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**Brexit, the rules-based international order
and the United Kingdom's strategic alignment with the US
since 2016**

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Introduction

The UK's 2016 decision to leave the European Union (EU) is often cited alongside the election of Donald Trump as US President as evidence that the rules-based international order is in crisis. G. John Ikenberry, a leading liberal internationalist, writes that '[t]he two great powers that have done the most to give the modern international order a liberal character ... seem to be pulling back from this leadership' with Britain leaving the EU, 'the silent bulwark of the Western liberal order' and Trump's promise to put 'America First'.¹ Francis Fukuyama, famous for his 'end of history' thesis, draws a similar conclusion. Brexit and Trump's election, he claims, show that 'the two leading democracies that had been the architects of the modern liberal international order' are 'turning away toward a more narrow nationalism'.² For many, Brexit marks the triumph of an introverted nativism over outward-looking, cooperative internationalism.

However, speeches and policy papers produced by key ministers since the Brexit referendum have routinely emphasised the UK's commitment to the rules-based order. This evidence raises several questions. How did scholars come to see Brexit as they have? Was Brexit symptomatic of a genuine desire to abandon the rules-based order? Most importantly, is the post-Brexit UK genuinely committed to this order? This report examines Britain's strategic alignment with the US since 2016, within the context of formative aspects of its foreign policy, to gain insight into its role in the world since deciding to leave the EU. This enquiry helps us to understand whether Brexit, with the election of Trump, should be regarded as a watershed in the history of the rules-based international order.

The rules-based international order

The rules-based international order is generally thought to be a set of institutions and arrangements constructed by the victorious nations during and after the Second World War. This order, underpinned by American hegemony, was built on liberal principles and designed to regulate economic and political interaction among states. Its key institutions include the United Nations, NATO, the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and the 'European project' which would eventually produce the EU. In theory, this order would codify international law, foster cooperation and prevent the return of aggression, militarism and

¹ G. John Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy: Liberal Internationalism and the Crises of Global Order* (New Haven and London, 2020), p. 2.

² Francis Fukuyama, *Identity: Contemporary Identity Politics and the Struggle for Recognition* (London: Profile Books, 2018), p. xii.

economic nationalism which led to war in 1939. Today this order faces numerous challenges.³ Beyond the war in Ukraine, China seeks to challenge American primacy, become a world leader in its own right and create new institutions which duplicate the role of existing ones in a process of ‘counter-hegemony’.⁴ Some warn that China has dramatically expanded its economic and military power and weaponised its state-led market economy in order to remake the world in its own image and displace liberal norms.⁵ The crisis is compounded in America by scepticism of the order’s value and in Europe by insufficient defence policies and illiberal populism.⁶ It is within the context of these threats that ‘Brexit’ has appeared so alarming. An investigation of British cooperation with the US offers an opportunity to deepen our understanding of the liberal order at a time of generally perceived crisis and unprecedented challenge.

Method and structure

This paper investigates UK foreign policy priorities and the ideas that they are framed in based on policymakers’ speeches, policy statements and papers which are contextualised within broader international developments. In this process, it is asked how the US fits into UK foreign policy, acknowledging differences in policy as well as strategic cooperation within the scope of ‘alignment’. This research has been conducted under the assumption that policymakers act to advance their nation’s interests which they conceive by drawing on interpretative frameworks including ideology and in response to external pressures.⁷

The paper is divided into two parts. The first looks at the perceptions and pressures which have influenced UK foreign policy, examining whether the Euroscepticism underlying Brexit constituted a wholesale challenge to the rules-based order and also key developments in international affairs since 2016. The second explores security alignment with the US. Alignment on this matter is selected as a case study because of the centrality of security cooperation between the US and UK, among other European allies, to the rules-based order created in the 1940s. The emphasis falls on increasingly challenging areas of security to

³ Matthew Kroenig and Jeffrey Cimminio, *Global Strategy 2021: An Allied Strategy for China* (Atlantic Council: Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, 2021), pp. 15-17; Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy*.

⁴ G. John Ikenberry and Darren J. Lim, *China’s Emerging Institutional Statecraft: The Asian Infrastructure Development Bank and Prospects for Counter-Hegemony* (Project on International Order and Strategy at Brookings, April 2017).

⁵ Elizabeth Economy, *The World According to China* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2022).

⁶ Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy*.

⁷ For theoretical statements on this approach to studying foreign policy see Gideon Rose, ‘Neoclassical Realism and Theories of Foreign Policy’, *World Politics*, 51 (1998), pp. 144-72; Valeria Hudson, ‘Foreign Policy Analysis: Actor-Specific Theory and the Ground of International Relations’, *Foreign Policy Analysis*, 1:1 (2005), pp. 1-30.

focus analysis on the new threats to the rules-based order and deepen our understanding of its present crisis.

This paper argues that Euroscepticism challenged the EU but was not a wholesale challenge to the order at large. Moreover, external pressures and value-driven perceptions have inclined UK policymakers toward supporting that order. Consequently, the UK has aligned with the US to enforce that order in numerous ways which address the evolving context in which it exists today rather than merely shoring up institutions as they stood in the 1940s.

Euroscepticism, the rules-based international order and post-Brexit foreign policy

Euroscepticism, Fukuyama writes, ‘is rooted in a long-standing belief in English exceptionalism’.⁸ Brexit was thus an attempt to ‘restore British national identity’.⁹ This view of Brexit as a kind of nativist revolt took root because the referendum on Brexit in 2016 was dominated by ideas of popular sovereignty, fears of migration and populist rhetoric. Nigel Farage of the United Kingdom Independence Party caused controversy and drew accusations of racism by appearing before a poster displaying the words ‘Breaking Point’, a large queue of migrants, and the statement ‘take back control of our borders’.¹⁰ Even leaders of the less radical Vote Leave campaign challenged a governing elite by contrasting them to ‘the people’, a populist hallmark.¹¹ Justice Secretary Michael Gove argued that ‘the people of this country have had enough of experts’, referring to technocrats and economists who advocated remaining in the EU.¹² Boris Johnson accused the EU of causing ‘an alienation of the people from the power they should hold’ and invoked the need to reclaim popular sovereignty.¹³ In such a context, the decision over EU membership became a matter of whether the UK was a progressive or parochial nation. *The Guardian*, a progressive paper, advocated ‘remain’ and urged Britons to ‘vote against a divided nation that turns

⁸ Fukuyama, *Identity*, p. 152.

⁹ Francis Fukuyama, ‘30 Years of World Politics: What Has Changed?’, *Journal of Democracy*, 31:1 (2020), p. 12.

¹⁰ http://www.voteleavetakecontrol.org/why_vote_leave.html.

¹¹ Pippa Norris and Ronald Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash: Trump, Brexit and Authoritarian Populism* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2019), p. 4.

¹² Michael White, ‘Should we listen to the experts on the EU referendum?’, *The Guardian*, 8 June 2016 [<https://www.theguardian.com/politics/blog/2016/jun/08/experts-eu-referendum-michael-gove>].

