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Scope

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英国のインド太平洋関与の安定性 —コンセンサス政治 と対外政策の観点から—*

The Stability of the UK's Involvement in the Indo-Pacific from the Perspective of Consensus Politics and Foreign Policy**

Ryosuke Tanaka

Introduction

The U.K.'s involvement in the Indo-Pacific has been prominently attracting attention in recent years, which was substantiated by the arrival of a U.K.-U.S. joint carrier strike group to Japan. The U.K. has a background of a growing presence in the Indo-Pacific, despite being geographically distant from the region. This paper aims to provide a brief explanation of the U.K.'s involvement in the Indo-Pacific.

After leaving the E.U., the U.K. intends to implement the "Global Britain" initiative to preserve its international influence. Even though the 'tilt' of the UK towards the Indo-Pacific could be observed before the Brexit, it is undeniable that the trend has become more noticeable after leaving the E.U.. Secondly, the tension between the U.S. and China and the shift in Europe's stance regarding China have also influenced the U.K.'s strategy. European countries previously maintained decent economic relations with China, but now there are reassessments as China becomes more and more

^{*} This is an abbreviated translation of the following article: 田中 亮佑(2021年)。「英国のインド太平洋関与の安定性 —コンセンサス政治と対外政策の観点から」、日本国際フォーラム(JFIR)公式サイトコメンタリー(2021年9月24日)。The orginal text can be accessed at the following link: https://www.jfir.or.ip/wp/wp-content/uploads/2021/10/210927tr.pdf

^{**} Summarized and translated by Taha Arda Gün.

assertive. Furthermore, while the Biden administration takes a tough stance on China and aims to restore relations between the U.S. and Europe that had deteriorated under the Trump administration, the atmosphere becomes more advantageous for European countries, including the U.K., to develop their Indo-Pacific policies.

On the other hand, the Indo-Pacific region barely involves 'East of Suez', where the UK withdrew during the Cold War. Therefore, the UK's involvement in the Indo-Pacific is not secured by a relatively large population, territory, or exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the region, as is the case with France. Unlike France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the E.U., the U.K. has not formulated strategic and policy documents specific to the Indo-Pacific yet, amid concerns about the lack of assets to accomplish persistent progression. That is to say, while the U.K.'s involvement in the Indo-Pacific has been welcomed, its stability remains debatable.

So far, most evaluations on this matter have been mainly centered on strategic perspectives, such as dispatching military vehicles and restraining China. On the other hand, the method of achieving stability in the Indo-Pacific region is not confined to strategic approaches. Also, it involves domestic politics, which can similarly impact foreign policy. This paper analyzes the stability of the U.K.'s Indo-Pacific policy from the perspective of the U.K.'s consensus politics. First, I explain consensus politics in the U.K. and its application to foreign policy. Then, I discuss the collapse of domestic consensus, due to Brexit, in the 2010s and the political measures against China. Third, based on the current claims of the Conservative and Labor parties, I suggest that a consensus may be developing toward the Indo-Pacific, at least at the leadership level of both parties. Fourth, I provide a brief overview of the Indo-Pacific policies of France, Germany, and the EU and discuss the relevance of these policies to the U.K.. Lastly, I provide implications and prospects.

The U.K. and 'East of Suez' from the Perspective of Consensus Politics

Consensus politics in the U.K. generally refer to the commonality and continuity of the policies implemented by succeeding administrations. Consensus politics in postwar Britain can be divided into "post-war

consensus" and "neoliberal consensus". The former originated from the war cabinet that managed labor maintenance during World War II. Both parties integrated commonality and mutual understanding into their policies during the post-war period, especially in economics and social welfare. Nonetheless, post-war consensus collapsed due to both parties' inability to take practical actions to prevent the stagnation of the British economy. The latter phase is called the 'neoliberal consensus'. Assuming the presidency in 1979, Thatcher aimed to build a strong nation centered on neoliberalism; however, it was the Blair administration of the Labor Party that included neo-liberal elements in its policies as "The Third Way". Therefore, the neoliberal consensus was established after the premiership of Thatcher.

