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# How allies 'position' the United Kingdom

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## Foreword

In my role as the Prime Minister's Trade Envoy to Algeria and Lebanon and a member of the House of Lords' International Agreements Committee, it is important to remain on the lookout for independent work which facilitates understanding of the United Kingdom's (UK) role in the world, whether that be in the Middle East and North Africa where my work is focused, or further afield.

In this paper, Dr Philip Shetler-Jones, a scholar with significant expertise in British-Japanese relations and Indo-Pacific geopolitics, delivers in that regard by focusing on how our key allies – the United States (US), Germany and Japan – 'frame' and 'position' the UK as an international actor. These allies matter: the US is our closest and most powerful ally and the backbone both of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the prevailing international order; Germany is the most influential country on the European continent, our neighbourhood; Japan is our closest Indo-Pacific partner insofar as it is sponsoring British membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), which it chairs.

These allies also matter because we need their assistance in bolstering collective security, especially in an age of 'intensifying geopolitical competition' as put forth in the Integrated Review. If we fail, hostile states – such as Russia – and 'systemic competitors' – such as China – will successfully continue to revise the prevailing international order.

For these reasons, we need to better understand our allies' strategic needs and objectives, not least as the UK has often acted as a custodian of international alliances. We also need to do more to understand which allies are likely to be the most helpful in assisting us in keeping the international order free and open.

Where Dr Shetler-Jones' paper adds value is that it identifies how the US, Germany and Japan employ specific forms of 'discursive statecraft' to instrumentalise and restrain the UK, as well as reinforce their own identities, at the international level. This helps us understand what those allies want from us, how their interests intersect and



conflict with one another, and how we should respond to their positioning efforts.

A timely intervention, this paper deserves to be carefully read.

## **The Lord Risby**

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## Executive summary

1. Asking how allies ‘position’ the United Kingdom (UK) might seem odd, or even a violation of the spirit of friendship that is supposed to accompany alliance relations. Allies may be friends but have diverging interests or common interests differently felt. Pressure, coercion, and threats of abandonment are also features of alliance relations. While genuine feelings of friendship are often present and serve to rally public support for an alliance and oil the wheels of professional relationships, the logic at the core of alliances is also instrumental and contingent. The way allies position Britain is therefore a legitimate area of enquiry.
2. Three key allies have been identified: the United States (US), as Britain’s preeminent strategic ally and a treaty ally for over 70 years; Germany, as the dominant power on the European continent – the UK’s neighbourhood; Japan, a key partner in Britain’s Indo-Pacific ‘tilt’, with whom the country has established a ‘quasi alliance’.
3. Different kinds of positioning ‘moves’ used by allies to instrumentalise and restrain the UK, as well as reinforce their own identities, can be theorised. In the case of the allies examined here, each type of move is in use, but to varying degrees. A dominant move tends to emerge as a characteristic of each alliance relationship, reflecting its power balance, patterns of dependency and policy alignment.
4. In the case of the US, a lot of positioning is connected with the idea of the ‘special relationship’ with Britain, which has the potential to direct and restrain the UK’s sense of its policy choices, but is also an ingredient of the US’ own legitimacy. In the case of Germany, Britain is positioned as both partner and rival in different spheres of action and may also serve as an alter ego in aspects of national identity. This identity reinforcement move is present also in the case of Japan, but to emphasise similarity in a context where the UK is positioned positively and in ways that –



compared to the US and Germany – align with the ambitions of ‘Global Britain’.

5. Regardless of whether positioning is carried out by an adversary or an ally, and irrespective of an identifiable motive or intentionality, the effects of positioning by allies on the UK’s internal discourse seems to be of a magnitude that merits conscious appreciation, and closer analytical attention. As the saying goes, if you have a hole in your roof, the rain comes in whether the wind blows from the east or from the west.
6. The best response to positioning by allies is first of all to be more aware of it and attuned to the messages it sends about what the UK’s allies expect or want. When an ally’s positioning undermines British interests, the UK should not be afraid to call it out. As well as deterring careless comments, this also exercises a pro-active expression of national role and identity which will improve the health of the alliance relationship. Lastly, allies equipped with a more conscious awareness of the potential impact of positioning – deliberate or accidental – will be better provisioned to neutralise the use of positioning against their common interest, to sow suspicion, or to drive a wedge between them.

## 1.0 Introduction

Why ask how allies position us? After all, we are friends, aren't we?

Winston Churchill is supposed to have observed that there is only one thing more difficult than fighting alongside allies, and that is fighting without them.<sup>1</sup> True or not, he would not have been the first to have expressed mixed feelings about allies, which can come in a variety, from 'like-minded' to 'of convenience'. Although leaders reach for the metaphor of 'friendship' when talking about allies, it has to be admitted that allies are not necessarily the same as friends. A recent commentary on the importance of this distinction asserts that amid

the competitive world of international politics, even close allies have interests that diverge; even when they have common interests, they are not equally felt...unlike friendships – coercion, pressure, and threats of abandonment are often the coin of the realm.<sup>2</sup>

Although feelings of friendship are often present and may cement an alliance, the logic at the core of the relationship is also instrumental and contingent. Despite describing other constitutional states as 'the natural allies of this country', Lord Palmerston also asserted that 'We have no eternal allies, and we have no perpetual enemies. Our interests are eternal and perpetual, and those interests it is our duty to follow.'<sup>3</sup> Allies, even those on their most friendly terms, routinely spy on each other and often instrumentalise each other. So as well as considering how adversaries engage in 'discursive statecraft' against the United Kingdom (UK), it also pays to be aware of how allies and partners 'position' the country.

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<sup>1</sup> Kenneth Harris, 'Wartime Lies', *The New York Times*, 27/04/1997, <https://nyti.ms/2QxMYoS> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Porter and Josh Shiffrinson, 'Why we can't be friends with our allies', *Politico*, 22/10/2020, <https://politi.co/3dKwonn> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>3</sup> Cited in: David Brown, 'Lord Palmerston and the "civis Romanus sum" principle', 10 Downing Street, 20/03/2015, <https://bit.ly/3vjcXIb> (found: 22/04/2021) and Lord Palmerston, 'Treaty Of Adrianople – Charges Against Viscount Palmerston', *Hansard*, 01/03/1848, <https://bit.ly/3nhSfWt> (found: 22/04/2021).