¹³ ‘Boris Johnson exclusive: There is only one way to get the change we want – vote to leave the EU’, *The Telegraph*, 16 March 2016 [<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/opinion/2016/03/16/boris-johnson-exclusive-there-is-only-one-way-to-get-the-change/>].

inwards’,¹⁴ whilst Brexit is often seen by scholars as synonymous with other populist movements such as the French National Front or Alternative for Germany.¹⁵

The neoliberal foundations of British Euroscepticism

Despite the populist tactics used in the referendum, in the longer term British Euroscepticism was driven more by neoliberalism than nativism. Neoliberalism can be broadly defined as an ideology which prizes individual liberty and free markets, both of which should be protected by strict legal limitations on state power.¹⁶ After Britain joined the European Economic Community (EEC, later the EU) in 1973, its relationship with the European project was heavily influenced by neoliberals, especially Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher (1979-1990). Thatcher supported the project in many regards. Believing that the EEC was compatible with her free market-oriented domestic agenda, she advocated the creation of a single market with the 1987 Single European Act which she called ‘a treaty for economic liberty’.¹⁷ However, she opposed the move toward political union and a shared social rights system championed by Jacques Delors, President of the European Commission from 1985 to 1995.¹⁸ In her 1988 ‘Bruges Speech’, Thatcher argued that Britain’s ‘destiny is in Europe, as part of the Community’ but warned that it must not ‘be ossified by endless regulation’.¹⁹ Neoliberal concerns with regulation from Brussels sharpened in the 1990s as Delors pushed for increased political and monetary integration. Thatcher warned of a threat to democracy from ‘back door’ federalism.²⁰ Conservative Member of Parliament William Cash led parliamentary resistance to integration and established the European Foundation, warning against the EU’s ‘denial of liberty on a monumental scale’ through its publication, *The European Journal*.²¹ For

¹⁴ ‘The Guardian view on the EU referendum: keep connected and inclusive, not angry and isolated’, *The Guardian*, 20 June 2016 [<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jun/20/the-guardian-view-on-the-eu-referendum-keep-connected-and-inclusive-not-angry-and-isolated>].

¹⁵ Fukuyama, *Identity*, p. xii; Norris and Inglehart, *Cultural Backlash*; Ikenberry, *A World Safe for Democracy*, pp. 2-3.

¹⁶ Rachael S. Turner, *Neo-Liberal Ideology: History, Concepts and Policies* (King’s Lynn: Edinburgh University Press, 2008), pp. 4-9; Dag Einar Thorsen and Amund Lie, ‘What is Neoliberalism?’, pp. 14-15 [<https://jagiroadcollegelive.co.in/attendance/classnotes/files/1589998418.pdf>].

¹⁷ Mark Garnett, Simon Mabon and Robert Smith, *British Foreign Policy since 1945* (New York: Routledge, 2018), p. 211.

¹⁸ Brendan Simms, *Britain’s Europe: A Thousand Years of Conflict and Cooperation* (London: Penguin Books, 2016), pp. 189-94; Peter Wilding, *What Next? Britain’s Future in Europe* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2017), pp. 38-56.

¹⁹ Margaret Thatcher, ‘Speech to the College of Europe’, 20 September 1988 [<https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/107332>].

²⁰ Wilding, *What Next?*, p. 55.

²¹ *Ibid.*, 56; Bill Cash, ‘A European Offensive for a Democratic Europe of Nations States’, *The European Journal*, 5:6 (1998), p. 2.

neoliberals, liberty and economic freedom are inseparable.²² Thatcher stated in 1979 that economic freedom was one of ‘three pillars’ of liberty upon which the EEC must rest.²³ The supranational governance of the EU was thus not so much a threat to an insular national identity as to the economic freedom necessary for growth and liberty.

The centrality of these ideas to Euroscepticism is important because neoliberalism does not involve an outright rejection of the liberal international order. In fact, when Brexiteers argued that leaving the EU would unleash the economic growth inhibited by Brussels’ regulation, they did so in a way which positively vindicated or at least left the door open to international engagement. Gove, for instance, argued that Brexit would allow the UK to pursue a ‘genuinely internationalist alternative to the path the EU is going down’ and ‘forge trade deals and partnerships with nations across the globe’.²⁴ Similar visions were promoted by Brexiteers who were widely seen as hardliners such as Steve Baker, a Conservative MP. Baker criticised Prime Minister Theresa May for failing to make a harder break from the EU and has since encouraged his party ‘to rediscover our confidence as free market conservatives’, expressing his neoliberal worldview.²⁵ In 2019, he promoted the *Plan A+* paper produced by the Institute of Economic Affairs, which has long advanced neoliberal arguments.²⁶ The paper’s authors argued that Britain could benefit from breaking with EU regulations and pursuing trade deals around the world, assuming a seat at the World Trade Organisation, successor to the GATT, and joining the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) and the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP). Britain would thus ‘play an active, leading role, supporting the rules-based international order in its own interest, and bring a strongly pro-trade, pro-development message to the table’.²⁷ Trump’s hostility to both NAFTA and the CPTPP undermines the

²² Turner, *Neo-Liberal Ideology*, pp. 115, 124-6.

²³ Margaret Thatcher, ‘Europe: The Obligations of Liberty’, 18 October 1979 [https://www.margaretthatcher.org/document/104149].

²⁴ ‘EU Referendum: Michael Gove’s full statement on why he is backing Brexit’, *Independent*, 20 February 2016 [https://www.independent.co.uk/news/uk/politics/eu-referendum-michael-gove-s-full-statement-on-why-he-is-backing-brex-it-a6886221.html?r=72197].

²⁵ Steve Baker, ‘We must stand firm and reject Theresa May’s Brexit deal or we will live to regret it’, *The Telegraph*, 20 March 2019 [https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2019/03/20/must-stand-firm-reject-theresa-mays-brex-it-deal-will-live-regret/]; quotation from Steve Baker, ‘Disaster looms unless Conservative party rediscovers what it stands for’, *The Telegraph*, 11 September 2021 [https://www.telegraph.co.uk/politics/2021/09/11/disaster-looms-unless-conservative-party-rediscovers-stands/].

²⁶ Steve Baker, ‘Why it is to the UK’s advantage to leave the EU’, 23 April 2019 [https://www.stevebaker.info/2019/04/why-it-is-to-the-uks-advantage-to-leave-the-eu/]; Turner, *Neo-Liberal Ideology*, pp. 91-6.

²⁷ Shanker Singham and Radomir Tylecote, *Plan A+: Creating a prosperous post-Brexit UK* (Institute of Economic Affairs: 2019), pp. 15-21, 111.

association of America First and Brexit. In fact, some of the most radical visions of Brexit allowed for a British international role as a pillar of the rules-based order.