There is also a view that this framework of consensus politics can also be applied to foreign policy. For example, some portion of the Conservative Party opposed the withdrawal from 'East of Suez'. Yet, eventually, both political parties reached an agreement on the 'post-war consensus', and the withdrawal from the area was settled in 1968. Can we find a consensus on the U.K.'s movement toward East of Suez in the neoliberal consensus period then? Initially, the Thatcher government emphasized the necessity to protect the interests of the U.K. in a wide range of areas, even outside NATO. In fact, at the outbreak of the Iran-Iraq War, a fleet of Armilla patrols was deployed in the Persian Gulf countries. The Thatcher administration also sought to abandon a reduction in the deployment of British troops outside Europe due to the Falklands War. Furthermore, following the Cold War, the U.K. participated in the Gulf War. The policies and discourses of the time show the U.K. intended to have a further presence in the Gulf region and possible involvement in the Asia-Pacific, following the return of Hong Kong to China.

During Labor Party management under Blair, a policy document called "Strategic Defense Review" was published. This plan aimed to enhance the capacity of the British army to deploy far away, and accompanied with the repetitive statements about the importance of the Persian Gulf region, Five Power Defense Arrangements (FPDA), and cooperation with Southeast Asia. After the Blair administration accomplished the overthrow of the Hussein regime in the 2003 Iraq War, the Labor Party administration under Brown began to pursue an expansion into the Persian Gulf region seeking a military supply to Afghanistan. As far as the policy of expanding outside Europe is

considered, which was a part of the Thatcher administration, it can be asserted that there was stability during the neoliberal consensus period.

Brexit and China-U.K. Relations: The Collapse of Consensus

Cameron became the leader of the Conservative Party in 2005, and he believed that because of the policy changes under the Blair administration, the conservative party, which remained in the right-wing, must return to centrism so that they could resume power. Therefore, Cameron made a public commitment to 'liberal conservatism', which centered on maintaining government spending. However, after they regained political control in 2010, the Cameron administration imposed exhaustive budgetary austerities to manage the financial crisis of 2008. Miliband from the Labor Party, though he was defeated in the general election, was elected as the leader under massive support from the labor union. Even though Miliband demanded equalityoriented policies and was opposed to financial austerities, he lost the 2015 general election, as the support from the party members was inadequate. Corbyn, Miliband's successor, became prominent as a party leader owing to the change in the party election process. He demanded anti-austerity and social welfare policies more forcefully than Miliband and challenged the Conservative Party.

The collapse of consensus was spurred by European integration. British Eurosceptics increasingly condemned the E.U.'s response to the 2008 financial crisis, which led Cameron to declare that he would hold a referendum on Brexit after the 2015 elections due to the growing number of Eurosceptics within the Conservative Party and among its supporters. In 2014, William Hague resigned as foreign secretary from the Cabinet, and Hammond and other Eurosceptics began to serve as foreign secretaries. Eventually, the Conservative Party won the majority in the 2015 general election, which initiated the 2016 referendum.

As the supporters of Miliband and Corbyn were populist Eurosceptics of the Blue Laborers, the Labor Party could not possibly emphasize strengthening relations with the E.U.. Before the national referendum, Corbyn insisted that he supported staying in the E.U. while, in fact, he wanted the U.K. to leave. He barely explained why the U.K. should not leave the E.U. to the Labor

Party supporters during the referendum process. Therefore, the consensus between the Conservative and Labor parties on economic policies and the relationships with the E.U. had collapsed.

The collapse of consensus was also reflected in U.K.-China relations crucial in Indo-Pacific involvement. The austerity measures of the Cameron administration were inextricably linked to the increased acceptance of foreign direct investment (FDI), and they involved a large amount of FDI from China. While human rights issues in China had become a matter of debate in the Cabinet by 'liberal conservatism' supporters, the disappearance of these liberal conservatives from the Cabinet in the 2014 cabinet reshuffle and the 2015 general election allowed a 'Golden Age' of relations between the U.K. and China. In contrast to this environment, the Labor Party was cautionary towards China and intensely criticized Chinese FDI and business acceptance by the party leader and the Shadow Cabinet. As the Labor Party tends to despise the dependence on the FDI, and emphasizes fiscal policies, the Conservative Party's dependence on China led to the collapse of consensus. That is to say, the neoliberal consensus saw its demise around 2016, mainly because of Brexit and U.K.-China relations.

