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South China Sea and Implications for UK Defence in the Indo-Pacific

China has transformed its economic, political, cultural, cyber, space and defence capabilities to a point at which it threatens the US as the region's guarantor of peace and the Rules-based International Order itself at the strategic level. The Indo-Pacific region is one of the three world economic centres consisting of 40 per cent of global trade and thus crucial to the UK's future trade and prosperity. The author highlights what should be obvious (but perhaps that is too often put in the 'all-too-difficult pending tray') – an urgent need to expand our navy to promote our vital interests in such a key region.

The South China Sea and Territorial Disputes

THERE are six claimant nations to the disputed islands and features in the South China Sea (SCS): China, Vietnam, the Philippines, Taiwan, Malaysia and Brunei. All are key UK trading partners and two are in the Commonwealth. The disputed islands are: the Spratly Islands, the Paracel Islands, the Scarborough Shoal and Pratas Island. Waters around them are governed by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS).¹

UNCLOS deem ownership of the sea and seabed up to 12 nautical miles from the coast of a territory plus the resources in the sea and seabed up to 200 nm (but not other territories in it) from the coast of the territory. The latter is known as the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). UNCLOS also makes a distinction between an 'island' which is entitled to an EEZ and a 'rock' which is not. This distinction is made on the basis that the latter cannot "sustain human habitation or economic life."

The outcome is the difference between an island being entitled to resource rights in its EEZ of 125,000 square nm and a rock one of 452 square nm. On 12 July 2016 China laid sovereignty claim to the whole of the South China Sea by its 'nine-dash line' saying that all islands and rocks in it were considered a single archipelago and under its control based on a claim to its 'historic rights.'



Fig. 1: The 'nine-dash line'.

UNCLOS makes no provision for this classification. In July 2016 the International Arbitration Tribunal supported the Philippines claim against China that the Spratly Islands and the Scarborough Shoal could not be considered ‘full islands’ and that China’s ‘nine-dash line’ is contrary and “without lawful effect.” China rejected this. Its Vice-Foreign Minister added that “it will not be enforced by anyone.” “China claims every feature within a U-shaped line.”² The ‘nine-dash line’ therefore strategically disturbs the Rules-based International Order (R BIO).

Japan is in dispute with China over the Senkaku Islands and is a strategic flash point. Japan is a ‘most allied nation’ of the US and the UK. There is no doubt that Japan will exert its full array of capabilities to resist Chinese efforts in the dispute of these islands and others in the SCS.

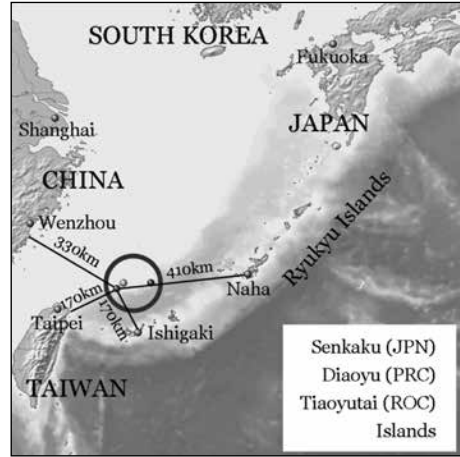


Fig. 2: Sino-Japanese Senkaku Islands Dispute.

China’s Belt and Road Initiative

China’s aim is to connect China to Europe with a new infrastructure. It consists of two parts – one on land through Central Asia, where the UK has substantial economic interests being one of the region’s four lead investors (along with the US, Japan and Switzerland) and another running in the sea across the Indo-Pacific region from Shanghai and North China ports to Djibouti. Considerable effort has been made by China for its new ports to be viewed as a peaceful trading infrastructure and a western investment opportunity. It has provided aid in the forms of loans to governments along it without any terms to improve their governance.

