the Russian aggression against Ukraine, it is time to consider the means of securing the UK's geopolitical and economic interests in a region that holds the key to supply chains for the most strategic goods of the 21st century.²

The area of the Indo-Pacific is a global strategic hub but it is not solely comprised of Asian states. It is also worth remembering that the US is an Indo-Pacific power, through geographic positioning as well as through military presence and diplomatic relations.

The overall wealth of the Indo-Pacific region is more than 60% of the global GDP,³ including that of China which was estimated to represent around 18.5% of the global GDP in 2022.⁴ Producers in the area control a large proportion of the global manufacturing sector, especially in the high-tech industry of silicon chip and microprocessor production. For the UK, approximately 12% of its seaborne trade passes through the South China Sea every year, while the Indo-Pacific is home to seven of the UK's top 25 trading partners.⁵

Taiwan, China, South Korea, Malaysia, Singapore and the US are home to the vast majority of global semiconductor manufacturers, but only 12% are produced in the US and 80% in Asia.⁶ As the UK is unable to meet domestic civilian and military demand in this sphere, it is of utmost importance that the countries currently supplying the UK with these and other goods, as well as potential producers in the region, maintain independence of their supply chains and remain free of influence from states whose geopolitical ambitions run counter to free market and British interests.

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I wish to extend my gratitude to Darren Spinck for his editing and comments, as well as to Catherine Perez-Shakdam and Jamila Mammadova.

¹ Ros Krasny, "World Bank to Warn of Global Recession Risk in Economic Outlook", *Bloomberg UK*, 7 January 2023, <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-01-07/world-bank-to-warn-of-global-recession-risk-in-economic-outlook>.

² Dr Robert Seely MP and Darren G Spinck, "A New Era for UK Policymaking: An Economic Denial Strategy in the Indo-Pacific", *Henry Jackson Society*, 25 October 2022, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/10/A-New-Era-for-UK-Policymaking-in-the-Indo-Pacific-web.pdf>.

³ "Remarks by President Biden at Indo-Pacific Economic Framework For Prosperity Launch Event", *The White House Briefing Room*, 23 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/speeches-remarks/2022/05/23/remarks-by-president-biden-at-indo-pacific-economic-framework-for-prosperity-launch-event/>.

⁴ "China's share of global gross domestic product (GDP) adjusted for purchasing-power-parity (PPP) from 1980 to 2021 with forecasts until 2027", *Statista*, 18 October 2022, <https://www.statista.com/statistics/270439/chinas-share-of-global-gross-domestic-product-gdp/>.

⁵ Dr Alessio Patalano, "The Indo-Pacific 'Tilt' and the Return of British Maritime Strategy", *King's College London School of Security Studies*, 19 July 2021, <https://www.kcl.ac.uk/the-indo-pacific-tilt-and-the-return-of-british-maritime-strategy>.

⁶ "What country produces the most semiconductors?", *Compound Semiconductor News*, 9 August 2022, <https://www.csfusion.org/semiconductor/what-country-produces-the-most-semiconductors/>.

With Britain's incomparably smaller economy compared to the chief power of East Asia, the UK must position itself to take advantage of its long-standing diplomatic relations with the countries of the region to present a common front against any moves that may endanger British interests.

Since its establishment in 1931, the Commonwealth, led by the United Kingdom, has expanded to encompass 56 "free and equal" sovereign nations from across the world.⁷ One of the UK's "closest and most like-minded partners" and a Commonwealth member is Australia.⁸ The AUKUS agreement and cooperation with the UK and the US aimed to strengthen Australia's military capacity and has significantly benefited the bilateral relationship.⁹ India, another power in the Indo-Pacific and a Commonwealth member, has, in recent years, demonstrated closer UK links through increased commerce and work opportunities through bilateral investments in previous decades.¹⁰

For tiny Commonwealth nations in the Pacific, participating in the Commonwealth provides a platform for perspective expression and then shaping world opinion.¹¹ Such ties also indicate a shared advocacy for democratic principles and human rights.¹² Meanwhile, as a leading power, the UK could transfer its influence and soft power to others. In the past, the UK impacted others by exporting its political system.¹³ Closer and stronger multilateral ties nowadays may enable additional partnerships on regional security and development challenges that align with the UK's national interests.

Diplomatic alignment, leading to military cooperation, is the only hope the UK has to extend its reach to a region so geographically removed, yet so vital to the UK's national interests.

With a number of alliances and diplomatic alignments already in existence, there is no need to reinvent the wheel for a greater British engagement in the region. This paper considers the possible vehicles of achieving the aim of maintaining a free market and British interests. The chief method discussed is the use of existing alliance and treaty structures, whether the UK is a signatory to them or not. The options for the inclusion of the UK in the Quadrilateral Security dialogue and an extension to the operation of the Joint Expeditionary Force are discussed. The argument is made that the UK already has a sizable

⁷ "The London Declaration", *Commonwealth Secretariat*, <https://web.archive.org/web/20100706045924/http://www.thecommonwealth.org/document/181889/34293/35468/214257/londondeclaration.htm>; "UK Representation in the Commonwealth", gov.uk <https://www.gov.uk/world/organisations/uk-representation-in-the-commonwealth>.

⁸ Anne-Marie Trevelyan MP, "UK commitment to the Indo-Pacific: Minister Trevelyan's speech", *Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office*, 28 November 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/minister-anne-marie-trevelyan-addresses-national-press-club-of-australia>.

⁹ "UK, US and Australia launch new security partnership", *Prime Minister's Office*, 15 September 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-us-and-australia-launch-new-security-partnership>.

¹⁰ "Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy", *HM Government*, March 2021, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf, p. 62.

¹¹ Murali Krishnan, "What is the future of the Commonwealth after Elizabeth?" *DW*, 14 September 2022, <https://www.dw.com/en/what-is-the-future-of-the-commonwealth-in-asia-after-the-death-of-queen-elizabeth-ii/a-63116553>.

¹² *ibid.*

¹³ "Contemporary context: Commonwealth of Nations", *UK Parliament*, <https://www.parliament.uk/about/living-heritage/evolutionofparliament/legislativecrutiny/parliament-and-empire/contemporary-context/>.

diplomatic engagement in the region, with sufficient globally reaching structures that can spread their influence to the region.

The UK's East Asian Stance

In the latest iteration of the UK's Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy, entitled *Global Britain in a competitive age*, then Prime Minister Johnson noted that: "Few nations are better placed to navigate the challenges ahead, but we must be willing to change our approach and adapt to the new world emerging around us."¹⁴

Despite the fears of global critics, Britain in a post-Brexit age is anything but in retreat from the world stage. UK leadership has been front and centre in recent world events, from creating and distributing a vaccine for COVID-19 to rallying the Western response to the war in Ukraine.

The Integrated Review defines this framework for global Britain, saying:

Our departure from the European Union (EU) provides a unique opportunity to reconsider many aspects of our domestic and foreign policy, building on existing friendships but also looking further afield. We must exploit the freedom that comes with increased independence...¹⁵

On a macro level, Britain is undoubtedly reinvigorated post-Brexit to be the frontline power in Europe. But how, if at all, is the UK positioning itself for the Indo-Pacific and what interests does it hold in the region?

The UK holds sizeable interests in the Indo-Pacific region: 1.7 million UK citizens live in the region, and Asia accounted for 20% of both UK imports and exports globally in 2019. Furthermore, Asian markets made up seven of the top 25 UK export markets in the same year, the top three of those bringing in £82 billion.¹⁶ The UK also has close cultural ties in the region, with eight Commonwealth countries in the region and 70% of Commonwealth citizens located in Asia.