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## The Council on Geostrategy's national positioning series

This paper is part of a series produced by the Council on Geostrategy to shed light on the political operations undertaken by foreign governments which aim to redefine the United Kingdom's position and role in the world. These operations, part of a broader approach which might be defined as 'discursive statecraft', can be undertaken by friend and foe, either to nudge a target country towards a different course of action or to silence and subdue it. The series focuses on five of the most significant countries to the UK: two competitors – Russia and China – and three allies and partners – Germany, Japan and the United States. The conceptual and methodological paper for the series can be found on the Council on Geostrategy's website.<sup>4</sup>

As part of the Council on Geostrategy's investigation into discursive statecraft, this paper sets out to examine how the United Kingdom (UK) is positioned in terms of its character and ranking as a world power in official statements by government representatives of the United States (US), Germany and Japan, and by the discourse of media and expert commentators in those countries. These allies have been selected for review because of their geostrategic importance:

- The US has remained Britain's preeminent strategic ally arguably for the last century, and a treaty ally for over 70 years;
- Germany, as well as being a key NATO ally, is economically and politically dominant in the European Union (EU) and sits in the priority region for UK security: continental Europe (still the case after Brexit and the 'tilt' to the Indo-Pacific, outlined in the recent Integrated Review);<sup>5</sup>
- Japan is central to the strategic rationale that underpins the Indo-Pacific 'tilt'. Although no longer a treaty ally, Japan and the UK have established a 'quasi alliance', and identify each other 'as the closest security partners respectively in Asia and Europe'.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> James Rogers, 'Discursive statecraft: Towards national positioning operations', Council on Geostrategy, 08/04/2021, <https://bit.ly/3moToN7> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>5</sup> 'Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy', Cabinet Office, 16/03/2021, <https://bit.ly/3vX8RGY> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>6</sup> See: Philip Shetler-Jones, 'Britain's Quasi Alliance with Japan', *Anglo-Japan Alliance*, 20/11/2018, <https://bit.ly/3xkgt73> (found: 22/04/2021) and 'Japan-UK Joint Declaration on Security Cooperation', 10 Downing Street, 31/08/2021, <https://bit.ly/3sVbQNY> (found: 22/04/2021).



For this reason, Japan is treated as an ally for the purposes of this study.

This Policy Paper proceeds in four sections. The next section lays out a theoretical framework for exploring why and how allies attempt to position one another. The following section looks at occasions where the US, Germany and Japan have responded to events with statements that look like positioning, before explaining the patterns or chains of meaning that emerge from specific examples. The final section makes some observations about what these examples suggest about the distinct character of those allies' relationships with the UK, as well as the practice of positioning by allies in general. The final section then concludes with a series of recommendations.



## 2.0 Positioning by allies: A framework for analysis

Alliances are a benefit that come with three hazards. The most obvious is the moral hazard of the ‘free ride’, or ‘buck passing’, in which the assistance provided to an ally works as an incentive for it to slacken off its efforts. A free-riding ally coasts along while making sure its partner bears the lion’s share of the burden. The second hazard is almost the opposite of that. An emboldened ally could start a conflict and force other allies to choose between abandoning it (probably ending the alliance and damaging one’s reputation as a reliable partner), or being drawn into a costly conflict against their will. Last, least dangerous but still uncomfortable, allies can cause embarrassment. Because alliances are often dressed up to make them analogous to relations of friendship, in the garb of shared values and emotional ties, when an ally acts at sharp variance with one’s values and traditions, it raises the question – how can one be so close to a country that does such unpalatable things?

One of the ways allies might seek to mitigate these risks is through forms of positioning similar to those explored in other papers in this series.<sup>7</sup> But the way allies engage in positioning is distinct from the way it is used by enemies or adversaries. In theory, at least three varieties of positioning can be proposed as a framework for analysis:

- The **instrumentalising** move: to direct an ally’s policy choices so that they align as much as possible with one’s own preferences. Usually it just takes a nudge but when one is dealing with a shirker or free rider it might need something more like a push. It is also a delicate move because push too hard and one can disempower one’s ally’s own agency or invite the accusation that an alliance has been instrumentalised to make the ally a vassal, or even, a client state. This is clearly a danger to the sustained value of an ally that requires a good dose of self-esteem and confidence

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<sup>7</sup> See: James Rogers, ‘Discursive statecraft: Towards national positioning operations’, Council on Geostrategy, 08/04/2021, <https://bit.ly/3moToN7> (found: 22/04/2021); Andrew Foxall, How Russia ‘positions’ the United Kingdom, Council on Geostrategy, 08/04/2021, <https://bit.ly/3scZdNj> (found: 22/04/2021); and Matthew Henderson, ‘How the Chinese Communist Party ‘positions’ the United Kingdom, 22/04/2021, <https://bit.ly/3nizzWq> (found: 22/04/2021).

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to mobilise when needed. Over-do the guidance and one's ally may go sour or just switch off, raising the risk that it might shirk or defect when it is most needed.

- The **restraining** move: to position an ally in a way that makes it less likely that it will take action with the potential to rebound with undesirable effects on one's own interests. One example is what Victor Cha, a former Director of Asian Affairs in the US National Security Council, called the 'powerplay', in which US alliance arrangements in East Asia after the Second World War contained features – command and control arrangements, limits on types of arms or amounts or ammunition – that were designed to make it harder for an ally to drag the US into an undesired conflict.<sup>8</sup> Another version discourages an ally from heading off in a policy direction where their capacities might be wasted from the point of view of one's alliance, or squandered and so less available when required. Finally, a restraining move could be triggered when a country that is an ally in one area is also a competitor in another; economic globalisation has made this a far from uncommon scenario.
- The **reinforcing** move: to construct or shape narratives about an ally with an eye to reinforce a message about one's own identity. Drawing attention to similarities – especially positive shared characteristics – can create a sense of reflected virtue, as if to say 'we are the kind of country that admirable countries like this are proud to be close to'. In that case, the mirroring effect is flattering to both parties. But this move also works the other way, by drawing out a difference in national character or policy that exhibits the complementary nature of the alliance. For example during John F. Kennedy's administration, Prime Minister Harold Macmillan is said to have flattered himself and his country's position by suggesting that the UK could act as a mature and wise Greece to the immature but awesome power of America's Rome.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Victor Cha, *Powerplay: The Origins of the American Alliance System in Asia* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2016).