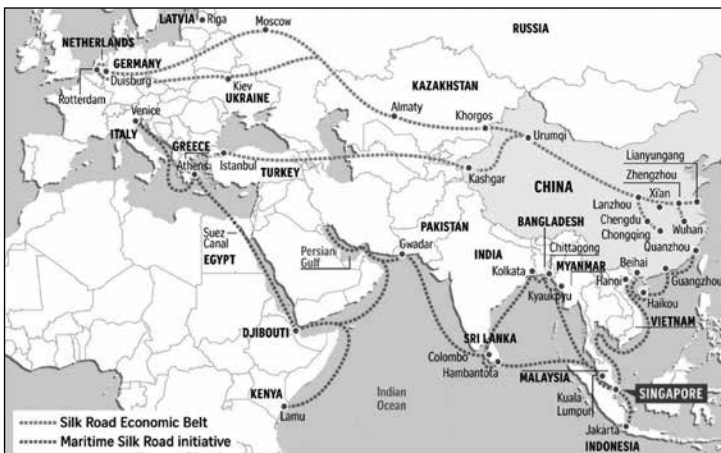


Fig. 3: Belt & Road.

But many of the ports can also be used by China as a naval infrastructure. Its mere presence generates economic and political influence within the countries comprising the Belt & Road Initiative that disturbs the RBIO. Its roots and basis are in the South China Sea. Without which the Belt and Road Initiative lacks its source.

The Indo-Pacific and Global Trade

The Indo-Pacific contains the region with the highest growth and will be the world's largest economic centre. The original Trans-Pacific Partnership aimed to cover 40 per cent of global trade. It has been superseded by the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership. China created the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership in response.

The United Kingdom and the Indo-Pacific

We tend to forget how essential the region is to the UK and the array of strategic interests and agreements it has in the region. The United Kingdom is a lead power in the Five Power Defence Arrangements, consisting of the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Singapore and Malaysia. In case of attack or threat against Malaysia and Singapore, the five nations will consult each other to decide separate or joint actions. The FPDA does not reference EEZ's as a joint responsibility but the FPDA leaves open a member requesting the support of the others. Annually it convenes a Defence Chiefs Conference and the Five Powers Defence Arrangements Ministerial Meeting (FDMM). The UK has a permanent military presence in Brunei in support of the Sultan. Brunei's strategic location enables Britain's military reach 'East of Suez' and the management of possible crises in the region as growing tensions both between the great powers and the countries of the region involved in the territorial disputes in the South China Sea. The United Kingdom has two other permanent military bases East of Suez at HMS *Juffair* in Bahrain and at Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean, with a support base in Duqm in Oman and military training areas inland from it. The United Kingdom is a 'Five-Eyes' power with the USA, Australia, New Zealand and Canada. The UK is the bilateral partner to China in the 50-year agreement ensuring the rights of Hong Kong following the 1997 handover. The UK has support base facilities in Singapore. The UK has formed defence agreements with Japan as a 'most allied nation.' Of the ten countries comprising ASEAN three of them – Singapore, Malaysia and Brunei – are Commonwealth partners; four if Papua New Guinea's observer status is included. The ties between the UK, Australia and New Zealand transcend the Five Eyes, wider Defence technology agreements, the Commonwealth and the FPDA. We share the same Head of State. From Japan to India the UK has an array of strategic partners in the critical Indo-Pacific region.

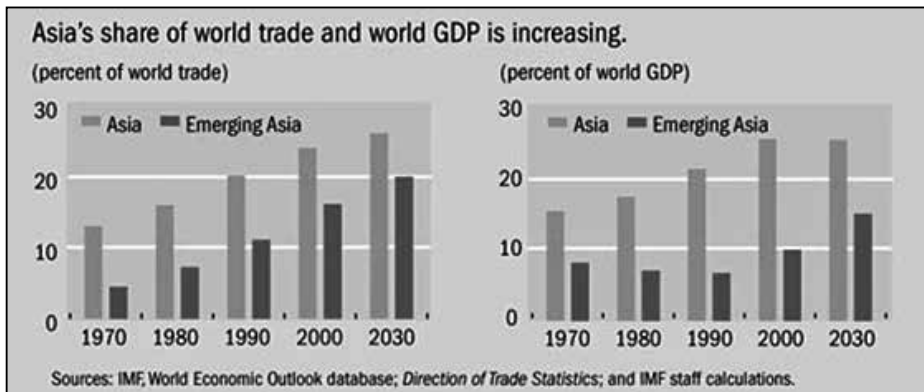


Fig. 4: World share of trade.