Beyond these numbers, the UK's security interests and the security of its citizens abroad have been repeatedly challenged through the reduction in control over the international shipping and supply chain routes that lay through the South China Sea and the loss of independent governorship of territories previously under British control.

The UK holds substantial interests in and ties to the region, and it is positioning its security focus with an "Indo-Pacific tilt" because the security environment necessitates a Western response. The Integrated Review rightly asserts:

China's increasing power and international assertiveness is likely to be the most significant geopolitical factor of the 2020s.¹⁷

Systemic competition will determine the shape of the future international order: the extent to which it is open, upholding the free exchange of ideas and trade, and facilitating cooperation on transnational challenges; or fragmented and broadly

¹⁴ "Global Britain in a competitive age", p. 3.

¹⁵ *ibid.*, p.11.

¹⁶ Patalano, "The Indo-Pacific 'Tilt'".

¹⁷ "Global Britain in a competitive age", p. 24.

divided into geopolitical neighbourhoods and technological ecosystems, eroding cooperation between nations and enabling the spread of authoritarianism.¹⁸

So what steps is the UK taking to change its security posture towards tackling a systemically competitive security environment in the Indo-Pacific? At its core, preserving a “free and open Indo-Pacific” for trade, for safe travel and for territorial integrity is a UK security goal. With Taiwan manufacturing circa 90% of the world’s most advanced semiconductors, and holding close to 50% of the overall semiconductor market,¹⁹ any disruption to this market will be detrimental to the UK economy, which will also suffer from an estimated \$2 trillion-worth of immediate damage to the global economy should a conflict erupt over Taiwan.²⁰

The Integrated Review emphasises the utility of UK military presence and increased military investment in the region to ensure freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific maritime domain. Specifically, it notes that the UK’s plan includes “building on our overseas military bases and existing contribution in the Indo-Pacific, enhancing our engagement and exercising with our FPDA [Five Power Defence Arrangements] partners, and increasing our engagement with regional security groupings.”²¹ Additionally, the UK’s force posture in the region is established and positioned well for further investment.²² Chief of Defence Staff Admiral Tony Radakin, advocating for a greater forward UK presence in the Indo-Pacific, said, “this is about being able to demonstrate a global navy, project influence and respond to threats more quickly.”²³

Since the end of the COVID pandemic lockdown, the UK has been moving to increase its naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, looking to project power in the region. In 2021, the UK deployed the *Queen Elizabeth* carrier strike group to the Indo-Pacific,²⁴ and sent *HMS Spey* and *HMS Tamar* for the Indo-Pacific.²⁵ The two ships remain in the Indo-Pacific to this day and participated in maritime exercises with the Indian Navy in January 2023.²⁶ The two ships are expected to stay in the region for a further three years.²⁷ Furthermore, according to the Ministry of Defence: “In June 2021, the UK posted its first permanent liaison officer at the Indian Navy’s Information Fusion Centre for Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in

¹⁸ “Global Britain in a competitive age”, p. 28.

¹⁹ Helen-Ann Smith, “China invasion of Taiwan would cause major blow to high-tech supply chain, warns boss of semiconductors firm”, *Sky News*, 19 January 2023, <https://news.sky.com/story/china-invasion-of-taiwan-would-cause-major-blow-to-high-tech-supply-chain-warns-boss-of-semiconductors-firm-12790600>.

²⁰ Charlie Vest, Agatha Kratz and Reva Goujon, “The Global Economic Disruptions from a Taiwan Conflict”, *Rhodium Group*, 14 December 2022, <https://rhg.com/research/taiwan-economic-disruptions/>.

²¹ “Global Britain in a competitive age”, p. 67.

²² Louisa Brooke-Holland, “Integrated Review 2021: The Defence tilt to the Indo-Pacific”, *House of Commons Library*, 11 October 2021, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9217/>.

²³ Speech by Admiral Tony Radakin, First Sea Lord, DSEI, 11 September 2019, [DSEI maritime conference 2017 – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/dsei-maritime-conference-2017).

²⁴ Euan Graham, “Reflections on the Royal Navy’s Indo-Pacific engagement”, *IISS*, 19 October 2021, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/analysis/2021/10/reflections-on-the-royal-navys-indo-pacific-engagement>.

²⁵ “Patrol ships bid farewell to Portsmouth as they begin Indo-Pacific deployment”, *Royal Navy*, 7 September 2021, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2021/september/07/210907-spey-and-tamar-deploy>.

²⁶ “India is first port of call for UK ship in Indian Ocean”, *British High Commission New Delhi*, 6 January 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/india-is-first-port-of-call-for-uk-ship-in-indian-ocean>.

²⁷ Yusuke Nakajima, “U.K. navy to station new vessels in Indo-Pacific for 5 years”, *Nikkei Asia*, 16 September 2021, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/U.K.-navy-to-station-new-vessels-in-Indo-Pacific-for-5-years>.

Gurugram to enhance maritime domain awareness in the region.”²⁸ The Royal Air Force (RAF) also held exercises in the Indo-Pacific in September 2022 with a deployment of the Typhoon jets.²⁹

Critics of the UK’s Indo-Pacific tilt primarily raise the concern that the UK is overreaching its abilities and should remain focused on the European theatre which currently faces the clear and present danger of Russian aggression, as well as the Russo-Iranian cooperative threat.³⁰ Such focus could also free up additional US resources to channel into the Indo-Pacific.

While certainly a valid statement on resourcing, a laser focus on the European theatre fails to address the very real threat posed to UK interests in the Indo-Pacific. The UK cannot simply ignore Indo-Pacific interests or rely solely on the United States to manage security of such interests.

The UK, in order to protect its Indo-Pacific interests and successfully “tilt” towards the region, will need to proactively increase investment and resourcing to meet the need. This option is available through a UK membership of the Blue Dot Network and increased British international investment activity in the region. Moreover, the UK needs to continue investing in defence. Secretary of Defence Ben Wallace recently highlighted the dangers posed by years of underinvesting in UK defence capabilities in regard to the Ukraine response,³¹ and the same logic applies to the Indo-Pacific. If the UK is concerned about the security of its assets and interests in the region, it will not want to be under-resourced when a push comes to tackle this challenge.

The UK, with adequate planning and investment, is positioned to be the major European player in the Indo-Pacific. To that end, it is in the interests of other nations with longstanding diplomatic and cooperation histories to consider the security gains of making the UK a part of the region’s security force.

Britain holds high-level and long-standing partnerships in the region. The UK has been an active player in both the Five Eyes and the Five Power Defence Arrangements; these are alliances that have lasted decades, that require a high degree of trust amongst the members, and that will play leading roles in facing security challenges in the region. The UK has also engaged bilaterally with Japan and India on areas of defence cooperation.³²

²⁸ “India is first port of call for UK ship in Indian Ocean”.

²⁹ “UK Armed Forces kick off major series of exercises in the Indo-Pacific”, *Ministry of Defence*, 25 September 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-armed-forces-kick-off-major-series-of-exercises-in-the-indo-pacific>.

³⁰ Nakajima, “U.K. navy to station new vessels in Indo-Pacific for 5 years”.

³¹ Tony Diver, “More money may be needed to defend Britain, warns Ben Wallace”, *The Telegraph*, 29 March 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2022/03/29/defence-funding-needed-threat-uk-changes-ukraine-crisis-warns/>.