From "East of Suez" & "Asia Pacific" to "Indo-Pacific": Rebuilding Consensus?

Being aware of the "bonds of the imperial era," the Cameron administration began building relations with the Persian Gulf region and Southeast Asian countries from 2010, by concentrating on potential areas in which the U.K. could play a role. Initially, the U.K. had begun to expand its political and economic relations with the Gulf countries, and signed bilateral cooperation agreements one after another mainly to broaden the development of its naval aviation. On the other hand, in Southeast Asia, where relations were weakened, military action was limited for a short period to initiate the establishment of diplomatic relations. Nonetheless, around 2018, the U.K. declared its intention to increase its permanent presence in the region. It has been pointed out that the deployment of British forces in the Gulf region may serve as a model. Relating to this announcement, large-scale military defense expenditure and asset reductions specified in the 2010 "National Strategic

Defense and Security Review" were also improved with the 2015 edition. In fact, the latter is additionally directed as a reference to the Asia-Pacific.

As mentioned above, there were already negotiations on the return to East of Suez even before the 2016 U.K. European Union membership referendum. However, they indeed became more prominent as a response to the referendum's result. For instance, in 2016, Johnson, who was the prime minister at the time, stated that the 1968 decision to withdraw from East of Suez was a 'mistake' and that he plans to expand the U.K.'s involvement in the Gulf countries. In 2017, Jones (First Sea Lord) stated that the U.K. should play a role in the maritime security of Europe, the U.S. (NATO), and the Gulf region / Asia-Pacific. This statement implies the increased importance of the Gulf Coast and Asia-Pacific in the U.K. and reveals the necessity of forming an Asia-Pacific or Indo-Pacific strategy by policy institutes or think tanks.

Furthermore, in March of 2021, the U.K. published a comprehensive security policy review entitled "Integrated Review". Even though the U.K. government traditionally mentions the term 'Asia-Pacific' when referring to Asia, it appears that the word "Indo-Pacific" was deliberately used in the "Integrated Review". While the announcement of "Integrated Review" and setting forth 'The Indo-Pacific Tilt', in the document commenced the U.K.'s current policy of involvement in the region, it is also highlighted that publishing a policy document specific to the area, such as those of Germany, France, and the E.U., remains necessary. In any event, the U.K. certainly presented a strategy of involvement in the Indo-Pacific region and is now in the process of examining how to envisage and implement it in the future.

It seems that the shift in the U.K. and China relations have had an impact on the transformation of 'East of Suez' and 'Asia Pacific' into 'Indo-Pacific'. In 2016, when the Brexit referendum was held, there was also another diplomatic conflict in the South China Sea. Therefore, during 2017, many cabinet ministers remarked on sending naval vessels and potential aircraft carriers to the South China Sea, while finance minister Hammond and others have presented their concerns about possible adverse effects of such operation on economic relations with China. Besides, Prime Minister May, who mentioned the dispatching of ships in the first place, later distanced herself from the discussion, in consideration of relations with China. Nevertheless, Hammond left the Conservative Party in 2019; thus, the relationship between the U.K.

and China certainly continued to deteriorate in 2020, due to the Hong Kong issue and China's position in the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Labor Party has been advocating this cautionary position against China for a long time. Currently, under the leadership of Starmer, the Labor Party has returned to middle-of-the-road policy while still maintaining Corbyn's type of caution towards China. Their support of domestic politics involves restrictions on FDI and the supply chain. At the same time, their foreign policies include building relations with countries in the Indo-Pacific region that are conscious of China. Furthermore, due to Brexit and the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conservative Party seems to have steered away from austerity in economic policies. In other words, even though currently the U.K. is in a situation of turmoil and has an unstable foreign policy, the third consensus is nearby. Such agreement may remain at the leadership level of both parties, yet it is vital to note that it may provide some stability to Indo-Pacific engagement.

