



***THE REFRESH OF THE INTEGRATED  
REVIEW: PUTTING BRITAIN AT THE  
HEART OF THE ATLANTIC-PACIFIC  
WORLD***

BY JAMES ROGERS

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On Monday, His Majesty's (HM) Government [released](#) the refresh of the Integrated Review (IRR), the re-appraisal of the wide-ranging foreign and defense policy appraisal ordered by Boris Johnson when he became prime minister. His successor, Liz Truss, commissioned the refresh during her brief stint in 10 Downing Street, and incumbent Rishi Sunak continued it. The worsening geopolitical situation, especially Russia's attempt to seize Ukraine by force but also the People's Republic of China's attempts to change the international order, motivated the refresh.

**The worsening geopolitical environment**

Like the Integrated Review of March 2021, the IRR establishes the parameters for British global engagement in an era of "systemic competition," described as "the dominant geopolitical trend and the main driver of the deteriorating security environment." However, unlike the Integrated Review, the IRR defines systemic competition as the "growing convergence of authoritarian states" to the extent that they are "working together to undermine the international system or remake it in their image." In addition, the IRR sees the competition of the late 2010s and early 2020s deteriorating into an outright struggle:

*Since...[2021], Russia's illegal invasion of Ukraine, weaponisation of energy and food supplies and irresponsible nuclear rhetoric, combined with China's more aggressive stance in the South China Sea and the Taiwan Strait, are threatening to create a world defined by danger, disorder and division—and an international order more favourable to authoritarianism.*

**Key threats and challenges**

In keeping with the growing emphasis on interstate rivalry and geopolitical confrontation, gone are the days when British security strategies emphasized terrorism or failed states as the principal threat to the United Kingdom and its allies and partners. This is not to say that HM Government discounts such threats. Instead, they are deprioritized in relation to the more significant threat from large or aggressive authoritarian states.

Unsurprisingly, given the character of the kleptocratic regime in the Kremlin and its ongoing offensive against Ukraine, Russia is characterized in the IRR similarly to the Integrated Review, i.e., as a "direct" and "acute" threat to British interests. There is no shadow of doubt that HM Government sees Russia as the most immediate threat to the United Kingdom and its allies and partners, particularly in the Euro-Atlantic. The British stance towards Russia has even hardened since 2021. While the United Kingdom is open to cooperation with the Kremlin, Russia has to cease to be a rogue state. Until then, HM Government plans to treat Vladimir Putin's regime as a hostile opponent, if not an outright enemy.

The IRR goes further than the Integrated Review in reframing the PRC. While the Integrated Review described the PRC as a "systemic competitor," the IRR calls the PRC an "epoch-defining systemic challenge." An entire box is devoted to the nature of the threat the PRC—under the control of the Chinese Communist Party—poses to the British state and the international order more generally:

*The CCP is increasingly explicit in its aim to shape a China-centric international order more favourable to its authoritarian system, and*

*pursuing this ambition through a wide-ranging strategy—shaping global governance, in ways that undermine individual rights and freedoms, and pursuing coercive practices. China's deepening partnership with Russia and Russia's growing cooperation with Iran in the wake of the invasion of Ukraine are two developments of particular concern.*

This language may not satisfy more pugnacious parliamentarians in Westminster but represents a considerable hardening in how HM Government sees the PRC. The IRR strongly confirms Sunak's assertion that the United Kingdom considers the “golden era” proclaimed in 2015 by then-Chancellor of the Exchequer George Osborne to be over.

### **Towards a new British geostrategy?**

Regarding geography, the IRR explains that both the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theaters matter to the United Kingdom, with the former taking priority but the latter becoming increasingly important. The IRR confirms that the “tilt” to the Indo-Pacific, outlined in the Integrated Review of 2021, is complete and that the United Kingdom will prioritize establishing a more solid “footing” in the region. The Indo-Pacific is no longer a novelty but a pillar of British foreign policy. The IRR goes further than any recent British or foreign strategy by viewing the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific as a single geostrategic space.