Adam Forrest, “British army ‘no longer able to defend UK and its allies, US general warns’” *Independent*, 31 January 2023, <https://www.independent.co.uk/>

³² “UK and Japan set to rapidly accelerate defence and security ties with landmark agreement”, *Prime Minister’s Office*, 5 May 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-japan-set-to-rapidly-accelerate-defence-and-security-ties-with-landmark-agreement>; “PM: UK-India partnership ‘brings security and prosperity for our people’”, *Prime Minister’s Office*, 22 April 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-uk-india-partnership-brings-security-and-prosperity-for-our-people-2>.

Additionally, the AUKUS agreement³³ between the United States, Australia and the United Kingdom, which trilaterally commits to building nuclear-powered submarines for Australia, is a landmark testament that the UK is the preferred European security partner for the United States in the region.³⁴ The significance of AUKUS comes from the reluctance of the United States to share its nuclear propulsion technology, as only six nations in total possess the capability.³⁵ There is more to AUKUS than the nuclear submarines, with at least 17 working groups, of which eight are related to non-nuclear military capabilities like quantum, AI and undersea technologies. As the UK was the only nation the US was willing to share the sensitive technology with before the AUKUS deal was signed, the alliance can be seen as indicating a shift in the importance with which the region is viewed by the UK's partners, a shift that the British Government has to acknowledge in order to stay ahead of geopolitical curves, being mindful of the broad range of topics of discussion for cooperation.

Tools at Hand

There are a number of agreements to which the UK is already a signatory and that work to increase British reach in the Indo-Pacific region. Those fearful of overstressing suggest we should seek to engage further in the existing agreements, as they do not require additional diplomatic capital for their establishment.

Reciprocal Agreements

The most recent developments on the diplomatic stage for the UK in the region have been the January 2023 Japan–UK Reciprocal Access Agreement³⁶ and the 2020 UK–Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement.³⁷ Previously, the 2017 Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services with Japan was signed by then Prime Minister Boris Johnson. The documents covered training and military exercises of the militaries of both nations, supply of vessels, as well as a number of humanitarian and other factors.³⁸

³³ Darren G Spinck, "Securing the Strait: Engaging Taiwan in the UK's Indo-Pacific Tilt", *Henry Jackson Society*, 13 July 2022, <https://henryjacksonsociety.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/HJS-Securing-the-Strait-Engaging-Taiwan-in-the-UKs-Indo-Pacific-Tilt-Report-web.pdf>.

³⁴ Henry Jackson Society, "Former Australian Prime Minister Tony Abbott – 'Defending the Free World: Ukraine and Taiwan'", *YouTube video, posted by Henry Jackson Soc*, 16 August 2022, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_wYDuoUuY-w.

³⁵ Louisa Brooke-Holland, John Curtis and Claire Mills, "The AUKUS agreement", *House of Commons Library*, 11 October 2021, <https://researchbriefings.files.parliament.uk/documents/CBP-9335/CBP-9335.pdf>, p. 17.

³⁶ "Signing of Japan-UK Reciprocal Access Agreement", Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 11 January 2023, https://www.mofa.go.jp/erp/we/gb/page1e_000556.html; "UK-Japan defence agreement 2023", *House of Commons Library*, 13 January 2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9704/>.

³⁷ "UK-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement", Department for International Trade, 23 October 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/uk-japan-comprehensive-economic-partnership-agreement>; "UK/Japan: Agreement for a Comprehensive Economic Partnership: summary of chapters", *Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office*, 30 November 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/ukjapan-agreement-for-a-comprehensive-economic-partnership-cs-japan-no12020/ukjapan-agreement-for-a-comprehensive-economic-partnership-summary-of-chapters>.

³⁸ "Agreement between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Japan concerning Reciprocal Provision of Supplies and Services between the Armed Forces of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Self-Defense Forces of Japan",

The agreements are a prerequisite for successful UK naval and other military operations in the regions as they provide a maintenance, recuperation and resupply hub for the British forces in the region without the need for a dedicated British base. Considering the current climate in the region, it is unlikely that Japan would turn away British vessels, subject to adequate supplies of its own.

The agreements are not, however, military alliances. They do not offer cooperation in defence or security spheres beyond assistance with supplies and logistics. In this regard, the cooperation between the two countries remains to be regulated.

The UK is also continuing negotiations with India on a free trade agreement;³⁹ a successful outcome would be a significant step towards improved British relations in the Indo-Pacific, and would be especially significant considering the economic potential of trade with a state that has the second largest population in the world. Such agreements are also a great means of extending the UK reach in the region without other states being subjected to the strict adherence to diplomatic and foreign policy stances on human rights and other matters, as is required of alliances such as Five Eyes.

Five Eyes

In February 1941, the British codebreaker Alastair Denniston anticipated an upturn in Britain's fortunes in the Second World War: "The Ys are coming!" he exclaimed. The 'Ys' (a reference to the 'Yanks') had agreed to joint intelligence cooperation with the British, despite having not officially entered the war.⁴⁰ Intelligence sharing across the Atlantic blossomed in the years thereafter, with the British breaking of the 'Enigma' code being a particular highlight.

When the Second World War had concluded, the scourge of communism necessitated further intelligence collaboration between the British and the Americans; the UKUSA agreement signed in March 1946 reaffirmed intelligence sharing across the Atlantic.⁴¹ Canada becoming a signatory in 1948, alongside Australia and New Zealand in 1956, transformed what was at first a bilateral partnership into a multilateral intelligence-gathering initiative termed the Five Eyes (FVEY).⁴²

Establishing a global intelligence network has provided several benefits for Britain. All signatory parties use the ECHELON surveillance system, a collection of intercept stations that are posted all over the world to capture communication data.⁴³ The ECHELON system is the most innovative system for information gathering on the planet, providing the British

HM Government, 26 January

2017 https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/599415/CS_1_2017_Cm_9442_Japan_PRINT_version.pdf,

³⁹ "Joint outcome statement: UK-India round six FTA negotiations", *Department for International Trade*, 22 December 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-outcome-statement-uk-india-round-six-fta-negotiations>.

⁴⁰ Corey Pfluke, "A history of the Five Eyes Alliance: Possibility for reform and additions", *Comparative Strategy*, Vol. 38, 2019.

GCHQ, "GCHQ marks 75th anniversary of the UKUSA agreement", GCHQ, 5 March 2021, <https://www.gchq.gov.uk/news/gchq-marks-ukusa-75th-anniversary>.

⁴¹ Andrew O'Neil, "Australia and the 'Five Eyes' intelligence network: the perils of an asymmetric alliance", *Australian Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 71, No. 5, 2017.

⁴² *ibid.*

⁴³ Pfluke, "A history of the Five Eyes Alliance", p. 306.

intelligence community with access to communications from terrorist groups and rogue states.⁴⁴

Another advantage for Britain is that member states share the burden of intelligence gathering. Australia covers East Asian communications; New Zealand operates in Southeast Asia and the South Pacific; Britain provides member states with intelligence information related to Europe and Western Russia; the US covers the largest land mass, investigating the Caribbean, China, Russia, the Middle East and Africa.⁴⁵ By sharing the burden between multiple countries, each signatory state possesses a global surveillance capability.

The alliance is also asymmetric. Superpower status is a prescription for assuming the greatest responsibility in a multilateral accord. The United States maintains the most extensive intelligence apparatus, with the centre of intelligence operations being the National Security Agency at Fort Meade.⁴⁶ At the same time, Britain possesses greater influence than its efforts merit. The UK has access to the bulk of intelligence data provided by the US despite only providing a fraction of the amount in return.