Because of Euroscepticism's neoliberal foundations it was easy for policymakers to pursue Brexit and declare support for the foundational principles of the rules-based order without any apparent inconsistency. Since Prime Minister May's October 2016 Conservative Party Conference speech, policymakers have consistently argued that Brexit gives the UK an opportunity to become 'Global Britain'.²⁸ Policymakers have since drawn on both the principles underpinning Euroscepticism, including strong commitments to sovereignty and free trade, and the fundamentals of the rules-based international order to substantiate this concept. Johnson, now Foreign Secretary, told the same Conference that 'the message of global Britain to the world' is 'that we stick up for free markets as vigorously as we stick up for democracy and human rights'.²⁹ In the 2021 *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, subtitled *Global Britain in a Competitive Age*, Britain's role is defined as a pillar of the rules-based order in a new age of 'systemic competition' which includes 'growing contest over international rules and norms'.³⁰ Announcing the *Integrated Review* in March 2021, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab (July 2019-September 2021) stated that Brexit made the UK an 'independent nation, but we're not inward-looking. Sovereignty has never meant isolation'. In fact, he argued that its commitment to free trade gave London a 'uniquely international perspective'.³¹ Policymakers have committed to Brexit and the rules-based order simultaneously rather than opting for one over the other, and have even insisted on their compatibility.

External pressures and value-driven perceptions

Whilst Euroscepticism did not in fact entail a rejection of the rules-based order, other international pressures, and the value-based perception of them by

²⁸ 'Britain after Brexit. A vision of a Global Britain. May's Conference speech: full text' [<https://conservativehome.com/2016/10/02/britain-after-brexit-a-vision-of-a-global-britain-theresa-mays-conservative-conference-speech-full-text/>].

²⁹ 'Full text: Boris Johnson's conference speech', 2 October 2016, *The Spectator* [<https://www.spectator.co.uk/article/full-text-boris-johnson-s-conference-speech>].

³⁰ *Global Britain in a competitive age. The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy* (March 2021), p. 24.

³¹ 'A force for good: Global Britain in a competitive age', 17 March 2021 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/a-force-for-good-in-a-competitive-age-foreign-secretary-speech-at-the-aspen-security-conference>].

policymakers, have operated on the UK to incentivise its commitment to it. Four core pressures are worthy of note.

Firstly, Russia and China have been seen as increasingly threatening to British interests. Russia's 2008 invasion of Georgia, 2014 annexation of Crimea and 2018 use of a Novichok nerve-agent in the British town of Salisbury are frequently cited by policymakers as evidence of a Russian threat.³² Additionally, over the 2010s China has established military installations and laid territorial claims within the 'nine-dash line' in the South China Sea. In 2016, an international tribunal at The Hague judged this line has no legal foundation and China has faced increased international pressures to withdraw this claim which exceeds the area of sovereignty recognised under the 1982 United Nations Law and Seas Convention.³³ In a 2017 speech before the Australian Lowy Institute, Johnson affirmed Britain's commitment to international law in the South China Sea and also its commitment to work with regional partners to do so because such cooperation is 'a big part of how we uphold the liberal international order'.³⁴

China's assertiveness is compounded by the second core pressure, which is the increasing importance of East Asian markets to global trade. Especially since the 1980s, Asian states dramatically cut tariff rates and exhibited high levels of growth, with some talking of 'economic miracles', creating attractive trade opportunities to foreign nations including the UK.³⁵ In the first decade of the twenty-first century, Asian economies contributed to around half of global economic growth.³⁶ Already under Foreign Minister William Hague (2010-2014), policymakers began to emphasise the importance of opportunities to engage with growing economies in the global south, especially Asia.³⁷ This coincided with the US's 'Pivot to Asia', underpinned by President Barrack

³² *Global Britain in a competitive age*, p. 4; 'A force for good: Global Britain in a competitive age'; 'Foreign Secretary's speech at the United States Institute For Peace', 21 August 2018

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretarys-speech-at-the-united-states-institute-for-peace>];

'Foreign Secretary Hunt: Britain's role in a post-Brexit world', 2 January 2019

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-hunt-britains-role-in-a-post-brexit-world>].

³³ Siniša Vuković, 'Halting and Reversing Escalation in the South China Sea: A Bargaining Framework', *Global Policy*, 11:5 (2020), p. 599; Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, 'China must honour legally binding UNCLOS verdict on South China Sea', *The Economic Times*, 9 July 2021 [<https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/china-must-honour-legally-binding-unclos-verdict-on-south-china-sea/articleshow/84257847.cms?from=mdr>].

³⁴ 'The 2017 Lowy Lecture: Then-UK Foreign Secretary Boris Johnson'

[<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/publications/2017-lowy-lecture-uk-foreign-secretary-boris-johnson>].

³⁵ Ibid.; Peter Vanham, 'The story of Vietnam's economic miracle', 11 September 2018

[<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2018/09/how-vietnam-became-an-economic-miracle/>].

³⁶ Yiping Huang and Bijun Wang, 'From the Asian Miracle to an Asian Century? Economic Transformation in the 2000s and Prospects for the 2010s', Reserve Bank of Australia (2011)

[<https://www.rba.gov.au/publications/confs/2011/huang-wang.html>].

³⁷ 'Britain's Foreign Policy in a Networked World', 1 July 2010 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/britain-s-foreign-policy-in-a-networked-world-2>].

Obama's belief that 'America's economic future lies in Asia'.³⁸ By increasingly looking to Asia for economic opportunities, the UK and other western countries have increased their reliance on stability in a region in which China, the UK's largest import partner in 2021,³⁹ is increasing its influence but does not always adhere to the norms of the rules-based order. The 2015 *National Security Strategy* stated that the UK was the 'first major Western country' to join the Chinese-created Asian Infrastructural Development Bank [AIIB],⁴⁰ indicating Britain's increasing interest in the economy and international governance of East Asia.

Thirdly, the UK faces a challenge shared by European nations: increased American scepticism, under the influence of Trump's 'America First' agenda, of the value of its European allies and international institutions. Since 2016, Trump has openly criticised NATO allies for not sharing the financial burden of maintaining the alliance.⁴¹ Just as an aggressive Russia made NATO increasingly more important to UK security, American support wavered. Trump was also prone to unilaterally reject multilateral agreements such as the treaty to limit Iran's nuclear capabilities, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which the UK supported but Trump withdrew from in 2018.⁴² Such behaviour was worrisome because British policymakers recognised that US hegemony and leadership has been central to the rules-based order since its inception. Foreign Secretary Jeremy Hunt (July 2018-July 2019) told an audience in 2019 that the order is built on multilateral institutions and an 'American-led security umbrella', and several months later Defence Secretary Penny Mordaunt (May-July 2019) called a 'distracted America' a symptom of 'troubled times'.⁴³ As the certainty of American security commitments came into question, a core pillar of the rules-based order suddenly looked unstable.