<sup>9</sup> D. Richard Thorpe, *Supremacy: The Life of Harold Macmillan* (London: Pimlico, 2011).

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### 3.0 Allied positioning of the UK

A plethora of US, German and Japanese statements – from political leaders, officials and civil society – over the past decade exemplify all three kinds of positioning move, although with variable levels of emphasis and coherence.

#### *3.1 Positioning by the United States*

Since Britain's humiliation during the 1956 Suez Crisis, the UK-US relationship has been untroubled by strategic rivalry and maintained through exceptionally close military, intelligence and political cooperation. With the notable exception of the Vietnam War, the US could count on the UK as a highly interoperable ally in its wars, and as a customer and development partner of advanced defence equipment. The UK's senior position in NATO (uninterrupted as Deputy Supreme Commander since 1950), has had a stabilising effect on US interests in European security, just as Britain's European Union (EU) membership gave the US indirect influence on that organisation's policy on trade, defence, and tendencies toward 'strategic autonomy'. If one were to speculate on what an 'ideally-positioned' UK might look like to the US, it might be one economically able and politically willing to accompany the US in war, and embedded in institutions where it can encourage others to make choices that are aligned with American interests.

Three issues in the recent past have threatened to disrupt these ideal attributes, and thereby provoke positioning by the US: the vote for Brexit and subsequent negotiations with the EU, the decision to allow the Chinese company, Huawei, market access for 5G technology, and the British Government's defence spending choices in 2017-2018 and failure to commit to punishing Bashar al-Assad's regime for using chemical weapons in 2013.

#### **3.1.1 Instrumentalising the UK in the EU**

While the UK was positioned differently during the presidency of Donald Trump, under the administrations of Barack Obama and Joe Biden the UK's relationship with the EU has been positioned as a critical ingredient – almost a precondition – for the UK's continued



importance as a power and value as a US ally.<sup>10</sup> In turn, the US has implied that if the UK distances itself from the EU through a ‘hard’ Brexit or a more independent form of future UK–EU relationship, it can expect to become less important to the US. This instrumentalisation move blended flattery – if the UK remained in or close to the EU – with warnings about what might happen if it did not.

Visiting the UK in April 2016, Obama informed his British ally that ‘The United States wants a strong United Kingdom as a partner. And the United Kingdom is at its best when it's helping to lead a strong Europe. It leverages UK power to be part of the European Union.’<sup>11</sup> This message was projected throughout his presidency, as shown by this earlier statement from Jay Carney, Obama’s Press Secretary in 2013:

We welcome the prime minister’s call for Britain to remain in the EU and to retain a leading role in Europe’s institutions...We value our essential relationship with the UK, as well as our relationship with the European Union, which makes critical contributions to peace, prosperity, and security in Europe and around the world. We believe that the United Kingdom is stronger as a result of its European Union membership, and we believe the European Union is stronger as a result of having the United Kingdom in the EU.<sup>12</sup>

It is only fair to point out that under Prime Minister David Cameron, the British Government’s preference was also for the UK to remain inside the EU, so US positioning was aligned with – even supported – British policy. At the same time, both Obama and his spokesperson gently implied that outside the EU the UK would be weaker and less instrumentally useful to the US. This narrative of a diminished post-Brexit UK, but one that retains influence in Brussels, continued to be a US narrative even long after the referendum. As

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<sup>10</sup> It is important to point out that, due to the nature of American democracy and the power of domestic political forces in the US, alternative positions are sometimes heard. For example, Rick Scott, a US Senator and former Governor of Florida, hailed Brexit as a ‘watershed moment’ allowing for even deeper US–UK ties. He called for a ‘more united threat posed by communist China’ and ties this in with a deepening of the ‘special relationship’. Rick Scott, ‘US and UK have a golden opportunity to strengthen the special relationship and stand strong against China’, Senator Rick Scott, 05/06/2020, <https://bit.ly/3dT81op> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>11</sup> ‘Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron in Joint Press Conference’, White House, 22/04/2016, <https://bit.ly/3tP2Jz5> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>12</sup> Ned Simons, ‘United States “Very Clear”, Britain Must Not Leave The European Union’, *Huffington Post*, 23/02/2013, <https://bit.ly/2S2tG4k> (found: 22/04/2021).

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Victoria Nuland, now President Joe Biden's nominee Under Secretary of State for Political Affairs, asserted in December 2020:

It's going to be very, very important for all of us to relink hands with the UK and ensure that London stays a strong global player and is well docked into the US-EU conversation, the democracy conversation, and is really the global Britain that they have said they want to be.<sup>13</sup>

By placing the EU and Britain on the same level – or even, the EU-US relationship above that of the UK-US alliance (insofar as the UK is described as merely 'docked into' the US-EU relationship) – this narrative seems intended to instrumentalise the UK by warning the British Government that it still risks losing influence in Washington unless it works with the EU.

### 3.1.2 Restraining the UK on Huawei

An example of the restraining move can be seen in the US response to UK debates on whether to adopt Huawei as a supplier of 5G telecommunication technology. This led to US suggestions that the close intelligence sharing aspect of the US-UK 'special relationship' might be downgraded if the UK opted to adopt the Chinese technology company – a narrative projected from across the US political spectrum.

Robert Strayer, then US Deputy Assistant Secretary for Cyber and Communications, said in this context: 'If countries adopt untrustworthy vendors in 5G technology, it will jeopardise our ability to share information at the highest levels.'<sup>14</sup> Senator Lindsay Graham tweeted that 'This decision has the potential to jeopardize US-UK intelligence sharing agreements and could greatly complicate a US-UK free trade agreement. I hope the British government will reconsider its decision.'<sup>15</sup> Likewise, Liz Cheney, the US Congresswoman and daughter of a former Vice President, warned that 'By allowing Huawei into their 5G network, Boris Johnson has chosen the surveillance state over the

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<sup>13</sup> Quoted in: Jamie Dettmer, 'Role Reversal for US and Post-Brexit Britain', *Voice of America*, 22/01/2021, <https://bit.ly/3aE6TSN> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>14</sup> 'Huawei: US cyber-boss tells UK to "think again" on Huawei', BBC News, 21/02/2020, <https://bbc.in/3u256ih> (found: 22/04/2018).