Global stability enables global prosperity. It is enabled by the Rules-based International Order. Seventy years ago its architects were the UK and the USA. Today they are supported in this by the ‘most allied nations.’ If Russia disturbs the RBIO in Europe, then NATO is its foil. If China disturbs the RBIO in the Indo-Pacific, then the combination of the UK-US Special Relationship, Five-Eyes, the FPDA and the ‘most allied nations’ are its foil. Bringing these four together to act in concert so as to deter the possibility of conflict with China is a UK-US challenge and must become an increasingly visible UK strategic aim.

The UK MoD’s Modernising Defence Programme of 18 Dec 2018 says: “The Pacific region is becoming ever more important to the UK, with growing trade links and regional security issues that have global implications. We will increase our presence in the region, through our bilateral relationships and the Five Eyes and Five Power Defence Arrangements groups. Together, we will stand up for the global rules, including freedom of navigation, that underpin our security and prosperity as an island trading nation.”

China and the Indo-Pacific

Since the 1970s China developed its economic, political and cultural power. From the 1990s it began to re-shape its military forces. By 2012 it had launched its first aircraft carrier. Since 2016 it militarised the South China Sea on islands and features in contravention to international law. During the period it built the Belt and Road Initiative, which in the maritime domain has no economic purpose. The world is not short of ports. It is though short of ports funded and controlled by China. That is its point.

For decades China sought to reassure that its economic growth had peaceful outcomes seeking co-existence within the global order, having no intent to become the world’s dominant power. But in the Indo-Pacific the reverse is true. China aims’ to “become the regions unchallenged political, economic and military hegemon... to push the US out of the Indo-Pacific and rival it on the global stage.”³ Ambiguity has been central to its strategy to achieve it. The US will have to work more, not less, closely with the UK and its allies to uphold the RBIO and prevent the threat to it.

The ambiguity in China’s development is not new. We saw it on the UK hand-over of Hong Kong in 1997 with “One Government, Two Systems.” The West saw China’s economic development as capitalist on the path towards freedom without recognising it as ‘Authoritarian Capitalism’ and being in direct tension with western values. We see it in the cyber domain with China seeing cyber as the responsibility of the state rather than the UN Group of Governmental Experts, the main ‘rules-based’ body in cyberspace. We see it in the implicit link between the Chinese State security apparatus supporting Chinese state-owned finance institutions and industrial enterprises. We see it now militarily with its growth of a 450-ship Navy and its first overseas base in Djibouti.

“China is trying to separate the United States from allies in the Pacific region, like Japan, South Korea, Thailand and the Philippines,” said Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Joseph Dunsford on 5 November 2018.

China's Military Transformation in the South China Sea & the UK Role

Its “anti-access/area-denial” (A2/AD) missile and air capabilities and its territorial claims and militarisation of the South China Sea have changed the ability of US and allied naval manoeuvre in it. It transforms the ability to protect Japan, the Philippines or Taiwan in the event of war. It impedes ‘freedom of navigation’ in international waters by rejecting its international legal basis, confronting western vessels, thereby threatening regional stability. President Xi said that China did not, “intend to pursue militarisation” on its islands. Its construction activities in the SCS were not meant to “target or impact” any country. Concurrently China filled ‘gaps’ the West created with countries such as Pakistan and Iran. Gwadar in Pakistan was one of the Belt & Road’s first ports.