Although Britain enjoys many benefits from being a signatory partner, there are also several disadvantages to membership of the Five Eyes. A global system capable of sweeping up massive amounts of private and commercial communications, such as telephone calls, emails and other data traffic, could be used for interests beyond national security.⁴⁷ The ECHELON system could provide governments with the ability to monitor citizens. A United Kingdom charity, Privacy International, has stated:

Key documents, including the current agreement, remain secret, despite being critical to proper scrutiny of surveillance activities. The public has a right to know what rules govern the exchange of information—which may include purely domestic communications and data—through this secret pact.⁴⁸

There have also been numerous data breaches associated with the Five Eyes. Leaks related to the Manchester Arena bombing in May 2017 strained the “special relationship” between the United States and the United Kingdom. The then British Home Secretary, Amber Rudd, said: “the British have been very clear that they want to control the flow of its information to protect the operational integrity and the element of surprise”.⁴⁹ Data breaches prefigure a breakdown in trust between member states.

Finally, the Five Eyes faces challenges from the world of emerging technologies. Technologies such as encryption thwart government attempts to access information. The issue of encryption has also played a role in the privacy versus security debate. Member states have stressed the need for gaining access to encryption forums; they have probed instant messaging services to create encryptions with covert decryption methods that provide governmental access to information.⁵⁰ Understandably, most private citizens want intelligence authorities to stay away from encryption. A development of the Five Eyes

⁴⁴ *ibid.*

⁴⁵ O’Neil, “Australia and the ‘Five Eyes’ intelligence network”.

⁴⁶ Pfluke, “A history of the Five Eyes Alliance”, p. 308.

⁴⁷ *ibid.*, p. 303.

⁴⁸ *ibid.*, p. 306.

⁴⁹ *ibid.*, p. 307.

⁵⁰ *ibid.*

alliance would be the inclusion of Japan. Already several years into consideration,⁵¹ Japan has made moves to change legislation that would tighten security around army bases.⁵² However, the overall intelligence framework of Japan is still some way off the standards of other Five Eyes partners, both in terms of the quality and quantity of the data gathered, as well as in safeguarding of information.⁵³ Furthermore, a full membership would also require a tougher stance from Japan on China and Russia than it currently holds and it may not be completely prepared to change this position.

Overall, the central challenge Britain faces over its membership of the Five Eyes is to decide whether or not the privacy of private citizens outweighs possible security threats. Undoubtedly, joint intelligence cooperation has aided the security effort vis-à-vis the global challenges faced by the Western powers in the last 70 years. However, in recent years, the Five Eyes alliance has come under considerable scrutiny, frequently criticised for its intrusive character.

AUKUS

The Australia–United Kingdom–United States Partnership, also known as AUKUS, is a trilateral agreement established in 2021 under the top political figures’ endorsement and aspires to assist Australia in acquiring nuclear-powered submarine capability.⁵⁴ Aiming to “deepen diplomatic, security, and defence cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region”, AUKUS can potentially contribute to regional stability, which is endangered by the rising implicit or explicit threats.⁵⁵ Continued participation in AUKUS could benefit the UK in three ways: strengthening both the UK’s and its partners’ military capabilities; deepening collaborations beyond conventional military aspects; and demonstrating the UK’s commitment to and alignment of its global strategy to tackle the rising “systemic challenge” and “biggest state-based threat” to the country emanating from the region.⁵⁶

The UK’s continuing involvement in AUKUS ensures the possibility of robust growth in military capability between the UK and its partners. AUKUS was launched with an 18-month consultation period to help Australia acquire nuclear-powered submarines with US and UK assistance.⁵⁷ Involving the Australian military forces in the AUKUS agreement may allow the possible long-term basing of UK military forces in Australia, improving the UK’s military projection in the Indo-Pacific region and its capability to maintain regional stability.⁵⁸ It may also engender collective actions to counter regional threats that hinder regional stability through multiple high-level meetings and the exchange of information and military-oriented technologies such as counter-hypersonic capabilities and electronic

⁵¹ Ken Kotani, “Japan’s Five Eyes chance and challenge”, *East Asia Forum*, 26 August 2021, <https://www.eastasiaforum.org/2021/08/26/japans-five-eyes-chance-and-challenge/>.

⁵² Yukio Tajima, “Five Eyes partner Japan to tighten controls on strategic land”, *Nikkei Asia*, 16 December 2020, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Politics/Five-Eyes-partner-Japan-to-tighten-controls-on-strategic-land>.

⁵³ John Hemmings, “How Might Japan Join the Five Eyes?”, *CSIS*, 6 January 2023, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/how-might-japan-join-five-eyes>.

⁵⁴ “UK, US and Australia launch new security partnership”, *Prime Minister’s Office*.

⁵⁵ *ibid*.

⁵⁶ Anushka Asthana, “Rishi Sunak brands China ‘biggest state-based threat’ to UK economic security and values”, *ITV News*, 15 November 2022, <https://www.itv.com/news/2022-11-15/pm-brands-china-biggest-state-based-threat-to-uk-economic-security-and-values>.

⁵⁷ Brooke-Holland, Curtis and Mills, “The AUKUS agreement”.

⁵⁸ David Camroux, “AUKUS: Why Britain Was the Big Winner”, *The Diplomat*, 2 December 2021, <https://thediplomat.com/2021/12/aukus-why-britain-was-the-big-winner/>.

warfare.⁵⁹ The closer the trilateral connections, the more likely they are to tackle common problems and dangers under collective actions.⁶⁰ Besides directly empowering the UK military capability by obtaining new types of military equipment for deterrence, the involvement in AUKUS could potentially provide a golden opportunity for UK-based military-industrial complexes to mitigate development costs on advanced technologies. In the long run, participation in AUKUS could therefore enhance the UK's military capability in both direct and indirect ways.⁶¹

The continuation of the UK's AUKUS participation could also lead to the expansion of the trilateral coordination beyond military aspects and could benefit the UK's greater national interests. The latest policy paper about AUKUS has already indicated that some collaborations, such as cyber and artificial intelligence, are under way with the potential to expand beyond military cooperation.⁶² As described by certain experts, the initial trilateral military collaborations were expected to be expanded into more critical technologies to serve both military and civilian purposes.⁶³ Along with partnerships that enable capabilities growth in military and possibly civil ways in the future, the UK could benefit from the empowerment of military strength and from receiving and sharing advanced technologies with both Australia and the US. In the long run, advanced cooperation in trade and technologies beyond military aspects could benefit the public. Examples of possible cooperation have already been proposed, such as expanding the scope of AUKUS to include securing defence-related rare earth mineral supply chains in North America, Europe and the Indo-Pacific.⁶⁴ Another area is a possible review of defence exports for AUKUS member states, possibly allowing greater purchasing ability for the Australian defence sector from UK manufacturers, as the US is currently resistant to such a change to arms trade rules. Considering the shortages resulting from the Russian invasion of Ukraine, such a move, if replicated by the US, would also help address the current UK military supply issues.⁶⁵

Last but not least, demonstrating the UK's commitment to continued participation in AUKUS aligns with the UK's grand strategy to tackle Indo-Pacific threats and security threats domestically. By countering the Indo-Pacific influence of other states with AUKUS collaboration in military ways, the UK can deter potential military expansion of other powers in the region and thus mitigate the opportunity for military conflicts under the trilateral deterrence. Aligned to the Government's belief that the Indo-Pacific region is "critical" to the UK's national interests, remaining in AUKUS ensures that the UK's

⁵⁹ "Fact Sheet: Implementation of the Australia – United Kingdom – United States Partnership (AUKUS)", *Prime Minister's Office*, 5 April 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/implementation-of-the-australia-united-kingdom-united-states-partnership-aukus-fact-sheet/fact-sheet-implementation-of-the-australia-united-kingdom-united-states-partnership-aukus>.