On the other hand, domestic politics and public opinion have not agreed on the deployment of British troops in the Indo-Pacific; hence the U.K. government will be expected to deliver a precise and more detailed justification of such necessity. While the general agreement is that the Indo-Pacific is crucial to the U.K. and related policies must be pursued, there is still hardly any consensus on providing a security guarantee, especially by the military. However, there is a particular union between the Conservative and Labor Parties that the U.K.'s primary mission is to contribute to European security through NATO. The government, political parties, public opinion, and research institutes have seemingly not concluded their thoughts on a military involvement policy in the Indo-Pacific, whereas the Johnson administration certainly aims to develop a military initiative.

Europe's Indo-Pacific Policy: Relations with the U.K.

After the discussion on the U.K.'s involvement in Indo-Pacific from the perspective of the U.K.'s domestic politics, now I aim to discuss the U.K.'s relationship with the Indo-Pacific policies of European countries and the E.U.. France obviously is the first European nation to develop progressive policies towards the Indo-Pacific since it has the largest territory, EEZ,

population, and military force amongst any European country. Europe's first Asia-Pacific documents called "France and Security in the Asia" were respectively published in 2014, 2016, and 2018 (which was renamed as "Indo-Pacific"). In 2019, a document entitled "Indo-Pacific's National Defense Strategy" was published by France's Ministry of Military Affairs. France even carried out separate navigation operations and joint military exercises with Japan, the United States, and Australia. In 2021, France's Indo-Pacific Strategy, constructed by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, was published to revise the previous strategy. These facts above demonstrate that France stands out among the other European countries owing to the number of policy documents on the Indo-Pacific, and will undoubtedly promote several practical strategies.

China primarily triggers the expansion of France's Indo-Pacific policy. As evident in the 2008 Defense White Paper, France initially intended to focus only on the Western Indian Ocean, also called the "arc of instability". Nevertheless, France was also aware of the necessity to strengthen its involvement in Asia, considering that the initiatives such as "The Rise of China and India by 2025" would change the international strategic environment. In other words, the concept of connecting the Indian Ocean region with the Pacific region is not a recent phenomenon. After the release of this document, France examined China's growing influence not only on the South China Sea but also on the Pacific islands; consequently, the Indo-Pacific policy was developed and is currently recognized as the Indo-Pacific Power.

As for the other European countries, Germany and the Netherlands prepared documents on the Indo-Pacific in September and November 2020. Even though the policies formulated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands have several unknowns about its military movement, they included actions such as dispatching naval vessels to a joint U.K.-U.S. carrier strike group and joint exercises between Japan, the U.K., and the U.S.. Germany's "Indo-Pacific Guidelines" were approved by the Cabinet. They cover policies on a wide range of areas, involving strengthening multilateral security, promoting trade, addressing human rights issues, and promoting the rule of law. Germany's policies are aimed to diversify its diplomatic relations, so there have been considerations on economic interactions with China. Nevertheless, they still concentrate on security, such as dispatching

naval vessels to the area.

Currently, the three major European powers (the U.K., France, and Germany), and the Netherlands, are in the stage of advancing their policies. Still, the policy of E.U. involvement in the Indo-Pacific will attract more attention in the future. In April of 2021, the Council of the European Union adopted conclusions on "the EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific". In September, the European Commission and the European External Action Service published "Joint Communication on the Indo-Pacific Strategy". Under these policies, we can expect the E.U. to announce and advance its Indo-Pacific strategy soon. However, cooperation between Germany and France is considered necessary even today, and both countries have made public statements confirming it. France is inclined to have a flexible and independent partnership with the QUAD and other countries. At the same time, Germany wishes to have a comprehensive strategy at the E.U. level and cooperation with regional organizations such as ASEAN. There are also other differences of opinion between France and Germany on traditional security issues of Europe. For example, France is flexible in employing military power in the region, whereas Germany has strong domestic constraints on such involvement. Therefore, we can say that these differences in the Indo-Pacific policies are likely to trigger future discussions.

How does the U.K. relate to the Indo-Pacific strategies of these European countries and the E.U.? The U.K., France, Germany, and the E.U. share similar fundamental values; thus, we can suppose further cooperation on global issues from a normative perspective. In fact, the E.U. document mentioned above includes the U.K. as a potential partner in the Indo-Pacific, whereas France, which has deployed assets in the Indo-Pacific, has been regarded as a potential partner for security cooperation. Since 2010, the U.K.. .and France have strengthened their relationship by establishing a joint integrated expeditionary force and continually conducting training. Collaboration has been discussed in other security fields, even though they plan to operate these activities in the vicinity of Europe. In addition, both the U.K. and France have established separate connections with the QUAD and various Indo-Pacific countries.