“Last month came the revelation that China had installed anti-ship and surface-to-air missiles on three islands in the Spratly archipelago west of the Philippines – far, far from its own shores. (Some or all of the Spratleys are claimed by Brunei, China, Malaysia, the Philippines, Taiwan and Vietnam.) That follows China’s biggest ever naval review in the South China Sea in April. Later in May China declared that several bombers had landed in the Paracel Islands, which it disputes with Vietnam. It seems only a matter of time, says Bill Hayton of Chatham House, before the final step in China’s militarisation of the sea: the deployment of attack aircraft in the Spratleys.”⁴

The US aims to generate a 355-ship fleet operating globally. Of these only 150 can cover the Indo-Pacific given its other global commitments. On freedom of navigation operations in the SCS it has generally protected US and western interests but aimed overall to generate regional stability. “We must do all everything possible to advance an international order that is most conducive to our security, prosperity and values, and we are strengthened in this by the solidarity of our alliances.”⁵

The PLAN is expanding exponentially, building naval forces equivalent to the RN fleet annually. The most likely and immediate threat is that China tests its 450-ship Navy against a non-peer adversary such as Vietnam, which, whilst the US has no obligation to protect in a territorial dispute in the South China Sea, would involve the US in its role as a guarantor of peace in this region and which our RBIO helped in its path to prosperity by generating its stability 70 years ago and since. “Many of the countries in the South China sea region, as well as regional powers such as Japan and the US, are concerned that Beijing may accelerate its efforts to establish de facto control over the disputed areas through increased military deployments, more land reclamation, and/or the enforcement of a naval blockade or an air-defence identification zone.”⁶

Japan is equally concerned citing: “China’s unilateral escalation of military activities posing a strong security concern for the region, including Japan and the international community.”⁷ In sum: “Chinese military forces continue to develop capabilities to dissuade, deter or defeat third-party intervention during a large-scale theatre campaign... and conduct long-range attacks against adversary forces that might deploy or operate in the western Pacific region.”⁸

The UK role in this crucial relationship with the US acts across the full spectrum of defence, intelligence, security, space, cyber, trade and finance domains rooted in UK awareness that global stability generates global prosperity. It will mean generating far more naval forces available to us today, forward positioning them at highly capable basing facilities in Singapore or Brunei, so as to generate UK naval force levels able to deter China's ability to influence or control the Indo-Pacific.

The UK Government is well aware of the threat in the Indo-Pacific from China. The UK public is though less aware. The gap between both needs to be closed. The case is now clear that it can be. The Secretary of State of Defence said in December 2018: "So many times when you have been out into the Middle East or the Far East they actually bring up the policy of 1968 East of Suez. We have got to make it clear that that is a policy that has been ripped up and Britain is once again a global nation."

China's Weakness

"It is clear that China and Russia want to shape a world with their authoritarian model. That is why we must use all the tools of the American power to provide for the common defence."⁵ The model of China's "Authoritarian Capitalism" rejects freedom and liberty. It disables individual freedom, domestic cohesion and societal happiness. China's vision of global leadership is incompatible with these, damages the RBIO and risks global stability. As always it is for Western powers to demonstrate their values by their willingness to deter those who threaten these, through their soft power where possible, and by hard power if necessary. But always by the nobility of our ideas and the integrity which underpins them. Which no authoritarian power can confront.

"Understanding why things are as they are and how they have reached this point is vital if we are to make sense of the complex world around us. In an age when globalisation not only creates greater interdependence but brings an unavoidable importation of strategic risk, we need to understand as well as know – and they are not the same."⁹ China's greatest vulnerability is its failure to establish inspiring values that can be shared with others. The illegal and strategic extension of its coastline to include the South China Sea effectively places its new borders adjacent to the coastlines of regional states who reject its values and look to the US and key partner nations such as the UK to protect their freedoms and enable regional stability.

Naval Implications for the United Kingdom

"We are the second largest defence spender in NATO, one of only a small number of allies to spend 2 per cent of our GDP on defence, and invest 20 per cent of that in upgrading equipment."¹⁰ This generates near-full spectrum capability in our current areas of operation from the Atlantic to the Middle East.

"We need to explore the opportunities to increase the lethality, mass and reach of our Armed Forces, so that we have the right capabilities, in the right numbers and forward based in the right locations to protect the rules-based international order and the security and prosperity it provides."¹¹ This makes clear a key UK aim is the upholding of the RBIO, global stability and prosperity.