⁶⁰ Jason Pack and Darren Spinck, "AUKUS Represents the Future of Collective Deterrence", *The National Interest*, 5 September 2022, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/aukus-represents-future-collective-deterrence-204590>; "Fact Sheet: Implementation of the Australia – United Kingdom – United States Partnership (AUKUS)".

⁶¹ Camroux, "AUKUS: Why Britain Was the Big Winner".

⁶² "Fact Sheet: Implementation of the Australia – United Kingdom – United States Partnership (AUKUS)".

⁶³ "AUKUS and Changing Dynamics in the Indo-Pacific", CSIS, 3 December 2021, <https://www.csis.org/analysis/aukus-and-changing-dynamics-indo-pacific>.

⁶⁴ Seely and Spinck, "A new era for UK policymaking", p. 31.

⁶⁵ Inder Singh Bisht, "UK Asks BAE to Ramp Up Artillery Shell Production Amid Ukraine Drawdown", *The Defense Post*, 17 November 2022, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2022/11/17/uk-bae-artillery-shell-production/>.

presence in the area ultimately mitigates threats.⁶⁶ Thus, the UK's participation in AUKUS is justified.

Pathways to Increased Indo-Pacific Involvement

Looking beyond its current agreements, the UK can seek to expand its Indo-Pacific influence by exploring opportunities to participate in existing international agreements with allies with whom it already has ongoing diplomatic and military cooperation agreements in the region. The most obvious example is the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Furthermore, building on its European successes, the UK can seek extension of existing diplomatic and military tools, such as the Joint Expeditionary Force.

The Quad

Despite high levels of engagement and partnership, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (known as the Quad) began as an informal dialogue between four nations (the United States, Japan, India and Australia) with broadly shared security interests in the region. Today it is purportedly working on everything from climate change and combatting COVID-19 to cybersecurity. And while security interests can include diversifying regional trade partnerships to minimise risks and asymmetric trade, and ensuring supply chains remain free from coercion, the scope of the work taken on by the Quad has reached beyond its initial remit. At its core, the Quad's fundamental aims centre on security and it is security challenges that will most immediately test the capabilities and effectiveness of this group of nations working together.

One of the major open questions, as the Quad continues to bolster its profile, is whether or not the group feels it is advantageous to add additional nations. Ideas to expand the Quad to a Quad-plus arrangement have caught some backing from major security players in Asia, such as South Korea and smaller ASEAN nations like the Philippines, who feel that their bilateral security relationships with Quad countries in some ways necessitate a seat at the table. While the inclusion in such an arrangement may be seen as beneficial to smaller countries, it is yet unclear if the major players of the Quad wish to see an increase in membership.

The Quad, as reflected by US participation, is not constrained by geography. There is interest, given the depth of historical engagement with the region, in France and the United Kingdom participating. The group has not signalled outward opposition to the idea of bringing in additional countries. In fact, two virtual meetings in 2020 included representatives from South Korea, New Zealand and Vietnam.⁶⁷ However, these are all states positioned in the Indo-Pacific region.

Structure of the Quad

To understand the structure of the Quad, it is best to start with what the Quad is not. The Quad, despite media rhetoric, is not a mutual defence alliance and its joint statements do

⁶⁶ "Global Britain in a competitive age", p. 66.

⁶⁷ Indrani Bagchi, "India joins hands with NZ, Vietnam, S Korea to combat pandemic", *The Times of India*, 21 March 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-joins-hands-with-nz-vietnam-s-korea-to-combat-pandemic/articleshow/74740424.cms>; Indrani Bagchi, "India, Quad-Plus countries discuss Covid-19 battle, economic resurgence", *The Times of India*, 28 March 2020, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-Quad-Plus-countries-discuss-Covid-19-battle-economic-resurgence/articleshow/74861792.cms>.

not include any reference or commitment to mutual defence. The choice not to be a formal alliance with mutual defence obligations is in some senses strategic. The United States already holds mutual defence commitments with Japan and Australia under bilateral agreements. To add another multi-lateral layer would be somewhat redundant and confusing. Additionally, the Modi Government in India maintains a robust commitment to “strategic autonomy” but believes its recent growth in external engagement complements this principle if partnerships are formed based on specific issues rather than a complete ideology.⁶⁸ India, because of its resistance to formal alliances but openness to “arms-length” partnerships, will likely continue to be a moderating force on any ambitions for the Quad to formalise into a military alliance.

Under both the Trump and Biden US presidential administrations, the Quad has experienced a period of reinvigoration, which changed a major feature of the original conception of the partnership by formalising and expanding the group’s activities. Since its first major meeting of heads of state in March 2021, the Quad has issued three joint statements that progressively deepen its commitments and scope of activities.⁶⁹ The first reaffirmed a broad commitment to “quadrilateral cooperation” and focused the partnership’s central commitment on “promoting a free, open rules-based order, rooted in international law to advance security and prosperity and counter threats to both in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.”⁷⁰ However, the remainder of the statement laid the groundwork for large-scale cooperation in other areas adjacent to rapidly emerging security threats such as COVID-19, climate change and cybersecurity. Subsequent Quad summits actioned areas of cooperation with specific initiatives, funding commitments and working groups within areas of focus.⁷¹ The scale of activity now under the umbrella of the Quad has arguably tripled over the course of two years.

While the Quad is an active force on the world stage, there are two unintended consequences of its present structure that will hinder its long-term effectiveness in securing the region. First, the volume of focus areas is gargantuan. The Quad was born out of a vision for a “security diamond” that focused exclusively on working together to ensure the safe and open use of the Indo-Pacific’s maritime domain. Initiatives focused on global health, economic growth, infrastructure, etc. are positive but move the Quad away from its founding principle and arguably reduce the group’s comparative advantage. Organisations such as the G20, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and numerous regional bilateral and multilateral partnerships are forums better poised to tackle economic, health and social issues affecting the region.

Furthermore, the components of the Quad’s activities currently focused on security lack depth and impact. At the latest Quad summit, six “leader-level working groups” were

⁶⁸ Harsh V Pant, “A Quiet but Decisive Shift in India’s Foreign Policy”, *Mint*, 28 January 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/opinion/columns/opinion-a-quiet-but-decisive-shift-in-india-s-foreign-policy-1548695556487.html>.

⁶⁹ “Quad Leaders’ Joint Statement: ‘The Spirit of the Quad’”, *The White House Briefing Room*, 21 March 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/03/12/quad-leaders-joint-statement-the-spirit-of-the-quad/>; “Joint Statement from Quad Leaders”, *The White House Briefing Room*, 24 September 2021, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/24/joint-statement-from-quad-leaders/>; “Quad Joint Leaders’ Statement”, *The White House Briefing Room*, 24 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/24/quad-joint-leaders-statement/>.

⁷⁰ *ibid.*, 21 March 2021.

⁷¹ *ibid.*, 24 September 2021 and 24 May 2022.

formed.⁷² Notably absent was a working group focused specifically on security challenges such as ensuring freedom of navigation, deterring aggressive incursions into sovereign territory, bolstering the region's anti-access/area denial capabilities, or even addressing territorial disputes. It did, however, include a new partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness. This initiative will "offer a near-real-time, integrated, and cost-effective maritime domain awareness picture".⁷³ Enhancing the Quad's strategic picture of activity in the region, and sharing that information openly amongst the four nations and other partners, is unquestionably a positive development. However, the question remains of "to what end?" The lack of a working group with a long-term focus on defining, developing and enhancing hard power deterrence against present and future regional threats is a missed opportunity.