<sup>15</sup> Quoted in: 'Huawei decision could "greatly complicate" a US-Britain free trade agreement: Graham', *Reuters*, 28/01/2020, <https://reut.rs/3vdrwry3> (found: 22/04/2021).





special relationship.’ She went on: ‘Tragic to see our closest ally, a nation Ronald Reagan once called “incandescent with courage”, turn away from our alliance and the cause of freedom.’<sup>16</sup>

Here, US leaders would surely understand the positioning power of the ‘special relationship in peril’ by observing the alacrity with which it has often been taken up in the British press. For example, when Mike Pompeo, then US Secretary of State, visited the UK in 2019, the story ran: ‘Mike Pompeo warns UK special relationship is under threat’.<sup>17</sup> When one looks past the headline, the actual quote suggests he did nothing of the sort. The closest he came was in reference to Margaret Thatcher, when he prompted his audience: ‘Ask yourself: would the Iron Lady be silent when China violates the sovereignty of nations through corruption or coercion?’<sup>18</sup>

British sensitivity to any hint of downgrading the special relationship is more than a matter of pride, because some things that make the relationship ‘special’ – notably intelligence arrangements but also nuclear agreements – are central to the UK’s strategic capabilities. The UK nuclear deterrent may be operationally independent but relies on American facilities in King’s Bay, Georgia, to service the Trident missiles. US inferences on downgrading the special relationship in areas where there is a degree of dependency on the British side – intelligence and nuclear – therefore can be effective restraining moves to coax Britain towards preferred US courses of action.

### 3.1.3 Reinforcing the ‘special relationship’

Since Winston Churchill’s 1946 ‘Iron Curtain’ speech, the ‘special relationship’ has become the core rhetorical emblem of the UK-US alliance. Over time, the development of the ‘Five Eyes’ intelligence group and UK-US nuclear sharing agreements gave it substance. Despite many ups and downs, this ‘special relationship’ is very much alive – and not only in the UK, where it is often thought to be a key element of Britain’s global reach. As Nikki Haley, then US Ambassador to the United Nations, stated on the occasion of Russia’s poisoning of the Skripals in Salisbury:

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<sup>16</sup> ‘Huawei decision jolts UK-US ‘special relationship’ at sensitive time’, *Financial Times*, 28/01/2020, <https://on.ft.com/3sMuxTu> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>17</sup> ‘Mike Pompeo warns UK special relationship under threat’, *The Week*, 09/05/2019, <https://bit.ly/3xhU8qV> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.





The United States stands in absolute solidarity with Great Britain. [...] No two nations enjoy a stronger bond than that of the United States and the United Kingdom. Ours is truly a special relationship, when our friends in Great Britain face a challenge, the United States will always be there for them, always.<sup>19</sup>

For the US, the ‘special relationship’ is undoubtedly instrumentalised to flatter and coax or restrain the UK in relation to favoured US policy positions. For example, in June 2018, excerpts from a leaked letter from Jim Mattis, then US Secretary of Defence, to Gavin Williamson, then UK Secretary of State for Defence, were published in *The Sun*:

I am concerned that your ability to continue to provide this critical military foundation for diplomatic success is at risk of erosion. A global nation like the UK, with interests and commitments around the world, will require a level of defence spending beyond what we would expect from allies with only regional interests...It is in the best interest of both our nations for the UK to remain the US partner of choice.<sup>20</sup>

Whether or not the letter had been leaked to put pressure on Her Majesty’s Treasury to provide more money for the Ministry of Defence, one cannot know. However, this story painted the ‘special relationship’ in a less than flattering light, positioning the UK as a shirker whose efforts were inadequate in helping the US to uphold international peace.

American leaders must surely know that the faintest suggestion that the US might downgrade or develop another ‘special relationship’ – with France, for instance – has often made British leaders jittery. When Philip Hammond, then Foreign Secretary, was asked about reports of a renewed French–American alliance in 2013, he said:

It’s certainly a reversal of the usual position and it will be an uncomfortable place for many people in the British armed forces

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<sup>19</sup> ‘Salisbury poisoning attack: “US stands in solidarity with Britain”’, BBC News, 14/03/2018, <https://bbc.in/3xmMPOB> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>20</sup> ‘US defence secretary intervenes in UK military budget row’, *The Guardian*, 02/07/2018, <https://bit.ly/3aCyXWH> (found: 22/04/2021).

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who are used to working alongside the Americans as an everyday, normal course of business.<sup>21</sup>

But as a positioning move, the ‘special relationship’ is also used to reinforce America’s own identity, and not only by ‘rooting’ the US to its cultural and historical birthplace. Americans are often concerned about how their power is perceived around the world; an entire cottage industry – focused on ‘soft power’ – has emerged to improve Americans’ understanding about how the different dimensions of their power might be deployed counterproductively.<sup>22</sup> Indeed, American leaders prefer to see their actions legitimised, both for domestic and international reasons. The US deploys the term ‘rogue state’ to admonish countries that depart from the international order, of which the US sees itself as leader. The UK – as the previous superpower and birthplace of parliamentary democracy – supports US leadership more than any other country in the world. The ‘special’ value of UK endorsement can be seen in the recent case when the British Parliament withheld support for military action against the Assad regime in Syria in 2013, apparently prompting a reversal of US presidential policy.<sup>23</sup>

In sum, these three examples show the US positioning the UK in a privileged role, but one that is as conditional and fragile as it is ‘special’. The suggestion is that UK power and status are derived from the utility of its position (in the EU, or compared to France), and its fidelity to US preferences, rather than something organic or intrinsic. At the same time, US positioning moves reinforce its own identity, not least as a legitimate international leader.

## 3.2 Positioning by Germany

As a large export economy with a residual military allergy and a neighbour with regional ‘leadership’ ambitions (i.e., France), Germany benefits from UK policies that support an open international order, strengthen European security through US involvement and NATO or the

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<sup>21</sup> ‘UK-US special relationship in danger, warns Philip Hammond’, *The Guardian*, 30/08/2013, <https://bit.ly/3axF8eH> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>22</sup> For the best example, see: Joseph Nye, *Soft Power: The Means To Success In World Politics* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Public Affairs, 2005).