“In April, by opening the UK Naval Support Facility at Mina Salman port in Bahrain, we established an enduring, self-sufficient hub to support UK operations in the Gulf, Red Sea and Indian Ocean. In the Pacific, HMS *Sutherland*, HMS *Argyll* and HMS *Albion* have shown the UK’s resolve to work with our regional partners in support of peace and security, promoting our interests across the world.”¹² This shows the UK’s intent to operate globally but reveals our lack of permanent naval presence in the Pacific. The potential basing of HMS *Montrose* in Bahrain is a significant one. Thought should be given to increasing the UK-Indian Naval relationship.

The Secretary of State for Defence said that Britain will turn its back on the 1968 ‘East of Suez’ strategy, which led to Britain withdrawing from military bases in Malaysia, Singapore, the Persian Gulf and the Maldives. In December 2018 the Secretary of State of Defence announced plans for two new UK bases in the Caribbean and the Indo-Pacific region to enable the United Kingdom project her influence militarily after Brexit. The UK has permanent joint operating bases in Cyprus, Gibraltar, the Falkland Islands and Diego Garcia in the Indian Ocean. The new bases could be sited in Singapore or Brunei in the South China Sea, or Montserrat or Guyana in the Caribbean. The RN vessel capability of those bases must be high in logistic support and maintenance terms. “Within the next couple of years. I am also very much looking at how can we get as much of our resources forward based, actually creating a deterrent but also taking a British presence.”¹² “We continue to examine ways to develop our persistent presence in the region. We already have long-standing arrangements in the region, with the UK Garrison based, at the invitation of HM the Sultan, at British Forces Brunei and also a fuel facility in Singapore. We are a key member of the Five Powers Defence Arrangements with Malaysia, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand... also undertaken key regional engagement with our allies in the area(for example, Japan, Korea and Brunei)... and examining how we can maintain this presence and maximise the opportunity afforded by our existing facilities in the region in the future.”¹³

Funding a Future Fleet & Permanent Presence in the Indo-Pacific

Excluding smaller vessels and the RFA the fleet will shortly consist of two carriers, seven SSN attack submarines, two amphibious ships, 19 destroyers/frigates and three Cdo Bde RM. Excepting deployments to the region this ‘mass’ limits the ability to protect the Carriers or permanently base in the region. The Carriers are the UK’s central conventional strategic deterrent and power projection force and must be used on the global stage. The new Type 31 light frigate will greatly assist if their numbers increase. The success of Type 26 across the RN, RAN, RCN and possibly RNZN is a great Five-Eyes cooperation success.

The RN will deploy Carrier Strike to the region. It will prove a potent, securing and deterring one with the US, our allies and the region. But it will not be ‘permanent’ given existing RN taskings. “With the *Queen Elizabeth* class aircraft carriers shortly coming into service, generation of a carrier group will become a priority task for the Royal Navy. Operating aircraft carriers without the sovereign ability to protect them is complacent at best and potentially dangerous at worst. The UK should be able to sustain this capacity without recourse to other states.”¹⁴

Such is the growth of submarine fleets in the region that, “one can now [virtually] walk across the Malaccan Straits on the conning towers of the combined Asian submarine fleets if they were berthed alongside each other.” The author’s aside perhaps, but I do not think many understand here just how significantly naval, and particularly submarine fleet, expansion is occurring in Asia. When combined with the complexities of South China Seas militarisation we could be facing significant challenges without an expansion of our own SSN fleet of only seven. The implications are that growth must occur in both future Type 26 ASW frigate and our SSN nuclear submarine fleets. Without them the risk of loss of our Carrier Strike Groups when operating in the Indo-Pacific region are high. If Carrier Strike is sovereign UK power, then sovereign protection capability of them is equal to that.

The fleet will have to expand to account for our new Carrier capability and the Indo-Pacific region. Far from being able to operate with 19 frigates/destroyers and seven SSNs the fleet may need growth to 30 and nine respectively to enable the combination of its current tasks, the generation of Carrier Strike and the establishment of a new fleet permanently based in the Indo-Pacific with its basing support facilities. The latter must be Carrier and SSN-capable to operate there. Thought might be given to manning a Carrier largely based there with the assistance of Five-Eye Commonwealth partners.