Future of the Quad

Fundamentally, the Quad, as a security focused group, must come to an agreement on a set of goals. These goals do not have to be hyper-political or make particularly bold statements like defence of Taiwan, for example. Rather, as former US Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Strategy Elbridge Colby put it, partnerships in the Indo-Pacific should be shaped by interests rather than values or ideologies because shared interests are more likely to foster agreement that can be actioned.⁷⁴ While there is likely to be some disagreement, it is prudent to manage concerns or objections now, prior to a major security crisis, and also to avoid shifting the focus of the Quad almost entirely to soft power. Future summit meetings should include a space to discuss and define agreement amongst the four nations on shared security interests.

The current Quad countries rank in the top twenty militaries in the world with the most active and ready manpower available.⁷⁵ Although the Quad is not a defence alliance, the group has a history of working together to enhance military preparedness. Since 1992, the United States and India have conducted an annual joint naval exercise. Japan was added as a permanent participant to the exercise in 2015. Australia participated in both 2020 and 2021, marking the first time all members of the Quad ran a joint military exercise. The expansion and increased sophistication of this Malabar exercise signals that shared capabilities, planning and technological interoperability are central to deterrence and preparedness in the region.^{76,77}

US Rear Admiral Dan Martin, Commander of Carrier Strike Group 1, said the 2021 Malabar exercise "improves the compatibility of our forces in support of our mutual desire for unmatched maritime security in the global commons."⁷⁸ All four Quad nations possess

⁷² "Fact Sheet: Quad Leaders' Tokyo Summit 2022", *The White House Briefing Room*, 23 May 2022, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2022/05/23/fact-sheet-quad-leaders-tokyo-summit-2022/>.

⁷³ *ibid*.

⁷⁴ Elbridge Colby, "Interests, Not Values, Should Guide America's China Strategy", *The National Interest*, 25 April 2021, <https://nationalinterest.org/feature/interests-not-values-should-guide-america-s-china-strategy-183430>.

⁷⁵ "Armed forces personnel, total", The World Bank, <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.TOTL.P1>.

⁷⁶ "Australia, India, Japan, and U.S. Kick-off Phase II: MALABAR 2021", *United States Navy*, 13 October 2021, <https://www.navy.mil/Press-Office/News-Stories/Article/2808152/australia-india-japan-and-us-kick-off-phase-ii-malabar-2021/>.

⁷⁷ Gurpreet S Khurana, "'Malabar' naval exercises: trends and tribulations", *National Maritime Foundation*, 5 August 2014.

⁷⁸ "Australia, India, Japan, and U.S. Kick-off Phase II: MALABAR 2021".

high levels of military strength and investment. India and Australia spend around 2% of GDP on defence.⁷⁹ The Japanese Government was considering a defence spending increase over the next five years, a move that could bring the nation up and over the 2% of GDP marker.⁸⁰ A reiteration of this commitment was recently repeated at the 2023 US–Japan Security Consultative Committee.⁸¹ However, even with the higher spending announced for the Japanese military,⁸² the country finds added strength on the international stage in, what is in essence, an integrated approach to national security, encompassing diplomatic, economic and other aspects. Japan stands well aware of its threats and capabilities, as outlined in the National Security Strategy of Japan.⁸³ In turn, the Quad members are well positioned to cooperate as defence partners given that the cost burden is somewhat fairly shared. Additionally, playing on similar spending levels could allow the Quad the ability to enhance capabilities and interoperability at a similar pace, something that should be considered at a future summit.

Fundamental to the effective operation of Quad should be the idea of becoming Quad plus. The group needs to carefully consider if a potential new addition complements its security aims and interests. In addition to South Korea, Vietnam and New Zealand, the US included Brazil and Israel at a May 2020 Quad meeting, signalling that the group is not constrained to Indo-Pacific geography.⁸⁴ The reason given for the inclusion of Brazil and Israel was cooperation on the response to COVID-19. If the Quad continues to focus on primarily soft-power aims, bringing in a hodgepodge of non-regional partners on an ad-hoc basis could be a value-add. However, if the Quad focuses the bulk of its efforts on security, it will need to establish a specific threshold for both regional and non-regional consistent partnership. Arguably, the Quad should only consider additions to the group who can demonstrate a nearly equal capacity for defence activities and add capabilities that enhance the defined security interests of the group.

Why the UK Should Join the Quad

British membership of the Quad would not merely increase the UK’s presence in the Indo-Pacific. Such a move would also bring renewed relationships with Commonwealth members India and Australia, practically functioning as an extension of the AUKUS, and would be the first step towards the formation of a block of powers with a vested interest in the stability of the region’s security.

The Quad, not being a formalised alliance, operates on high-trust relationships based on proven shared interests and existing agreements. Former Chief of Naval Staff Lord Boyce, in response to the Integrated Review, notes that the framework is a prime opportunity to

⁷⁹ “Military expenditure (% of GDP)”, *The World Bank*,

https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/MS.MIL.XPND.GD.ZS?most_recent_value_desc=true.

⁸⁰ Daniel Leussink and Tim Kelly, “Japan calls for defence spending hike in policy paper, notes threats to Taiwan”, *Reuters*, 7 June 2022, <https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/japan-calls-defence-spending-hike-policy-paper-notes-threats-taiwan-2022-06-07/>.

⁸¹ “Joint Statement of the 2023 U.S.–Japan Security Consultative Committee (“2+2”)”, *U.S Department of Defense*, 11 January 2023, <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/3265559/joint-statement-of-the-2023-us-japan-security-consultative-committee-22/>.

⁸² Derek H Burney, “Japan ups the ante on defence spending”, *National Post*, 24 January 2023, <https://nationalpost.com/opinion/japan-ups-the-ante-on-defence-spending>.

⁸³ “National Security Strategy of Japan”, *Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan*, December 2022, <https://www.cas.go.jp/jp/siryou/221216anzenhoshou/nss-e.pdf>.

⁸⁴ Jagannath Panda, “Making ‘Quad Plus’ a Reality”, *The Diplomat*, 13 January 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/01/making-quad-plus-a-reality/>.

“look for ways to create bonds with the Quad”.⁸⁵ The UK is already deeply engrained in a close web of security relations with all four countries, making it a natural transition to fold it into formal Quad activities. Further, including the UK opens up an opportunity to build on existing bilateral and trilateral commitments, sharing the security burden to benefit all the Quad players.

The UK’s resources will complement and enhance the Quad’s capabilities. The UK, like the Quad players, is concerned with the rapid modernisation of the Chinese military and Navy. The Chinese Navy remains the largest in the world by a number of vessels,⁸⁶ and has the potential for utilising civilian craft for landing operations.⁸⁷ The Integrated Review notes: “The significant impact of China’s military modernisation and growing international assertiveness within the Indo-Pacific region and beyond will pose an increasing risk to UK interests.”⁸⁸ In response, the UK Government is investing in its own military modernisation as noted in the Ministry of Defence’s Science and Technology Strategy.⁸⁹ The UK Government has committed to investing up to £6.6 billion over four years in “advanced and next-generation R&D to deliver an enduring military edge in areas including space, directed energy weapons, and advanced high-speed missiles.”⁹⁰ The UK’s investments and trajectory in the modernisation of military technology and weaponry for the future fight not only complement similar efforts by Quad countries, but are a potential opportunity for resource and knowledge sharing. Additionally, shared investment in areas of mutual need could save the national governments of Quad nations resources by not reinventing the wheel.