<sup>23</sup> John Kerry, former US Secretary of State, explicitly blamed Britain’s decision in 2013 for the US reversal. See: David Smith, ‘John Kerry links Britain to derailing of Obama’s plan for intervention in Syria’, *The Guardian*, 05/01/2017, <https://bit.ly/3eTrrI9> (found: 22/04/2021).



EU, and offer opportunities to balance against European regional powers. One might reasonably speculate that for Germany an ideally positioned UK would be an active but principled international actor, without competing head-on with German commercial specialisations, and a team player in the institutions that provide defence and structure political relations in Europe. In German eyes, the UK had broadly conformed to this profile, at least up to the Brexit referendum in 2016.

### 3.2.1 Instrumentalising a transatlantic partner

The German positioning of the UK as an ally is related to the role played by the US in German security. As Angela Merkel, German Chancellor, expressed in a speech to the UK Parliament in 2014:

despite the differences of opinion between us and our partners on the other side of the Atlantic, it has always been true to say, and is still true today: we – the United States and Europe – could not wish for better partners. Our relations are of prime importance – and the United Kingdom is an important, if not the most important, anchor in this relationship.<sup>24</sup>

This association of the British and Americans carried over into the years of the administration of Donald Trump, in which German trust in the UK as an ‘anchor’ in the transatlantic relationship began to falter. Indeed, the association in Germany between ‘Brexit’ and ‘Trump’ was perhaps part of what led Merkel to call the trustworthiness of the UK into doubt. In 2017, a headline in *The Guardian* said ‘Angela Merkel: EU cannot completely rely on the US and Britain any more’.<sup>25</sup> While this was not exactly what Merkel said, she departed sharply from the previous narrative insofar as she divided the UK and US from ‘we Europeans’, who ‘must really take our fate into our own hands.’ She went on: ‘Of course in friendship with the United States of America, in friendship with Great Britain, and as good neighbours wherever it is possible in friendship with other countries, even with Russia’.<sup>26</sup> Not only is Merkel segregating ‘we Europeans’ from the UK (and denying

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<sup>24</sup> Angela Merkel, Speech: ‘Speech by Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel in London’, Parliament of the United Kingdom, 27/02/2014, <https://bit.ly/3vjTmrE> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>25</sup> ‘Angela Merkel: EU cannot completely rely on US and Britain any more’, *The Guardian*, 28/05/2017, <https://bit.ly/3gBlbYj> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.



Britain's European identity), but she is also repositioning the UK and the US alongside Russia.

However, with the Brexit negotiations complete, a change of administration in the US, and the end of the Merkel era approaching, the instrumental move positioning the UK as a valuable ally for European or even global security may be ripe for a fresh approach.

### 3.2.2 Restraining a 'new competitor'

On the one hand, the UK is seen in Germany as a potential balancer in terms of French-German relations (e.g., on neoliberal economic policy), and at the same time a complementary partner on aspects of German policy where the UK and large parts of Germany's establishment are in broad agreement, like on the importance of the transatlantic alliance. On the other hand, referring to Brexit, Merkel warned that 'Now we will have a new competitor at our door in the form of Great Britain.'<sup>27</sup>

Merkel's positioning of the UK as a competitor was not an off-the-cuff remark. Earlier that year, speaking to reporters after a meeting at the Elysée Palace in October 2019, she outlined a wide range of areas where Berlin and Paris would aim to cooperate more closely, adding that 'We will do all this in the knowledge that with the departure of Great Britain, a potential competitor will of course emerge for us.' She went on: 'That is to say, in addition to China and the United States of America, there will be Great Britain as well.'<sup>28</sup>

As the implications of a 'hard' Brexit became more clear, the narrative of the UK as an economic or even systemic competitor appeared in the wider continental European discourse. In a speech, Josep Borrell, the EU High Representative for Foreign and Security Policy, mirrored Merkel's position on the UK:

On substance, we count on the UK to continue to share our main interests and values. This is true at the macro-level of promoting the "rules-based global order" and protecting open, democratic societies, but also in concrete policy areas such as climate, development and many regional files. In some specific cases, the

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<sup>27</sup> 'Merkel voices caution and optimism on Boris and Brexit at EU leaders' summit', *DW*, 13/12/2019, <https://bit.ly/3tPN9Dk> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>28</sup> Rym Momtaz, 'Merkel sees post-Brexit UK as "potential competitor" to EU', *Politico*, 13/10/2019, <https://politi.co/3tPvbRb> (found: 22/04/2021).



UK may want to diverge, putting its own accents, and we will have to manage these cases pragmatically. In short, the UK will be a key ally and strategic partner on the world stage. But in some instances it will also be an assertive competitor.<sup>29</sup>

Of course EU officials do not simply read from a script provided by a particular member state – even one as influential as Germany – but the alignment of perceptions is significant.

### 3.2.3 Reinforcing trust in ‘Europe’

In German eyes, Britain’s reputation has suffered since 2016.<sup>30</sup> As Sir Paul Lever, a former British Ambassador to Germany and a close observer of German politics, has noted: ‘the German media’s reporting on the UK has become increasingly uncompromising’. He goes on: ‘the picture presented is of a country to be pitied, one whose leadership is incompetent and corrupt, whose democratic institutions are crumbling, whose economy is on the point of collapse and whose population has been manipulated into voting for extremists.’<sup>31</sup>

Part of this may be related to reinforcing Germany’s post-Second World War identity. By positioning Brexiting Britain in such morally negative terms, Germans may be trying to shore up the EU as a saviour of their country due to the shame and humiliation of the Nazi period. As Diana Zimmerman, a German journalist, explained in *The Independent* a year after the Brexit referendum:

As a German...rejecting the European Union, specifically the idea of European solidarity, is so difficult to understand it is almost unforgivable, mainly, of course, because Europe saved us...the EU was an institutionalisation of a painful recognition in the wake of the Second World War – nationalism was the origin of fascism...It is difficult to see Brexit as anything other than an expression of a

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<sup>29</sup> ‘After Brexit, how can the EU and UK best cooperate on foreign policy?’, European External Action Service, 29/01/2021, <https://bit.ly/3gCiPIs> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>30</sup> Judith Mishke, ‘Just 37 percent of Germans see UK as trustworthy partner, poll says’, *Politico*, 02/08/2019, <https://politi.co/3h5ffGX> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>31</sup> Paul Lever, ‘What Do the Germans Make of the UK?’, Royal United Services Institute, 20/08/2020, <https://bit.ly/32RBI1T> (found: 22/04/2021).



feeling of superiority; we're better off without you. Because we are better.<sup>32</sup>

The more Brexit is stigmatised, the more effectively this narrative about the EU affirms Germany's moral recovery.