Finally, there is the global decline in democracy between 2006 and 2021.⁴⁴ Policymakers have frequently flagged the decline in democracies across the globe

³⁸ Jeffrey Goldberg, 'The Obama Doctrine', April 2016, *The Atlantic*

[<https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>].

³⁹ 'UK trade with China: 2021'

[<https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/articles/uktradewithchina2021/2022-06-01#:~:text=2.->

UK%20trade%20in%20goods%20with%20China,our%20sixth%2Dlargest%20exporting%20partner].

⁴⁰ *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015 A Secure and Prosperous United Kingdom* (November 2015), p. 71.

⁴¹ Krishnadev Calamur, 'Nato Shmato?', *The Atlantic*, 21 July 2016

[<https://www.theatlantic.com/news/archive/2016/07/trump-nato/492341/>].

⁴² 'Iran nuclear deal: Trump pulls US out in break with European allies', BBC News, 9 May 2018

[<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-us-canada-44045957>].

⁴³ 'Defence Secretary keynote speech at the Sea Power Conference 2019', 15 May 2019

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/defence-secretary-keynote-speech-at-the-sea-power-conference-2019>].

⁴⁴ 'New Report: The global decline in democracy has accelerated', Freedom House, 3 March 2021

[<https://freedomhouse.org/article/new-report-global-decline-democracy-has-accelerated>].

as a security concern which demands renewed commitment to supporting the liberal democratic model of governance. This problem dovetails with the first pressure because the challenges posed by Russia and China are perceived as part of an increasingly severe contest between democracy and autocracy.⁴⁵ This contest is particularly related to new technologies as Russia has utilised disinformation to undermine democratic processes whilst China has aspired to lead the world in technology creation and set the norms of global internet governance. The concerns caused by these developments are expressed in Foreign Secretary Liz Truss's (September 2021-present) statement that '[w]e need global technology standards to be shaped by the free world – not by authoritarian regimes'.⁴⁶ Policymakers have increasingly judged UK interests as lying in cooperating with other democracies to address the problems created by new technologies.

Together, these four pressures combine to incentivise British support for the rules-based international order. Raab stated in March 2021 that 'the fraying of the world order that grew up after World War 2' was one of the foremost dangers in a 'competitive age'.⁴⁷ This perception contrasts with the 2015 *Review* which rested on the assumption that security was built on national prosperity. Prime Minister David Cameron wrote that 'the first step in our National Security Strategy is to ensure our economy is, and remains, strong'.⁴⁸ Compounding this heightened competition is the fact that these four pressures cannot be met by reaffirming commitment to existing institutions alone; the rules-based order created in the 1940s was not designed to cope with new challenges including a powerful and assertive China as well as internet governance. The rest of this paper examines UK-US security alignment with a key problem in mind: the imperative of approaching the seven-decade old order in a way which meets the demands of the 2010s and 2020s.

⁴⁵ 'Lord Mayor's Banquet 2019: Foreign Secretary's speech', 13 May 2019 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/lord-mayors-banquet-2019-foreign-secretarys-speech>]; 'NATO Parliamentary Assembly, October 2019: Foreign Secretary's speech', 20 October 2019 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretary-speech-to-the-nato-parliamentary-assembly-12-october-2019>]; 'A force for good: Global Britain in a competitive age'.

⁴⁶ 'The network of liberty, CPC21 speeches', 3 October 2021 [<https://www.conservatives.com/news/2021/the-network-of-liberty>].

⁴⁷ 'A force for good: Global Britain in a competitive age'.

⁴⁸ *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015*, p. 5.

Security alignment since 2016

UK-US security alignment has been complex and cannot be reduced to one type of alignment. The UK has been involved with the US in both bilateral and multilateral arrangements for the promotion of their own security and that of others, as envisioned by the founders of the rules-based order. Many areas of UK-US alignment emanate from multilateral institutions which linked the two long before 2016, including NATO. However, policymakers have not limited themselves to shoring up the order as conceived in the 1940s. The UK has aligned with the US on security policy in numerous ways which have evolved, at least in conception, since 2016 as direct responses to the novel challenges faced by the rules-based order. It has positioned itself as a burden-sharer to the US in response to Trump's criticisms of European free riding, especially in Europe. Policymakers have also made efforts to maintain close relations with the US whilst the Trump administration tended to take unilateral action which caused tensions with European allies. Moreover, whilst the UK is an independent nation and conducts its own bilateral relations with other countries, it has conducted them in a way which vindicates the principles of the rules-based order and has consequently led to cooperation with the US with the same goal in mind, particularly in the Indo-Pacific. This second part of the report looks at how these alignment dynamics have been manifest in Europe, the Middle East, the Indo-Pacific and cyber-space.

Europe and the Russian threat

As noted above, UK policymakers have regarded Russia as the primary security threat in Europe and this is reflected in its cooperation with US within the scope of NATO. At the July 2016 Warsaw Summit, just days after the Brexit vote, NATO members agreed to established the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in Eastern Europe. The eFP was intended 'to unambiguously demonstrate, as part of our overall posture, Allies' solidarity, determination, and ability to act by triggering an immediate Allied response to any aggression'.⁴⁹ The UK has undertaken Operation Cabrit to support the eFP, deploying a UK-led battlegroup to Estonia which includes 800 British troops, joined by French and Danish forces, whilst also deploying British troops to Poland in a US-led battlegroup.⁵⁰ This action was directly driven by Putin's 2014 move on Ukraine. After these forces

⁴⁹ Warsaw Summit Communiqué, 9 July 2016 [https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_133169.htm].

⁵⁰ Robert Czulda, 'Enhanced Forward Presence: Evolution, Meaning and the End Game' in Róbert Ondrejcsák and Tyler H. Lippert (eds.), *NATO at 70: Outline of the Alliance Today and Tomorrow* (Bratislava: Stratpol, 2019), p. 30.

arrived in March 2017, Defence Secretary Michael Fallon (2014–November 2017) said that this commitment was ‘a proportionate response to the changed security environment in Eastern Europe, as demonstrated by Russia’s aggressive actions in Ukraine’.⁵¹ Further measures to respond to this threat included efforts to bolster Ukrainian defence capabilities. Through Operation Orbital, the UK trained 22,000 Ukrainians in various military techniques between 2015 to 2022,⁵² whilst the US provided \$2.7 billion in military assistance and aid between 2014 and the end of 2021.⁵³ This commitment was consistent with the 1994 Budapest Memorandum, agreed by the UK, US, Ukraine and Russia, by which Ukraine gave up its nuclear capabilities and was guaranteed sovereignty and territorial integrity.⁵⁴ UK-US alignment in Europe has thus been expressed in pre-existing, institutionalised and multilateral commitments to European security, which were precipitated in the short-term by increasing Russian military aggression.