The strategic environment has changed for the worse, and this defence review must reflect this. The UK needs to be in a position to deter and challenge peer adversaries equipped with a full range of modern military technologies who seek to use them in ways that confuse our traditional conceptions of warfare. “The likelihood of operating in contested environments across all five domains – maritime, land, air, cyber and space – should be reflected in this force structure.”¹⁵

Deployment and basing of the Royal Navy into the Indo-Pacific will inevitably require the capacity for the projection of land forces with it. Thought should be given to expanding our amphibious capability both in terms of the Royal Marines themselves and more, smaller amphibious vessels based on commercial platforms to move them ashore. Thought might be given either to restoring British infantry battalions to the amphibious role or recruiting former British Gurkha’s along the lines of the Sultan’s Gurkha Reserve Unit (GRU) in Brunei to generate a based Indo-Pacific amphibious capability. “We have reported on the continuing relevance and requirement for amphibious capability.”¹⁶

On 11 February the Defence Secretary said at RUSI: “Our vision is for these [Littoral Strike] ships to form part of two Littoral Strike Groups complete with escorts, support vessels and helicopters. One would be based East of Suez in the Indo-Pacific and one based West of Suez in the Mediterranean, Atlantic and Baltic. And, if we ever need them to, our two Littoral Strike Ships, our two aircraft carriers, our two amphibious assault ships *Albion* and *Bulwark*, and our three *Bay* class landing ships can come together in one amphibious task force. This will give us sovereign, lethal, amphibious force. This will be one of the largest and best such forces anywhere in the world... I expect the Royal Navy to deploy flexibly, to be capable of being in many places at once and to ensure we have an efficient fleet of warfighting ships, looking at how they can grow both their mass and their lethality.”¹⁷

Additional funding will be required. The UK public cares deeply about its armed forces, is aware of the UK global role, the importance of the Indo-Pacific as 40 per cent of global trade, which it knows of as 'Asia', and has instinctive understanding of our close relationships with Five-Eyes partners, though not the term itself. It has faith in Defence Secretary Williamson and supported the government enabling the MoD's additional £1.8bn funding in Dec 2018. A case can now be made to them to increase defence spending from 2 per cent to 3 per cent of GDP to enable the Navy's growth and its "based-expansion" in the region to enable global security. UK health and welfare funding link directly to global prosperity.

"We and our predecessors repeatedly emphasised the inadequacy of the United Kingdom's level of defence expenditure—placing our views firmly on the record, both in this and in the previous Parliament. We do so again here. Defence spending is far too low. On the Government's calculation the UK is narrowly exceeding the 2 per cent target; but it is still facing a range of financial challenges. The Government now needs to apply the resources that are necessary to keep this country safe, and must begin moving the level of defence expenditure back towards 3 per cent of GDP, as it was in the mid-1990s."¹⁸

The Indo-Pacific – an Australian Perspective

The Australian minister of Defence in January this year said:¹⁹

"The Indo-Pacific is home to eight of the ten most populous nations on earth. Fifty per cent of the world's population, including the world's largest democracy. Twelve of the member states of the G20, including the three largest economies in the world are Indo-Pacific nations. Our sea lanes are the busiest in the world, with nine of the world's ten busiest seaports and many of the largest cities.

It is no surprise, then, that militarisation has become a defining characteristic. It is seeing the rise of new powers and the re-emergence of old ones. It also plays host to the defining great power rivalry of our times – between the United States and China. The rules based global order continues to be challenged, and requires the reinforcement of all those committed to its continued operation. New and more insidious threats, particularly in the cyber realm, are challenging our security and law enforcement agencies, with little regard to borders.

The Rules Based Global Order is under threat. The risks we face are getting too varied, big and complex for any one country to reliably address alone. Australia shares the ambitions of those that want a region where countries have the freedom to make their own choices. Where there do not have to be choices between economic gain and sovereignty. And in the Indo-Pacific's vast maritime domains, where global commons abound, it is all the more important that free and open access to oceans is fostered and rules governing maritime behaviour are followed. Countries will be more secure in a region characterised by respect for international law and other norms, where disputes are resolved peacefully, without the threat or use of coercion or force.