When aspects of the Withdrawal Agreement involving Northern Ireland intensified strains in the relationship, Britain's positioning as an untrustworthy ally returned. As Detlef Seif, a German parliamentarian and the Brexit rapporteur for the parliamentary group of Merkel's conservatives, told *The Spectator*:

The United Kingdom was for me, in the past, always a state that upheld the rule of law and with which one could negotiate. But with this behaviour, Britain is joining the ranks of despots and regimes like those in Russia, Turkey, China and North Korea. I don't think Britain wants to be included in that group, but it has earned that classification.<sup>33</sup>

Positioning is motivated by an obscure mix of unconscious and conscious motivations, which makes divining strategic intent a somewhat speculative exercise. However, one might look for example at the German emphasis on trustworthiness and wonder what sort of response it might elicit from the UK. Nobody likes to be seen as untrustworthy, so it would be understandable if this was taken as a provocation, prompting the UK (again, consciously or otherwise) to react with soothing gestures of reassurance, such as commitment to formal agreements on regulations or foreign and security policy cooperation with the EU or with Germany itself. Perhaps by coincidence, these would be desirable outcomes from a German point of view, and open opportunities for a fresh round of instrumentalising moves.

So in summary, just as the EU policy towards the People's Republic of China is expressed in terms of a trinity (cooperation partner, economic competitor, systemic rival), German positioning of the UK has three dimensions, reflecting each form of positioning move:

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<sup>32</sup> 'This is what we really think about Brexit in Germany', *The Independent*, 10/08/2017, <https://bit.ly/3sRVUvc> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>33</sup> Constantin Eckner, 'Merkel ally claims 'Britain is joining the ranks of despots'', *The Spectator*, 18/09/2020, <https://bit.ly/3esynff> (found: 22/04/2021).





instrumentalising a transatlantic ally, restraining an economic ‘rival’ and reinforcing the German vision of a Europe built on trust.

### *3.3 Positioning by Japan*

A recent article on leadership Shinzo Abe’s leadership in Japan’s grand strategy gives a precise description of how positioning is seen to work in Japan: ‘For Abe, existing narratives hindered domestic appetite for a wider range of political possibilities and were being used by other states to limit Japan’s international presence.’<sup>34</sup>

What would an ideally positioned Britain look like for Japan? As a wealthy, economically mature but vulnerable country with limits on its ability to deploy military power, Japan needs allies to deter its adversaries, keep the international economic order open, and limit strategic dependence on the US. Japan sees that the UK has the muscle memory and latent capacity to help it achieve these objectives, but it is also aware of British tendencies towards isolationism and self-doubt. Japan therefore has an interest in positioning the UK as an active and principled ally that looks beyond its region and narrow self-interest to fulfil a larger destiny.

Japan’s positioning of the UK over the last decade has been perhaps the least discomfiting of the case studies examined here, as it presents a generally positive view of the UK. It is also remarkably deft in its choice of language and tone, steering well clear of the risk of being seen to ‘push’ Britain. Finally, it has broadly gone with the grain of UK policy. In doing so, it contrasts with the US and German narratives and exhibits the application of identity reinforcement moves along with comparatively more tactful instrumentalisation and restraining moves.

#### **3.3.1 Instrumentalising an Indo-Pacific partner**

The idea of ‘Global Britain’ was partly designed in the UK in the aftermath of the Brexit referendum to head-off the accusation that the scope of British strategic policy was shrinking. The idea of the British ‘tilt’ to the Indo-Pacific has been an important element in expressing a scale of ambition that is as far from ‘little Britain’ as can be imagined. It is notable that encouragement for this ‘tilt’ has come from Japan even

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<sup>34</sup> Christopher W. Hughes, Alessio Patalano and Robert Ward, ‘Japan’s Grand Strategy: The Abe Era and Its Aftermath’, *Survival*, 63:1 (2021), p. 129.

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more than from the US. The fact that the foreword to ‘A Very British Tilt: Towards a new UK strategy in the Indo-Pacific Region’, a report by Policy Exchange, which encouraged Britain’s regional ambitions, was written by Abe himself is a clear statement. As a thought experiment, it is hard to imagine Obama, Trump or Merkel writing the forward to any UK think tank report, let alone on a foreign policy vision. Abe wrote that:

A leading global power, Great Britain has a major role to play in the Indo-Pacific. As the world’s sixth largest economy, increased trade between the UK and Indo-Pacific nations will contribute to overall economic growth. Britain can also work with countries throughout the region on upholding democratic values and supporting the multinational institutions that have developed in recent years. On the security front, the British military, and the Royal Navy in particular, will be a welcome presence in the seas of the Indo-Pacific.<sup>35</sup>

Such positioning is evident in Japan’s broader diplomatic establishment. In oral evidence to the House of Commons, Koji Tsuruoka, Japan’s Ambassador to the UK, also positioned the UK as a country with a role to play in Asia. In his words:

The UK could make a great contribution by coming back east of Suez and being more forthright in promoting those values. But the UK – or even Japan, for that matter – cannot do it alone. We must join forces to do that. This is what I am trying to convey.<sup>36</sup>

These direct and clearly articulated messages welcoming Britain into the Indo-Pacific region as a de-facto Japanese ally are tightly wrapped around Japan’s policy priorities on trade, democracy and defence. The UK ‘tilt’ to the Indo-Pacific can be seen as an instrument of Japanese policies to internationalise disputes in the region that threaten Japan’s security, and also to alleviate dependence on a sole ally – the US.

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<sup>35</sup> ‘A Very British Tilt’, Policy Exchange, 22/11/2020, <https://bit.ly/3sPWDwU> (found: 22/04/2021), p. 14.

<sup>36</sup> Koji Tsuruoka, ‘Oral evidence: The FCO and the Integrated Review’, House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee, 22/09/2020, <https://bit.ly/3u2cCJC> (found: 22/04/2021).