The UK can also be seen as aligning with the US as a burden-sharing security partner. This type of alignment emanated in part from within pre-existing security arrangements. At the 2014 Wales Summit, NATO established the principle of ‘framework nations’ which were, as part of a Readiness Action Plan, to lead regional groupings of nations, host the headquarters, contribute to peacetime command and logistical facilities and provide about 2/3 of the budget.⁵⁵ The UK was recognised as the framework nation for the Joint Expeditionary Force which coordinates defence among Arctic and Baltic allies.⁵⁶ The UK has thus been a leader of multilateral security in a region in which the US is also committed to defence, as indicated by US participation in military exercises in 2018 and 2022 alongside British forces (which is in addition to joint exercises elsewhere in Europe such as Steadfast Defender in 2021).⁵⁷ Since 2016,

⁵¹ ‘NATO’s Enhanced Forward Presence: Statement made on 28 March 2017’ [h\[https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2017-03-28/HCWS563\]](https://questions-statements.parliament.uk/written-statements/detail/2017-03-28/HCWS563).

⁵² ‘UK to offer major training programme for Ukrainian forces as Prime Minister hails their victorious determination’, 17 June 2022

[\[https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-offer-major-training-programme-for-ukrainian-forces-as-prime-minister-hails-their-victorious-determination\]](https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-to-offer-major-training-programme-for-ukrainian-forces-as-prime-minister-hails-their-victorious-determination).

⁵³ ‘In 2014, the ‘decrepit’ Ukrainian army hit the refresh button. Eight years later, it’s paying off’, *The Conversation*, 8 March 2022 [\[https://theconversation.com/in-2014-the-decrepit-ukrainian-army-hit-the-refresh-button-eight-years-later-its-paying-off-177881\]](https://theconversation.com/in-2014-the-decrepit-ukrainian-army-hit-the-refresh-button-eight-years-later-its-paying-off-177881).

⁵⁴ ‘Memorandum on security assurances in connection with Ukraine’s accession to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons. Budapest, 5 December 1994’

[\[https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%203007/Part/volume-3007-I-52241.pdf\]](https://treaties.un.org/doc/Publication/UNTS/Volume%203007/Part/volume-3007-I-52241.pdf).

⁵⁵ Diego A. Ruiz Palmer, ‘The Framework Nations’ Concept and NATO: Game-Changer for a New Strategic Era or Missed Opportunity?’, Research Paper: Research Division – NATO Defense College, Rome – No. 132 – July 2016, p. 9.

⁵⁶ Ministry of Defence, *The UK’s Defence Contribution in the High North* (2022), p. 10; Wales Summit Communiqué, 5 September 2014 [\[https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm\]](https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm).

⁵⁷ ‘Royal Marines thanked by Norwegian monarch’, 13 November 2018

however, burden sharing has increasingly been presented as an attempt to respond to Trump's criticism of unfair spending distributions within NATO. Johnson told an audience at Chatham House in December 2016 that Trump 'has a point' and implored other NATO allies to meet the minimum of spending 2% GDP on defence demanded by the alliance.⁵⁸ In August 2018 Hunt made the same point about 'fair burden-sharing' and stated that 'President Trump is surely right to urge higher defence spending'.⁵⁹ However, this stance did not translate into any major policy shift because the UK already consistently met the 2% requirement.⁶⁰ Nevertheless, it indicates the UK's willingness to support the burden-sharing principle already institutionalised in NATO and to address American grievances to shore up multilateral security arrangements.

Finally, the two exhibited a similar position on Ukraine as a crisis grew in late 2021 and 2022. Most European nations including France did not state that they expected a Russian invasion before it began on 24 February 2022. The UK, meanwhile, gathered and made public intelligence findings which showed that Russia was escalating its military presence on Ukraine's borders in the months preceding the war, thereby supporting US warnings of the same threat.⁶¹ The UK was also a leading European nation in providing Ukraine with increasingly powerful arms, for example following the US in sending long-range missiles in early June.⁶² The UK has thus positioned itself as a stalwart ally of the US in taking a forward stance in Ukraine.

Cooperation and discord in the Middle East

In the twenty-first century, the UK and US have cooperated closely to promote security, especially in response to the shared threat of terrorism. The most notable manifestation of such cooperation since 2016 is participation in a broad coalition

[<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2018/november/13/181113-rm-thanked-by-norwegian-monarch>]; 'Royal Navy completes largest Arctic defence exercise since the Cold War', 11 April 2022

[<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2022/april/11/20220411-royal-navy-completes-largest-arctic-defence-exercise>]. For Steadfast Defender see [<https://shape.nato.int/steadfast-defender>].

⁵⁸ Boris Johnson, 'Global Britain: UK Foreign Policy in the Era of Brexit', 2 December 2016, p. 5

[<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/events/special/2016-12-02-Boris-Johnson.pdf>].

⁵⁹ 'Foreign Secretary's speech at the United States Institute For Peace', 21 August 2018

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/foreign-secretarys-speech-at-the-united-states-institute-for-peace>].

⁶⁰ Defence Expenditure of NATO Countries (2014-2022), 27 June 2022

[https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2022/6/pdf/220627-def-exp-2022-en.pdf].

⁶¹ Karla Adam, 'How U.K. intelligence came to tweet the lowdown on the war in Ukraine', *Washington Post*, 22 April 2022 [<https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2022/04/22/how-uk-intelligence-came-tweet-lowdown-war-ukraine/>]; Neveen Shaaban Abdalla et al, 'Intelligence and the War in Ukraine: Part 1', War on the Rocks, 11 May 2022 [<https://warontherocks.com/2022/05/intelligence-and-the-war-in-ukraine-part-1/>].

⁶² Henry Ridgwell, 'Britain gives Ukraine long-range missiles to counter 'brutal Russian artillery'', VOA, 6 June 2022 [<https://www.voanews.com/a/britain-gives-ukraine-long-range-missiles-to-counter-brutal-russian-artillery-6605420.html>].

assembled to combat the threat of the radical Islamist organisation Daesh. Like other areas of UK-US alignment, this action is a manifestation of enduring commitments made before 2016. The UK joined the US-led Global Coalition in 2014 and the Royal Air Force remains active as a military force in Iraq and Syria. This cooperation achieved the destruction of Daesh's territorial caliphate in 2019, after which allies affirmed continuing commitment to combat Daesh in Iraq and Syria.⁶³

However, the UK and US have also been at odds in the region over the handling of Iran's nuclear capabilities. Despite Trump's 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA, the UK remained committed to the deal. Sir Simon McDonald, Foreign Office permanent secretary, was even on the board of the Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges which was established to facilitate trade with Iran 2019 whilst the US reinstated sanctions.⁶⁴ Even in July 2019 when Iran seized a British-flagged tanker in the Strait of Hormuz and Hunt condemned the action, the Foreign Secretary announced 'a European-led maritime protection mission' to ensure regional freedom of navigation but emphasised that '*[i]t will not be part of the US maximum pressure policy on Iran because we remain committed to preserving the Iran nuclear agreement [my emphasis]*'.⁶⁵