Additionally, one cannot forget the value and might of the British Navy. As the UK makes the vision of a Global Britain a reality post-Brexit, the Royal Navy possesses the capabilities to serve security needs abroad. The Integrated Review recognises that “persistent engagement will mean deploying more of our forces overseas more often and for longer periods of time, both with NATO and alongside our wider network of allies and partners.”⁹¹ This new posture is realised in recent Royal Navy deployments. For example, in September of 2021, two new Royal Navy patrol vessels, the *HMS Tamar* and the *HMS Spey*, were sent off on a five-year deployment that will run throughout the Indo-Pacific for the duration.⁹²

⁸⁵ “Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy”, Volume 811, House of Lords, Chamber Debate, 22 April 2021, <https://hansard.parliament.uk/Lords/2021-04-22/debates/2B604EC1-AF4E-47D4-BC07-DB90C30C913E/IntegratedReviewOfSecurityDefenceDevelopmentAndForeignPolicy#contribution-44AC5F32-9FE9-4BA8-A0A3-32EFBFAEF9D6>.

⁸⁶ Fatima Bahtić, “Chinese Navy is the largest navy in world, new report shows”, *Naval Today*, 5 November 2021, <https://www.navaltoday.com/2021/11/05/chinese-navy-is-the-largest-navy-in-world-new-report-shows/>.

⁸⁷ H I Sutton and Sam LaGrone, “Chinese Launch Assault Craft from Civilian Car Ferries in Mass Amphibious Invasion Drill, Satellite Photos Show”, *USNI News*, 28 September 2022, <https://news.usni.org/2022/09/28/chinese-launch-assault-craft-from-civilian-car-ferries-in-mass-amphibious-invasion-drill-satellite-photos-show>.

⁸⁸ “Global Britain in a competitive age”, p. 29.

⁸⁹ “Science and Technology Strategy 2020”, *Ministry of Defence*, October 2020, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/927708/20201019-MOD_ST_Strategy_2020_v1-23.pdf.

⁹⁰ “Global Britain in a competitive age”, p. 38.

⁹¹ *ibid.*, p. 73.

⁹² Nicola Smith, “‘Indo-Pacific events will shape the world for next century’, says HMS Tamar commander”, *The Telegraph*, 15 October 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/10/15/indo-pacific-events-will-shape-world-next-century-says-hms-tamar>.

The new *HMS Queen Elizabeth* aircraft carrier also made its first operational deployment to the Indo-Pacific in 2021, the first carrier deployment to the region by the UK in 20 years.⁹³ In the age of strategic competition, particularly as tensions in the region continue to move closer to potential flashpoints, the amount, diversity and sophistication of resources matter in the face of an unconventional new-age conflict. The UK's posture towards modernisation, and its comparative advantages in experience and resources in a primarily naval theatre, could enhance the Quad's security preparedness.

The Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF)

While the UK has the means to extend its presence in the Indo-Pacific in the intelligence, military and trade spheres through the Five Eyes and AUKUS and by utilising reciprocal agreements with Japan, there also remains an option of building on the successes of other operations led by the UK in other parts of the world to bring a new angle to the Indo-Pacific tilt. The Joint Expeditionary Force has been a useful tool for increasing the readiness of member states to counter Russian aggression, and has also provided a platform for supporting Ukraine in its defensive war against Russia. Expanding the operations of the JEF is within the limits of operation for the Force and such a move would restructure the geopolitical situation in the Indo-Pacific theatre with an injection of new participating parties and forces. Furthermore, it is a British-led initiative, which is currently lacking in a region dominated by the US's presence. This latter point is especially timely; as First Sea Lord and Chief of Naval Staff Ben Key said: "We can't expect America to be the world's policeman, by any stretch of the imagination. We all have an obligation to protect free and open oceans."⁹⁴

The JEF is a UK-led global high-readiness task force. Launched at the 2014 NATO summit and incorporating NATO members, the JEF does not have an official remit to function as a NATO force solely. Of the ten current members (Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, the Netherlands, Norway, Sweden and the United Kingdom), Sweden and Finland are not NATO members and current membership issues⁹⁵ do not facilitate quick entry into that alliance.

While the December 2022 JEF Summit and Rishi Sunak's speech there focused heavily on the Russian war of aggression against Ukraine,⁹⁶ the remit of the JEF is not limited by European engagement, nor the geographic positioning of its current member countries. In

The Hindu, "Royal Navy ship on permanent deployment in Indo-Pacific makes first port call in India", *The Hindu*, 6 January 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/royal-navy-ship-on-permanent-deployment-in-indo-pacific-makes-first-port-call-in-india/article66346516.ece>.

⁹³ Ministry of Defence, "Carrier Strike Group Looks Forward to a Busy Autumn in Indo-Pacific and Middle East", *HM Government*, 5 October 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/carrier-strike-group-looks-forward-to-a-busy-autumn-in-indo-pacific-and-middle-east>.

George Allison, "British aircraft carrier ignores Chinese warnings and enters South China Sea", *British Defence Journal*, 27 July 2021, <https://ukdefencejournal.org.uk/british-aircraft-carrier-ignores-chinese-warnings-and-enters-south-china-sea/>

⁹⁴ Ken Moriyasu, "U.S. alone can't police world: U.K. navy chief on Indo-Pacific tilt", *Nikkei Asia*, 9 November 2022, <https://asia.nikkei.com/Editor-s-Picks/Interview/U.S.-alone-can-t-police-world-U.K.-navy-chief-on-Indo-Pacific-tilt>.

⁹⁵ Richard Milne and Henry Foy, "Sweden warns it cannot meet Turkey's demands for backing Nato bid", *Financial Times*, 8 January 2023, <https://www.ft.com/content/9df4147d-beae-4479-b0f4-a13f6acea251>.

⁹⁶ "PM opening remarks at JEF Summit: 19 December 2022", *Prime Minister's Office*, 19 December 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/pm-opening-remarks-at-jef-summit-19-december-2022>.

a 2014 statement on JEF remits made during the signing of the JEF agreement, the then Defence Secretary Michael Fallon stated:

This will be developed around the UK's existing high readiness units and will provide a capability that can respond anywhere in the world, in any environment, as part of a coalition, or on behalf of international organisations such as the UN and NATO.⁹⁷

The UK is perfectly placed to use the JEF for operations in the Indo-Pacific, while still operating within the remit of the JEF. Although this would require cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners, as well as a possible extension of membership to states in the region, the UK is able to pursue negotiations of such provisions through continued cooperation with cosignatories of existing agreements such as AUKUS and other reciprocal agreements.

The updated principles of the JEF, as outlined in the 2021 policy directions, highlight that the "principal geographic area of interest for the JEF is the High North, North Atlantic and Baltic Sea region".⁹⁸ At the same time, the Royal Navy identifies that the JEF "task group is designed to demonstrate the UK's ability to project a highly effective maritime task force anywhere in the world, both individually and in partnership with other allied nations."⁹⁹

The aforementioned JEF nations face the same risks as the UK to supply chain stability and economic development due to disruption in the Indo-Pacific. Norway has identified the increased Indo-Pacific power in Europe as counter to its interests.¹⁰⁰ Denmark has already faced pressure to limit free speech and apologise to far-East Asian countries¹⁰¹ and Finland, among other states, has suffered from cyber-attacks on governmental infrastructure.¹⁰² In response, the Northern European states have become more hawkish on far-Eastern investment¹⁰³ and Finland's prime minister has spoken out against a policy of appeasement.¹⁰⁴ While these policies remain far from a military posturing or show of force, they are indicative of Northern Europe becoming more aware of far-east Asian threats.¹⁰⁵

⁹⁷ "International partners sign Joint Expeditionary Force agreement", *Ministry of Defence*, 5 September 2014, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/international-partners-sign-joint-expeditionary-force-agreement>.