### 3.3.2 Restraining a post-Brexit Britain

Brexit put Japanese economic investments in the UK at stake, as their viability was potentially jeopardised by a ‘hard’ future UK–EU trade relationship. Presumably it was well understood in Tokyo that – as in any negotiation – it may be necessary to suggest willingness to accept a costly outcome during the talks in order to raise pressure to deliver a compromise. In other words: to bluff. Therefore, restraining the UK from pursuing options that would be harmful to Japanese interests in the course of an ongoing negotiation would have to be undertaken in a way that sent a clear signal without undermining Britain’s negotiation position.

Japanese statements used a tone and language that minimised offence to British sensitivities. In contrast with other allies, not least the US and Germany, the Japanese message was that regardless of the uncertainties that arose in the course of a negotiation conducted partly in private and partly in public, the UK essentially was a country that could be trusted. As Abe put it in 2017:

From the UK, there has to be transparency and predictability in the EU exit negotiations to minimise any damage to businesses. We have received that commitment and we value it greatly.<sup>37</sup>

This positioning is not merely friendly; it also places the onus on the UK to prove in its conduct that it is deserving of Japan’s continued trust.

While making his country’s position on Brexit clear, Abe complemented the UK by placing it on the same level as the EU, both in terms of their status as negotiating partners and of responsibility to avoid an outcome that could be costly for Japan. He made this clear in an interview to the *Financial Times* in 2018: ‘I hope that both sides can contribute their wisdom and at least avoid a so-called disorderly Brexit.’<sup>38</sup>

This balanced and respectful tone was accompanied by the suggestion – possibly unique among the UK’s allies – that post-Brexit, UK–Japan relations would not only be safeguarded through the difficulties posed by Brexit, but that they would actually emerge

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<sup>37</sup> ‘Japan remains committed to UK after Brexit, Abe confirms to May’, *The Guardian*, 31/08/2017, <https://bit.ly/2QTpIdR> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>38</sup> Lionel Barber and Robin Harding, ‘UK would be welcomed to TPP “with open arms”, says Shinzo Abe’, *Financial Times*, 08/10/2018, <https://on.ft.com/3sQhZKP> (found: 22/04/2021).



stronger than before. The joint statement from the 2018 meeting between Abe and Theresa May, then-British Prime Minister, recorded that:

Abe also stated that, in order to strengthen the economic relationship between the two countries after the UK's withdrawal from the EU, he would like to work quickly to make a new economic partnership between Japan and the UK based on the Japan-EU Economic Partnership Agreement.<sup>39</sup>

When Abe said the UK would be 'welcome with open arms'<sup>40</sup> into the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership, the attitude could hardly have struck a more contrasting note to the threatening tone of Obama's warning that Britain would be 'at the back of the queue' when it came to striking a post-Brexit UK-US trade agreement.<sup>41</sup>

Moreover, in contrast to other British allies, Japanese commentators have linked Brexit to an image of the UK's role on the world stage that is not only undiminished, but actually enhanced:

Now the UK is out of the EU it can conduct its own diplomacy, not through the EU. The UK's independent and very decent, reasonable, well-thought-through diplomacy, which I expect will be the case, is going to contribute a great deal to the discussion. There is no doubt about that.<sup>42</sup>

As Tomohiko Taniguchi, then Communications Advisor and Speechwriter to Abe, put it: 'the benefits of Brexit for Japan, which are largely geo-political, could offset its costs, which are mostly

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<sup>39</sup> Emphasis added. See: 'Japan-UK Summit Meeting', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 01/12/2018, <https://bit.ly/2QVjk5E> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>40</sup> Lionel Barber and Robin Harding, 'UK would be welcomed to TPP "with open arms"', says Shinzo Abe', *Financial Times*, 08/10/2018, <https://on.ft.com/3sQhZKP> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>41</sup> 'Remarks by President Obama and Prime Minister Cameron in Joint Press Conference', White House, 22/04/2016, <https://bit.ly/3tP2Jz5> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>42</sup> Koji Tsuruoka, 'Oral evidence: The FCO and the Integrated Review', House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee, 22/09/2020, <https://bit.ly/3u2cCJC> (found: 22/04/2021).

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economic.’<sup>43</sup> Taniguchi has described a ‘Tokyo Consensus’, which he suggests might be shared with other Asian nations, based on the logic that ‘Post-Brexit Britain will no longer be able to identify with Europe the way it did pre-Brexit.’ He goes on: ‘A soul-searching Britain will instead seek to rediscover, and reinvest into, an older self-image which holds that, relative to nations on the Continent, Britain is still a great sea-faring country with global interests’.<sup>44</sup>

On Brexit then, even if Japan sought to restrain the UK from taking actions potentially disruptive to Japanese interests, the signals it sent about Britain were notably diplomatic, constructive and supportive of the UK in a position of sovereign equality with the EU, and resilient in the face of economic or political challenges connected to the exit from the EU.

### 3.3.3 Reinforcing a ‘free and open’ order

Being a great sea-faring country with global interests is not the only thing the UK and Japan have in common. Both are mature economies on densely populated islands in uneasy proximity to politically centralising continents, and so share a geostrategic interest in a world order that allows all nations a free choice in trade and strategic relations. Abe articulated this in his concept of the ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific’, which aligns on all points of principle with the British Government’s idea of ‘Global Britain’. The UK adopted similar language in the Integrated Review as it embraced the concept of an ‘open international order’.<sup>45</sup>

The position Japan would like the UK to have as a contributor to wider security interests beyond its Euro-Atlantic region is indicated in a line of the December 2018 Japan-UK summit meeting joint statement: ‘the bilateral cooperation between Japan and the UK, who play the role

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<sup>43</sup> The benefits Taniguchi Tomohiko identified included (i) a soul-searching by which Britain will rediscover, and reinvest into its role as a great sea-faring country with global interests that cover much of the English speaking world, (ii) the UK will be more motivated to show its flag in Indo-Pacific waters, (iii) Brexit was a catalyst that could further accelerate the existing trend for Japan and the UK to finding a common ground to strengthen their respective international standings. ‘Brexit: The View from Japan (or the “Tokyo Consensus”)', *E-International Relations*, 02/04/2017, <https://bit.ly/3vjU5ZU> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>44</sup> Ibid.