And countries will be more prosperous in a region where open markets facilitate the free flow of trade, capital, technology and ideas; where open markets facilitate prosperity and the well-being of our people. Unquestionably, rivalry between the US and China will

be a feature of our international outlook in the foreseeable future. However, it is critical that US-China relations do not come to be defined in wholly adversarial terms.

Cold War commentary fails to see a fundamental but defining difference, namely, that the world's economies are far more closely integrated and mutually dependent than they were when the West contested the Soviet Bloc. China has received strong support from major economies – including Australia – in integrating its own economy with systems that have helped underpin and consolidate its growth, most notably the World Trade Organisation. Growth we have all benefited from. There is no gain in stifling China's growth and prosperity. This is not an agenda in any capital that I know.

We are not interested in containing China, but engaging and encouraging China to exercise its power in ways that increase regional trust and confidence. The building and militarisation of artificial features in the South China Sea has not increased regional confidence in China's strategic intentions. Instead, it has increased anxiety. On the other hand, resolving disputes in the South China Sea in accordance with international law would build confidence in China's willingness to support and champion a strategic culture that respects the rights of all states.

I call on China to act with great responsibility in the South China Sea. The Indo-Pacific we aspire to is one underpinned by the rules-based order, which is open, inclusive, robust and free of coercion. Adherence to rules is what delivers security and prosperity, rather than tension and suspicion. As such, we are open to conducting multilateral activities in the South China Sea to demonstrate that they are international waters. In an age of increasing interdependence, a 'might is right' approach serves the long-term interests of no country. We fall short of our economic potential when parties choose to withdraw behind walls and withdraw from mechanisms designed to make us stronger."

Conclusion

China has progressed its international standing through an economic, political and cultural engagement process from the 1970s to the 1990s. Its economic development in the 1990 to current has been assisted by espionage, intellectual property theft and cyber. Since 2000 it developed its defence forces from a homeland defence capability to power projection, underpinned by the 'Belt & Road' Initiative which could serve as a future naval infrastructure extending from China to Africa. Since 2010 it has developed its A2/AD capability to limit US and allied naval manoeuvre near the Chinese coastline with implications for the defence of Japan or Taiwan. It has laid claim to and militarised the South China Sea. Its illegal claims to these islands and features are contested by other allied nations, such as Malaysia, Brunei, Vietnam and the Philippines. China is an 'authoritarian capitalist' model running counter to UK, US and allied nations, making use of the RBIO when it fulfils its objectives and disrupting it when it does not. The Indo-Pacific region comprises 40 per cent of global trade. It is one of the three great global economic centres of vital importance to global stability. China aims to displace US and western presence and become its regional hegemon.

The basis for China's global power projection, and its maritime Belt & Road Initiative, is in the South China Sea, which it considers is its 'historic right' to control. It is in that ocean that the US and the UK, as the architects of the RBIO and whose shared aim with its allied

partner nations is global stability, will have to exert maximum and renewed naval influence to contest China's illegal claims, deter and defend regional partner nations against China and enable freedom of navigation. And ensure the region's stability and prosperity through the reinforcement of western values to counter China's authoritarianism capitalist model which threatens the RBIO globally.

The United Kingdom's interests are global – economically and financially and committed to global stability to ensure global prosperity. It shares with the US values of freedom, liberty, democracy and free trade as its essential components through the upholding and maintenance of the RBIO. There is no doubt that the UK Secretary of State for Defence recognises the need for permanent naval basing in the South China Sea and that international structures and agreements fortunately exist to enable UK efforts in the region via Five-Eyes, the FPDA, UK defence agreements with most allied nations in the region such as Japan and the US special relationship. However, given that the region is 8,000 nm from the UK such basing cannot be made to deliver sufficient naval mass to counter the threat a 450-ship PLAN Navy poses and support a 150-ship USN Pacific Fleet presence without an expansion of the Royal Navy. A case to be made to the public now exists to enable it. The public would be greatly reassured were the UK Government to remind it that the UK is the world's second most powerful nation in terms of geopolitical capability after the USA and that China at this stage remains in third place.²⁰

CARL HUNTER

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