However, the new security cooperation framework AUKUS announced by the U.S., the U.K., and Australia in September 2021 triggered a conflict with European countries. AUKUS is a framework to promote security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. It involves collaboration on economic security (including supply chains) and technological fields, such as cyber security and artificial intelligence. Besides, it is expected to include provision technology and cooperation on nuclear submarines. Due to this pact, the Australian government abandoned their submarine construction plan contracted with a French company. Besides, the planning process of AUKUS was kept secret from NATO's ally European countries in the first place, leading to a conflict between the U.S., the U.K., Australia, France, and the E.U.. Although relations are currently restored in September of the same year, the conflict undoubtedly opened a new chapter to the traditional cooperation and confrontation structure between the U.S., U.K., Australia, and Europe. The dispute undeniably will hinder the cooperation between these countries and affect the U.K.'s involvement in the Indo-Pacific.

On the other hand, both the U.K. and France have committed to cooperating with the QUAD, which involves a group of countries such as the US and Australia. Progress on AUKUS would allow the U.K. to build further cooperation with the U.S. and Australia, and it would be absurd for France or the E.U. to not align with the U.S., the U.K., and Australia in their activities in the Indo-Pacific region. As a part of the improvement of relations between AUKUS, the E.U. and its member states, it is expected that the relations between the U.S. and France will improve and deepen further.

Conclusion: Towards the Stabilization of Involvement

To sum it up, the U.K. is possibly aware of the emergence of the third consensus politics in the wake of Brexit and the weakening of its relations with China. For now, a consensus can only be observed in the Conservative Party, Labor Party Cabinet, and Shadow Cabinet, but if the previous consensus could lead to an agreement on the foreign policy, the third consensus politics can bring stability to the Indo-Pacific involvement. Nevertheless, there are still many uncertainties in terms of security, and it can be said that military deployment by government initiatives is still in progress. From the perspective of foreign policy, AUKUS may become one of the external factors consolidating the U.K.'s involvement in the Indo-Pacific if only it continues to develop in the

future. However, it is still too early to claim certain assumptions.

Until now, the U.K. utilized its relations with the Middle East and the Gulf Region as a bridge to its Indo-Pacific involvement. Even though the relations with the European countries have temporarily deteriorated, cooperation between the U.S. and Europe is evidently indispensable in the military field and for promoting a wide range of policies, such as strengthening the supply chain and forming new strategies in the Indo-Pacific. Due to Brexit, it might be difficult for the U.K. to act as a bridge between the U.S. and Europe, yet cooperation of the U.S., the U.K., Australia, and the E.U. in the Indo-Pacific is still necessary. The U.K. is expected to improve its relations with France and the E.U..

In any event, the involvement of European countries (including the U.K.) in the Indo-Pacific on security areas was initiated not long ago and is not continually stable. As far as the U.K.'s politics are concerned, the situation remains unstable, although there is a possibility of an emerging consensus. In the 2021 by-elections, affected by political instability after Brexit, and economic instability due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the Conservative Party won the Labor Party stronghold. In contrast, the Liberal Democratic Party won the Conservative Party stronghold. Furthermore, in the Scottish Parliament elections of the same year, the pro-independence Scottish National Party won a majority. The U.K. will unlikely allow a Scottish independence referendum, but the situation will be a definite source of instability in due course.

The instability in the U.K.'s domestic politics is expected to continue. The U.K. government must maintain at least a minimum consensus within the country and not let such uncertainty affect its foreign and Indo-Pacific policies. In addition, not only the U.K. but Europe as a whole is expected to establish a structure of involvement by strengthening bilateral relations with Indo-Pacific countries and growing connections with relevant regional frameworks such as the QUAD and AUKUS. At the same time, the Indo-Pacific countries must also state the need for the involvement of European countries, consider the necessity of cooperation, and attempt to integrate European countries into the regional framework.

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