UK policymakers' dealing with these differences may, however, be considered an attempt to defend the deal whilst responding to UK-US differences in a way that maintained close engagement between the two countries. For instance, in September 2019 Raab defended the JCPOA for giving the International Atomic Energy Agency access to inspect Iranian nuclear facilities, whilst acknowledging American criticism of the deal, conceding that 'it also has its limitations' including time limits and not addressing Iran's destabilising action within the region. He also stated that both Trump and French President Emmanuel Macron agreed that the JCPOA could be improved to address this action and condemned the attack on Saudi Arabia's Aramco facility.⁶⁶ The UK thus stated its differing position whilst emphasising points of agreement and the scope for transatlantic cooperation. The Biden administration took office in January 2021 and was committed to re-joining the deal which Johnson stated was

⁶³ 'After the Caliphate: U.S. Strategy on ISIS', Wilson Center, 15 November 2019 [<https://www.wilsoncenter.org/article/after-the-caliphate-us-strategy-isis>]; 'UK action to combat Daesh' [<https://www.gov.uk/government/topical-events/daesh/about>].

⁶⁴ Leila Gharagozlou, 'EU implements new Iran trade mechanism', CNBC, 31 January 2019 [<https://www.cnbc.com/2019/01/31/eu-implements-new-iran-trade-mechanism.html>].

⁶⁵ 'Situation in the Gulf: Foreign Secretary statement to Parliament', 22 July 2019 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/situation-in-the-gulf-foreign-secretary-statement>].

⁶⁶ 'Dominic Raab – 2019 Statement on Iran', 25 September 2019 [<https://www.ukpol.co.uk/dominic-raab-2019-statement-on-iran/>].

the task of a ‘trans-Atlantic quad’, indicating ongoing support to find a collaborative solution to the issue with European allies.⁶⁷ The UK has thus endeavoured to maintain alignment with the US in the Middle East within multilateral arrangements designed to resolve common security threats.

Coinciding foreign policies and cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

The term ‘Indo-Pacific’, the Indian and Pacific Oceans, has been increasingly used in recent years to refer to a regional order cultivated first and foremost by the US, Japan, India and Australia.⁶⁸ Since 2016, both the UK and US have independently pursued their own Indo-Pacific policies, but because they are guided by shared interests and strategic concepts they have increasingly been able to cooperate to promote regional security on a value-based foundation.

The Trump administration reoriented American foreign policy to focus on the Indo-Pacific, prioritising cooperation with key regional partners and taking a firm stance toward China. This approach was framed in ideological terms. The 2017 National Security Strategy stated that a ‘geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region’, affirmed the US commitment to a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ and expressed concern with Chinese economic coercion and its increased military presence in the region.⁶⁹ The concept of a ‘free and open Indo-Pacific’ is used by many important regional actors and draws directly on the precepts of the rules-based order. In 2018 it was defined by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi as an non-exclusive grouping of like-minded nations, underpinned by ‘freedom of navigation, unimpeded commerce and peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law’.⁷⁰ A 2019 State Department paper reiterated this vision.⁷¹ However, both the 2017 and 2019 policy statements affirmed American commitment to cooperating with regional allies to advance this ‘shared vision’ without mentioning the UK.⁷² Instead, the 2017 strategy mentioned that the US ‘will seek to increase quadrilateral cooperation with Japan, Australia, and

⁶⁷ ‘Prime Minister’s speech at the Munich Security Conference: 19 February 2021’

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/prime-ministers-speech-at-the-munich-security-conference-19-february-2021>].

⁶⁸ Felix Heiduk and Gudrun Wacker, *From Asia-Pacific to Indo-Pacific: Significance, Implementation and Challenges*, SWP Research Paper (Berlin: Stiftung, Wissenschaft und Politik, 2020).

⁶⁹ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, D.C.: The White House, December 2017), pp. 45-6.

⁷⁰ Vice Admiral MP Muralidharan, ‘Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative’, *Indian Defence Review*, 6 January 2022 [<http://www.indiandefencereview.com/news/indo-pacific-oceans-initiative/>].

⁷¹ *A Free and Open Indo-Pacific: Advancing a Shared Vision* (Washington, D.C.: Department of State, November 2019), pp. 4-5.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

India'.⁷³ 'The Quad' grouping of nations was the main focus of US regional security policies since its first meeting in Manila in November 2017, and was in large part motivated by a desire to check China's regional ambitions. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said in 2019 that it would keep China in 'its proper place in the world'.⁷⁴

Whilst the US has been preoccupied with cultivating the Quad, the UK has advanced its bilateral relations with its members and formalised these relationships with affirmations of shared commitment to ideals of the 'free and open Indo-Pacific' concept. For example, in 2017 Japan and the UK issued a Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation. The two committed to 'elevating [their] global strategic partnership' against 'common strategic challenges to the rules-based system'.⁷⁵ In 2021, the UK and Japan made their shared commitment to a 'free and open Indo-Pacific' explicit.⁷⁶ In July, two weeks after they cooperated in counter-piracy operations in near the Somalian coast, Defence Secretary Ben Wallace (July 2019-present) told Japanese counterparts that the UK would permanently deploy two patrol vessels in the Indo-Pacific.⁷⁷ In May the same year, Johnson announced a novel Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with India.⁷⁸ The deepening of British cooperation with the Quad powers logically continued and manifests itself in the AUKUS security partnership among Australia, the UK and US which is aimed at enhancing joint capabilities and technology sharing. In September 2021, Johnson declared in a joint statement with Joseph Biden and Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison that the three partners were 'guided by our enduring ideals and shared commitment to the international rules-based order' and thus committed to promoting 'stability in the Indo-Pacific'.⁷⁹ This cooperation is set to continue and advance. In March 2022, high level US and UK representatives 'resolved to broaden and deepen their alignment and cooperation on and in the region' and 'coordinate implementation

⁷³ *National Security Strategy*, p. 46.

⁷⁴ Patrick Geard Buchan and Benjamin Rhimland, 'Defining the Diamond: The Past, Present and Future of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue' (CSIS Briefs, March 2020), pp. 1-4.

⁷⁵ 'Japan-UK Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation [2017]' [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/641155/Japan-UK_Joint_Declaration_on_Security_Cooperation.pdf].

⁷⁶ 'Japan-UK foreign and defence ministerial meeting 2021: joint statement', 3 February 2021 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/japan-uk-foreign-and-defence-ministerial-meeting-2021-joint-statement>].

⁷⁷ Junnosuke Kobara, 'UK to permanently station 2 patrol ships in Indo-Pacific', *Nikkei Asia*, 20 July 2021 [<https://asia.nikkei.com/Business/Aerospace-Defense/UK-to-permanently-station-2-patrol-ships-in-Indo-Pacific>].