The IRR marks an ongoing evolution in British grand strategy, much like the Integrated Review it updates; not only does it confirm the return of belief in the importance of national sovereignty and **resilience**, but it also represents a movement away from post-Cold War neoliberal mantras, such as limiting the power of the state and forging a “rules-based international system.” Building on the Integrated Review of 2021, the IRR confirms that the United Kingdom will no longer seek to uphold this fraying system but push back against systemic rivals' hegemonic regional or global designs. HM Government's objective is to use British power to keep the international order of tomorrow free and open.

Unsurprisingly, then, the IRR emphasizes the importance of **shaping** the international environment through “balancing, competing and cooperating across the main arenas of systemic competition” while “working with all who support an open and stable international order and the protection of global public goods.” The IRR positions the United Kingdom as a committed multilateralist but one that will not hesitate to bypass existing structures or create new ones to thwart expansionist autocracy. It also calls for new instruments of economic statecraft and tighter cooperation with Japan, Canada, South Korea, and Australia to craft a favorable economic order.

Given the extent of the threat from Russia and the PRC, the IRR also emphasizes a posture of **effective deterrence**. This posture will attempt to “bring together the wider levers of state power to increase the costs of aggression by hostile actors above and below the threshold of armed conflict.” Plainly, the United Kingdom will use its naval and armed forces more dynamically to constrain hostile actors, just as it will forward deploy assets in its growing array of military facilities—with new bases opened over the past five years in Bahrain, Oman, and Norway and a reciprocal access agreement signed with Japan—to reassure partners and deter aggressors. In particular, HM Government intends to “contain and challenge Russia's ability and intent to disrupt UK, Euro-Atlantic and wider international security.”

Finally, the United Kingdom plans to generate **strategic advantage** by capitalizing on national strengths. This may sound pedestrian: all countries work to enhance their strengths. Instead, it is an admission that British power has never resulted from the country's size, but from the economic and political structures and instruments the British people have created to protect and extend their interests. As in the past, HM Government will have to work harder to uphold British influence in a world of systemic confrontation by leveraging areas where the country excels, such as maritime industries and science and technology.

## Conclusion

With the Integrated Review of 2021, British foreign policy was already on a more robust trajectory. This review shifted and energized the United Kingdom's strategic posture, which has continued to toughen despite the country's domestic political changes. Consequently, Britain has racked up an impressive list of foreign policy successes, from co-creating AUKUS and deepening relations with Japan and ASEAN in the Indo-Pacific to leading the way in assisting Ukraine and containing Russia in the Euro-Atlantic, especially in Northern and Eastern Europe. The United Kingdom has also boosted defense spending: the IRR specified a £5 billion hike for the nuclear enterprise and new munitions, while Jeremy Hunt, the Chancellor of the Exchequer, added an additional £6 billion in his spending review three days later. With these actions and increases in defense investment, HM Government has confirmed its "tilt" to the Indo-Pacific and re-emphasized its centrality to the defense of Europe. Global Britain and European Britain are not mutually exclusive.

But it is with AUKUS that the United Kingdom has shown the extent of its determination to prevent authoritarian powers from establishing hierarchical forms of international order. It is no surprise that the publication of the IRR and the confirmation of AUKUS occurred on the same day. AUKUS, perhaps the most significant minilateral arrangement to materialize in a generation, confirms Britain's emergence as an Indo-Pacific power and the region's connectivity with the Euro-Atlantic. HM Government's participation in AUKUS demonstrates the emergence of the Atlantic-Pacific and the United Kingdom's willingness to share sensitive strategic technology—in this case, designs for nuclear-powered attack submarines—with close allies and partners to actively constrain the PRC. The United Kingdom remains a vital ally and partner in pursuit of a free and open Atlantic-Pacific.

*PacNet commentaries and responses represent the views of the respective authors. Alternative viewpoints are always welcomed and encouraged.*