<sup>45</sup> ‘Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’, Cabinet Office, 16/03/2021, <https://bit.ly/3vX8RGY> (found: 22/04/2021). See also: James Rogers, ‘The Integrated Review: Five key innovations’, *Britain’s World*, 17/03/2021, <https://bit.ly/2RtEUi4> (found: 22/04/2021).



for further strengthening the rules-based international order, is important'.<sup>46</sup> Abe affirmed that post-Brexit Britain would still be 'equipped with global strength'.<sup>47</sup>

Greater policy independence seems to be an aspect of Brexit that is welcomed to the extent that it makes the UK a more agile partner for Japan. Tsuruoka observed in 2020 that:

The EU puts together a political platform by the consensus of 27 member countries. So, their approach tends to please everybody and be ambiguous. Britain, after exiting from the EU, will have its own views regarding not just economic but also political and security issues.<sup>48</sup>

In contrast with Germany, Japanese positioning of the UK emphasises trustworthiness. In testimony to the House of Commons' Foreign Affairs Select Committee, Tsuruoka specified this as the basis for the value of British-Japanese relations:

despite what I hear from the press reporting surrounding the Brexit discussion nowadays – that the rule of law in the UK may not be as clear cut as it was before – I do not believe that is the case at all. The UK has always been the leading country in promoting the rule of law and not cherry-picking what is convenient...This is a very important feature that can contribute to improving and strengthening stability, which leads to predictability. I see the most serious danger in the world today to be uncertainty – departing from a stable world.<sup>49</sup>

The 'trust' issue also indicates a reinforcement move in the way Japan positions the UK. Given the lasting reputational damage due to events in the 1930s and 1940s, the establishment of a British-Japanese 'quasi alliance' is a source of legitimacy for a more 'normal' Japan (a

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<sup>46</sup> 'Japan-UK Summit Meeting', Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, 01/12/2018, <https://bit.ly/2QVjk5E> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>47</sup> 'The UK's Application to Join TPP is an Opportunity to Spread Freedom', *Japan Forward*, 04/02/2021, <https://bit.ly/3nuij2z7> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>48</sup> Tsuruoka Koji, 'Japan, UK both island nations but only one has 'James Bond'', *The Asahi Shimbun*, 16/03/2020. The article is no longer available on *The Asahi Shimbun*'s website, but can be found on Wayback Machine: <https://bit.ly/3vgvjJV> (found: 22/04/2021).

<sup>49</sup> Koji Tsuruoka, 'Oral evidence: The FCO and the Integrated Review', House of Commons Foreign Affairs Select Committee, 22/09/2020, <https://bit.ly/3u2cCJC> (found: 22/04/2021).



signature project of the Abe administration). Japan offers a good example of the reflective identity reinforcement move. It is mutually flattering and legitimating for both countries to be reflected in each other's eyes as seapower peers looking ahead to a second act upholding a '(free and) open international order'.

In summary, Japanese positioning of the UK shows up in moves that instrumentalise Britain as a partner in regional security, tactfully restrain the UK from 'disorderly' actions that hurt Japanese economic interests, and reinforce aspects of shared identity that inspire closer relations and cast each in their best light.

## 4.0 Conclusion

The reasons for allies – both old and new – to position the UK are often similar to those of an adversary, even if the methods of allies are constrained and pitched in a softer tone. Three types of positioning move are identifiable in theory and evident to varying degrees within the examples examined above: steering an ally like an instrument, restraining an ally-competitor, and reflecting (either mirroring or contrasting) a would-be peer as a way to stabilise a preferred national identity.

While allies position each other with a not always coherent mixture of such moves, a dominant style tends to emerge to reflect the role the alliance plays in furthering respective national interests. Some allies' positioning of the UK is more aligned with British interests than others. Germany exhibits elements of all three of the above, but probably shows examples of attempting to restrain Britain more than instrumentalising the country or attempting to share a common identity. Like Germany, the US favours a mix, and wields the 'special relationship' as a whip as well as a caress. Japan's positioning exhibits a prominent identity reinforcement move, with softer instrumentalisation and restraining moves that signal the closest overall alignment with UK policy of the three allies considered here.

In sum, it is not just discursive statecraft and positioning by adversaries that deserves our attention. The degree and mechanisms of strategic intent behind instances of positioning are probably a subject deserving their own attention, but as Edward Lucas, Senior Fellow at the Centre for European Policy Analysis, pointed out in a discussion on an earlier edition of the Council on Geostrategy's national positioning series, when you have a hole in your roof the bad weather will get in, irrespective of whether the wind blows from the east or the west.<sup>50</sup> So positioning by allies, however unconscious or innocently meant, still deserves to be identified, understood, and – where it does harm to British interests – resisted.

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<sup>50</sup> Event: 'How China and Russia "position" the United Kingdom', Council on Geostrategy, 07/04/2021, <https://bit.ly/3gCJHbe> (found: 22/04/2021).

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## 4.1 Recommendations

To implement an effective response to allied positioning efforts, British policymakers and strategists would do well to:

1. **Develop awareness of positioning by allies and consciously recognise when it is happening and what its effects might be.** ‘If you know the enemy and know yourself, you need not fear the result of a hundred battles’, said Sun Tzu, the Chinese strategist.<sup>51</sup> Perhaps he should also have said something about knowing one’s allies. Familiarity with the tropes and patterns of how the UK is positioned by its allies can also be a useful way to understand the preferences or unconscious bias that informs the relationship.
2. **Call out positioning by allies, particularly when it might undermine British interests.** Allied spokespersons, representatives and media figures might not even be aware that they are engaged in positioning. At times the cause may be an innocent laziness or a lack of the intellectual creative energy needed to develop a more up-to-date and objective picture of an ally. A British response that is quick and tactful neutralises some of the effect and might even make the speaker think twice before doing it again.
3. **Do not forget that allies are important.** Positioning by allies cannot be taken in the same way as hostile positioning. Rather, getting to a point where allies are able to surface and discuss the issue of positioning – and how it can be corrosive for good alliance relations – will make it harder for an adversary to succeed in driving a wedge or sewing division between them.

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<sup>51</sup> Sun Tzu, ‘3. Attack by stratagem’, *The Art of War*, No date, <https://bit.ly/3aAvWGc> (found: 22/04/2021).

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## Notes

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