⁹⁸ "Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) – Policy direction", *Ministry of Defence*, 12 July 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/joint-expeditionary-force-policy-direction-july-2021/joint-expeditionary-force-jef-policy-direction>.

⁹⁹ "Joint Expeditionary Force (Maritime)", *Royal Navy*, <https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/operations/mediterranean-and-black-sea/joint-expeditionary-force-maritime>.

¹⁰⁰ Dafina Shala, "Annual Threat Assessment 2019", *PST*, 6 February 2019, <https://pst.no/alle-artikler/trusselvurderinger/annual-threat-assessment-2019/>.

¹⁰¹ "Coronavirus: Denmark in cartoon bust-up with China over flag", 29 January 2020, *BBC News*, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-europe-51295225>.

¹⁰² "Supo identifies China-linked cyber-spying agent in Finnish Parliament hack", *YLE News*, 18 March 2021, <https://yle.fi/a/3-11843748>.

¹⁰³ Morten Andersen, Henrik Hiim and Ulf Sverdrup, "The Nordic shift: China's uphill battle for public approval in northern Europe", *European Council on Foreign Relations*, 18 March 2020, https://ecfr.eu/article/commentary_the_nordic_shift_chinas_uphill_battle_for_public_approval_in_nor/.

¹⁰⁴ Nic Fildes, "Finnish leader warns democratic countries against being 'naïve' on China", *Financial Times*, 2 December 2022, <https://www.ft.com/content/ceed7667-fe4a-4f14-b6da-eeb26d609eee>.

¹⁰⁵ "Baltic-China relations are at a low point – study", *The Baltic Times*, 29 December 2022, <https://www.baltictimes.com/baltic-china-relations-are-at-a-low-point-study/>.

While the people of the Baltic states are lukewarm towards China,¹⁰⁶ the official relationship between China and the Baltic states remains tense. After the Lithuanian exit from the Cooperation between China and Central and Eastern European Countries platform, known as 17+1, the country saw a drop in exports to Estonia and Latvia have further downgraded the platform, from 16+1 to 14+1, apparently leaving because of insufficient criticism of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, amongst other reasons.¹⁰⁷

The UK is perfectly positioned to galvanise the JEF members in its Indo-Pacific operations. The involvement of the JEF infrastructure and participating states would benefit all countries through the securing of their interests in the supply chain routes in the Indo-Pacific, as well as functioning as a greater combined force, which presents a larger presence than any of the member states are individually able to field. In this regard, a JEF participation in the Indo-Pacific creates a framework that is greater than the sum of its individual parts.

The core of the UK's military operations, and intrinsic to the Integrated Review, is for UK forces to "operate as a flexible campaigning force".¹⁰⁸ In this regard, the UK does not need to maintain a permanent presence in any field of operations but to utilise its high-mobility, high-readiness military assets when required. The global reach of the JEF, together with the remit of the Integrated Review, also meets the aim of the JEF: "to be a force that is able to operate persistently below the threshold of crisis or conflict. It is not a standing force."¹⁰⁹ In this regard, the UK and the JEF are able to periodically, and whenever necessary, deploy and conduct exercises in the Indo-Pacific, working within the existing frameworks of reciprocal agreements with states in the area, without the need for a permanent presence.

While the involvement of all JEF nations in Indo-Pacific operations would be of benefit to all involved, and would tie in with their existing concerns regarding threats emanating from the region, the UK does not need the full participation of all other nine members. As per the remit of JEF:

The JEF is not a group that requires consensus to conduct operations and deploy forces; this is designed to add considerably to its responsiveness. Rather, the UK acts as Framework Nation; as such, following consultation, the UK may conduct a JEF activity with the participation of one or more JEF Participants. JEF Participants are not obliged to contribute forces to any given JEF activity or deployment; instead, it remains a sovereign national decision for Participants to contribute, within their respective legal frameworks.¹¹⁰

Conclusion

The post-Brexit UK and its vision for a Global Britain in this new age is dynamic and bold. It not only shares the security interests of the states already involved in the Indo-Pacific

¹⁰⁶ "Baltic-China relations at one of the lowest points, study finds", LRT.lt, 30 December 2022, <https://www.lrt.lt/en/news-in-english/19/1855637/baltic-china-relations-at-one-of-the-lowest-points-study-finds>.

¹⁰⁷ Finbarr Bermingham, "What next for China's 16+1 trade group after Baltic countries exit over Russia and Taiwan?" *South China Morning Post*, 20 August 2022, <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3189579/what-next-chinas-161-trade-group-after-baltic-countries-exit>.

¹⁰⁸ "Global Britain in a competitive age", p. 73.

¹⁰⁹ "Joint Expeditionary Force (JEF) – Policy direction".

¹¹⁰ *ibid.*

power play, but is already acting through robust bilateral and trilateral relationships. The UK's investments in preparing for the future fight and its naval comparative advantage would be massive value adds to the further involvement in the region for the benefit of the furtherment Western values.

The Quad is at a pivotal moment in this era defined by strategic competition in an unconventional and entangled security environment. To succeed in ensuring the Indo-Pacific remains "free and open", it is essential that the group prioritises the solidification and strategic expansion of Prime Minister Abe's vision of a "security diamond". To do this will require a certain level of formalisation, joint agreement on a defined set of interests and a commitment of resources to protect and defend these interests. It does not, however, necessitate a mutual defence pact for the group or the region.

For the UK to join the Quad would require the express desire of all signatory states to involve other nations in the organisation; it would also require Britain to be chosen over the more geographically beneficially positioned countries. However, and above all else, the nature of the UK's relationships with Quad countries reflects trust and proven cooperation, making it a partner already, without the need for further agreements. The Indo-Pacific is a minefield of flashpoints, and as the Quad works to ensure not even one sparks global conflict, it will find no better stalwart and capable addition than the UK.

It serves the UK's interests to aggressively pursue its existing cooperation agreements in the region, including the AUKUS and the Five Eyes. Both agreements have led to tangible results in information sharing and military trade deals that look to further the interests of the United Kingdom and member states of these agreements. Furthermore, both the AUKUS and the Five Eyes include the US and Australia, two countries that form the backbone of the Quad dialogue, arguably duplicating the existing collaborative structures.

Alternatively, the UK can look to existing projects outside of the military realm, yet with significant geopolitical implications, such as participation in the Blue Dot Network. Discussion of this possibility is currently underdeveloped in the UK although it could prove to be a viable alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as well as an opportunity for British international investment to bring private sector funding to Quad states.

A new path for the UK, and one in line with the Integrated Review's vision for a leaner British military with more highly mobile and high-readiness units, is reflected by a wider application of the JEF. Able to engage in global operations, and with a membership structure not limited by unanimous agreement of signatories, backed by the individual signatory remit to involve themselves in every action of the JEF, Britain can bring a new force of like-minded states to a geographical position crucial to the national security of Europe and to global financial security. The JEF, acting in the Indo-Pacific, will remodel the power actors of the area and demonstrate the truly global reach of the UK, positioning it as a post-Brexit European leader.