⁷⁸ 'Joint statement on India-UK Virtual Summit', 4 May 2021: Roadmap 2030 for a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, 4 May 2021 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/india-uk-virtual-summit-may-2021-roadmap-2030-for-a-comprehensive-strategic-partnership>].

⁷⁹ 'UK, US AND Australia launch new security partnership', 15 September 2021 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-us-and-australia-launch-new-security-partnership>].

of the U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy and the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt', as their joint statement read. The statement also noted the 'systemic competition with China'.⁸⁰ Coinciding perceptions and interests have resulted in deepening security cooperation after years of independently pursued policies.

This dynamic has also resulted in cooperative power projection. Since 2018, policymakers have increasingly emphasised that demonstrating the UK's commitment to deploy forces around the globe is central to 'Global Britain'. In April, the UK deployed three Royal Navy warships to Japan to help enforce sanctions on North Korea and support regional free trade. Defence Secretary Gavin Williamson (November 2017-May 2019) stated that '[o]ur armed forces are at the forefront of Global Britain' and that the deployment demonstrated 'unwavering commitment to our international responsibilities'.⁸¹ The following year, Mordaunt stated that 'Global Britain is a protector' and must become 'more forward deployed'.⁸² This concern may be considered symptomatic of a more competitive age, discussed in the 2021 Integrated Review, which has drawn policymakers' attention increasingly toward China. In February 2019, Williamson announced a planned trip by the aircraft carrier *HMS Queen Elizabeth* to the South China Sea. He stated that the UK and allies must be ready 'to use hard power to support our interests' and oppose states which 'flout international law'.⁸³ *HMS Queen Elizabeth* visited the South China Sea in July 2021 as part of Carrier Strike Group 21 (CSG 21) which is constituted by both UK and US forces including the US destroyer *USS Sullivan* and ten Marine Corps F-35B jets. The same month, the carrier agreement was extended and Wallace celebrated its demonstration of the 'unique interoperability of the UK and US carrier forces'.⁸⁴ The visit to the South China Sea was part of a longer six-month mission in which CSG 21 also went through the Indian Ocean and carried out tri-service exercises with Indian armed forces, as agreed in May 2021, among numerous other exercises which involved Japan, the Republic of Korea and many

⁸⁰ 'Joint statement following consultations between UK and US Government officials on the Indo-Pacific', 11 March 2022 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-statement-following-consultations-between-uk-and-us-government-officials-on-the-indo-pacific>].

⁸¹ Julian Ryal, 'HMS Sutherland arrives in Japan in effort to curb North Korea's evasion of sanctions', *The Telegraph*, 12 April 2018 [<https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2018/04/12/hms-sutherland-arrives-japan-effort-curb-north-koreas-evasion/>]; 'Third Royal Navy warship offers support to allies in the Asia-Pacific', 11 April 2018 [<https://www.royalnavy.mod.uk/news-and-latest-activity/news/2018/april/11/180411-third-royal-navy-warship-offers-support-to-allies-in-asia-pacific>].

⁸² Defence Secretary keynote speech at the Sea Power Conference 2019.

⁸³ 'Gavin Williamson: Drone 'swarm squadrons' to be deployed by military', BBC News, 11 February 2019 [<https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-47192232>].

⁸⁴ 'UK and US extend carrier cooperation agreement', 13 July 2021 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-us-extend-carrier-cooperation-agreement>].

more partners.⁸⁵ UK-US security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is embedded within a deeper network which has been developed by the UK in its conduct of multiple bilateral relations.

Cyber-space and new technology

Before 2016, the UK and US had already begun cooperation to bolster cyber-security and this has continued since, in large part because the two face shared threats. In a 2011 communiqué, Cameron and Obama jointly affirmed their commitment to promote the rule of law in cyber-space to promote ‘fundamental freedoms’ and mutual security.⁸⁶ Following up on this value-driven approach in 2014 and 2015, they implemented various efforts to enhance cyber-security cooperation including collaboration between newly founded Computer Emergency Response Teams and increased information sharing.⁸⁷ Such cooperation was manifest in response to the 2017 WannaCry ransomware attack which effected Microsoft Windows users across the world. After several months of information sharing between the UK and US, as well as Australia, Canada, New Zealand and Japan, the UK and US publicly attributed the attack to North Korea.⁸⁸ All these countries but Japan are part of the Five Eyes intelligence network, which dates to the 1940s, which also publicly attributed the NotPetya cyber-attack on Ukraine to Russia in February 2018.⁸⁹ This was followed by a joint UK-US declaration warning of further Russian cyber-attacks in April that year.⁹⁰ Bilateral cooperation has been facilitated by long-standing multilateral security institutions, as in other areas of alignment.

Despite such cooperation, there was soon potential for rift in the face of security threats created by new technology. In February 2019, Pompeo warned

⁸⁵ ‘Joint statement on India-UK Virtual Summit’, 4 May 2021; ‘India, UK Take Part In Combined And Joint Exercise Konkan Shakti 2021’, 25 October 2021 [<https://www.navalnews.com/naval-news/2021/10/india-uk-take-part-in-combined-and-joint-exercise-konkan-shakti-2021/>]; ‘Carrier Strike Group 21 returns home’ [<https://medium.com/voices-of-the-armed-forces/carrier-strike-group-21-returns-home-3d54fd2e687c>].

⁸⁶ ‘US-UK Cyber Communiqué [2011]’ [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/62647/CyberCommunique-Final.pdf].

⁸⁷ ‘UK launches first national CERT’, 31 March 2014 [<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-launches-first-national-cert>]; ‘FACT SHEET: U.S.-United Kingdom Cybersecurity Cooperation’, 16 January 2015 [<https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/16/fact-sheet-us-united-kingdom-cybersecurity-cooperation>].

⁸⁸ ‘Press Briefing on the Attribution of the WannaCry Malware Attack to North Korea’, 19 December 2017 [<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/press-briefing-on-the-attribution-of-the-wannacry-malware-attack-to-north-korea-121917/>].

⁸⁹ Phil Muncaster, ‘Five Eyes Nations United in Blaming Russia for NotPetya’, *infosecurity*, 19 February 2018 [<https://www.infosecurity-magazine.com/news/five-eyes-united-blaming-russia/>].

⁹⁰ Ewen MacAskill, ‘US and UK blame Russia for ‘malicious’ cyber-offensive’, *The Guardian*, 16 April 2018 [<https://www.theguardian.com/technology/2018/apr/16/us-and-uk-blame-russia-for-malicious-cyber-offensive>].

that the company Huawei procured data for the Chinese state and was thus a security threat. This warning exemplified a growing concern among US intelligence and security leaders that Chinese companies were tools of the CCP, especially after Beijing passed a 2017 law requiring that ‘any organisation and citizen’ must cooperate ‘in national intelligence work’.⁹¹ Pompeo stated that the US may not be able to share intelligence with countries which acquire 5G from such companies because of this risk: this included the UK. UK National Cyber Security Centre head Ciaran Martin replied that the UK was independently managing any potential risks.⁹² But over months, Pompeo persisted in imploring British policymakers to abandon Huawei, prompting Hunt to state that the UK could not take any path that would jeopardise its intelligence relations with the US.⁹³ In July 2020, after the National Security Cyber Centre conducted its own technical review, Digital Secretary Oliver Dowden announced that Huawei-provided technology was to be completely removed from the UK by 2027.⁹⁴ Security alignment was thus maintained despite tensions.

More recently, the UK has increasingly approached cyber-space and new technologies as security issues which demand cooperation among democratic, ‘like-minded’ countries and has cooperated with the US on such terms. This approach involves collaboration on technology and also in promoting liberal, democratic norms in cyber-space. In May 2020, it suggested that a D-10 group (of ten democracies) coordinate to acquire 5G from secure sources, and in April 2021 Jeremy Flemming, Director of Government Communication Headquarters [GCHQ], stated that ‘the lack of agreed norms [in cyberspace] can allow illiberal states to wreak havoc online’.⁹⁵ Although Johnson ultimately did not follow through on his suggestion of replacing the G7 with a D-10 at the former’s June 2021 summit, this approach has continued to characterise UK policy and the kind of alignment it seeks with the US.⁹⁶ In November 2021, GCHQ and US Cyber Command conducted a joint Cyber Management Review with the stated aim ‘to generate shared insights, improve collective defence, and impose common costs

⁹¹ Richard McGregor, *Xi Jinping: The Backlash* (Lowy Institute for International Policy, 2019), p. 55.

⁹² Jack Stubbs and Foo Yun Chee, ‘Britain managing Huawei risks, has no evidence of spying: official’, Reuters, 20 February 2019 [<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-huawei-europe-britain-idUSKCN1Q91PM>].

⁹³ Stephen Castle, ‘Pompeo Attacks China and Warns Britain Over Huawei Security Risks’, *The New York Times*, 8 May 2019 [<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/05/08/technology/pompeo-huawei-britain.html>].

⁹⁴ ‘Huawei to be removed from UK 5G networks by 2027’, 14 July 2020

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/huawei-to-be-removed-from-uk-5g-networks-by-2027>].

⁹⁵ ‘UK seeks alliance to avoid reliance on Chinese tech: The Times’, Reuters, 28 May 2020

[<https://www.reuters.com/article/us-britain-tech-coalition/uk-seeks-alliance-to-avoid-reliance-onchinese-tech-the-times-idUSKBN2343JW>]; ‘A World of Possibilities: leading the way in cyber and technology’

[https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hnK3-h1fUSY&t=0s&ab_channel=ImperialCollegeLondon].

⁹⁶ Mercedes Page, ‘The D10 is dead, long live the ... Network of Liberty?’, *The Interpreter*, 24 January 2022

[<https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/d10-dead-long-live-network-liberty>].

for malicious cyber activity undermining the international rules-based order'.⁹⁷ UK-US cyber-security alignment is thus linked to the desire to extend the norms of the rules-based order into the sphere of internet governance, and it stands in opposition to assertions of 'internet sovereignty' from countries including China and Russia. The 2022 National Cyber Strategy stated the UK's desire to resist 'the pressure of authoritarian states towards fragmentation and their idea of internet sovereignty', an alternative model of internet governance by which states determine their own laws, potentially facilitating censorship and surveillance.⁹⁸ The UK has followed through on the value-driven approach to cyber-space and new technology expressed in the 2011 Cameron-Obama communiqué, and UK-US security alignment has been shaped by this commitment to advancing the rules-based order in the face of new challenges.

Conclusion

Fears that Brexit signalled a British departure from the rules-based international order appear to be exaggerated. In the first instance, leaving the EU was unlikely to lead to a wholesale break with the order because Euroscepticism was underpinned by neoliberal views which actually dovetailed with the rules-based order in championing free trade. The UK has also faced four key pressures which have shaped its foreign policy: increasing Chinese and Russian assertiveness and aggression; the increased importance of free trade in the Indo-Pacific; an America increasingly questioning its multilateral commitments; a global decline of democracy and relative advance of non-liberal standards for global governance. UK policymakers have perceived these pressures in a value-driven way and have repeatedly reaffirmed their commitment to the rules-based order and described the international sphere as characterised by a contest between democratic and authoritarian states. The case study of security alignment with the US reveals that these publicly expressed perceptions of and responses to global politics have been sincere. The UK has aligned with the US in both bilateral and multilateral arrangements, some of which have endured since the 1940s and some which have only recently been created. UK-US security alignment may thus be characterised as a reforming approach to conserving the rules-based order.

⁹⁷ 'UK and US defence conduct Cyber Management Review', 18 November 2021

[<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-us-defence-conduct-cyber-management-review>].

⁹⁸ Shannon, Tiezzi, 'Xi Jinping Vows no Compromise on 'Cyber Sovereignty'', *The Diplomat*, 16 December 2015

[<https://thediplomat.com/2015/12/china-vows-no-compromise-on-cyber-sovereignty/>]; Alena Epifanova, 'Deciphering Russia's "Sovereign Internet Law": Tightening Control and Accelerating the Splinternet', DGAP Analysis No. 2, 2020.

This alignment also endured the challenges posed by the Trump presidency. The Trump administration presented problems to European allies in questioning the value of ongoing cooperation and in unilaterally taking action which clashed with European policy. However, that did not lead the UK toward disengagement with the US in Europe, the Middle East or in cyber-space. Moreover, whilst the Trump administration pursued a relatively independent security strategy in the Indo-Pacific, it was driven by the same conceptions and interests as British policies – including both an increasing commitment to free trade in the economically dynamic region and a desire to counter growing Chinese assertiveness – and has since led to institutionalised security cooperation in the region.

What does this case study tell us about the current crisis of the rules-based order? Firstly, we should not assess the crisis by looking at shock events such as Brexit or the election of Trump in isolation. A nation can object or even abandon particular aspects of the order whilst still maintaining strong commitments to other parts of it. We should avoid asking binary questions about whether a particular nation does or does not support the order at large. Instead, we should assess a nation's relationship with the multiple different institutions, strategic concepts and arrangements which together constitute the order. Secondly, it shows that individual states can conduct independent foreign policies in a way that cultivates multilateral cooperation to support the rules-based order. This dynamic is evident in the UK's development of relations with important actors in Asia which have become intertwined with broader US-initiatives to support a 'free and open Indo-Pacific'. Lastly, it shows that such cooperation to meet new challenges to the order is deepening and is likely to continue in this direction because this security cooperation is driven by enduring ideological preferences and coinciding interests.

It therefore seems somewhat exaggerated to conclude with Ikenberry and Fukuyama that the rules-based international order is collapsing from within. This does not mean that the order is not, as the same scholars claim, in crisis. But it does mean that, at least in the case of security, it might be prudent to focus more on the external challenges than on the internal ones in order to understand how this crisis may be addressed.

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