



**DANIEL SCHATZ**

## **D10 – A Global Coalition for Democracy in the Making?**

Global Challenges Foundation: A policy perspective

June 2021

### **Introduction**

On 11-13 June, British Prime Minister Boris Johnson will welcome fellow G7 Prime Ministers and Presidents to Carbis Bay, in the picturesque English seaside county of Cornwall, for the 47<sup>th</sup> annual G7 Leaders' Summit. G7 member states (Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, United Kingdom, United States – representing the world's leading democracies and industrialized economies) have gathered since the 1970s, alongside the heads of the EU, to shape the global agenda on economic and political challenges facing the international community.

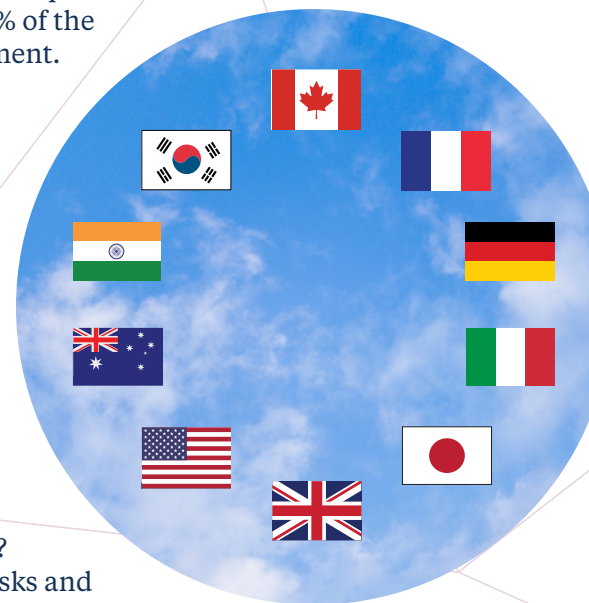
In addition to asking fellow leaders to respond to challenges, ranging from the COVID-19 pandemic to climate change, Prime Minister Johnson has pledged to use the UK's 2021 G7 presidency to champion the organization's foundational mission of promoting democracy, human rights and the rule of law within, and beyond, the G7's borders.

To that end, – and as a reflection of the growing geostrategic significance of the Indo-Pacific region – Johnson has invited Australia, India, South Korea and South Africa to the Summit as guest countries. Combined with the G7's members, these nations would represent more than half of the world's economy, over 2.2 billion people, and 60% of the global population that live under democratic systems of government.

These nations' presence at the summit would build on the UK's proposal to enlarge the organization by adding Australia, India, and South Korea to its permanent membership. The resulting constellation, tentatively dubbed the "Democratic 10"\* (or D10 for short), would neither be a formal alliance like NATO or an informal strategic forum like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue. Unlike the G20, which is a larger and more inclusive group without a shared set of values, the D10 could grow into a values-based multilateral coalition of leading democracies that formally supersedes or meets in parallel with the G7.

### **The Democratic 10 – risks and opportunities**

Before getting underway, D10 would face the very questions that have caused similar projects to run aground, who, how, and why? When considering these questions, one can identify a series of risks and opportunities.



\*Discussions are being made about the specific membership of the D10. This term in particular refers to the G7 members and Australia, India, and South Korea. D11 is a possible further development that would include South Africa in the near future. D10+ is a reference to all possible future member states of the D10.

## ▼ ...D10 has two advantages compared to earlier similar proposals; a limited membership and a clear alignment of objectives. ▼

The British government has contended that the D10 has two advantages compared to earlier similar proposals; a limited membership and a clear alignment of objectives. D10 is the right size and shape, neither too large thus facilitating cooperation and policy coordination, nor too small adding member states in the Indo-Pacific Region would expand the vision of international democracy beyond the legacy of the Cold War West.

The D10's immediate and clearly defined objective is limited to the development of cost-effective and technologically sophisticated 5G networks and supply chains that do not rely on Chinese technology. While the D10 concept was floated by the Atlantic Council think-tank as early as 2008, the initiative has gained recent political momentum in view of China's Huawei's positioning as the major global technology company able to produce the most complete commercially available solution to 5G network carriers today. This limited, yet highly significant endeavor, – based on a recognition that whoever sets rules, standards and norms for the use of today's emerging technologies will have an economic, military and political advantage for decades to come – means that D10 could get off the ground relatively quickly.

Technology has reached an inflection point where it can both liberate and oppress. At their core, democratic systems of government are based on open systems of governance, depending on free flows of information. The world's democracies are positioned to handle the challenge posed by authoritarian states – which, by contrast, weaponize and stifle information flows and technologies to exercise more effective internal control and to shape the global technological governance system in the service of regime objectives.

Formation of the D10, and its proposed thematic focus, also provide a platform for transatlantic cooperation; US President Joe Biden has expressed a commitment to hosting a Summit for Democracy in his first year in office, with the aim of securing pledges from participating governments to defend against authoritarianism and advance human rights in their own countries, as well as abroad.

While D10 offers potential in promoting cooperation among the world's democracies, critics have pointed out that sharing the same political system does not imply sharing the same interests or priorities. When realpolitik enters the scene, the coalition and its professed ideals, could come under strain.



▼ **This tide in international relations can only be reversed if democracies apply their core principles in domestic and foreign policy and cooperate to promote fundamental rights and freedoms wherever they are threatened.** ▼

Critics have also suggested that the proposed constellation may come at the cost of encouraging a divide between democracies and autocracies that could reduce the value and practical effect of such an undertaking. In the face of international threats, from global pandemics to climate change, a dynamic of confrontation between rival blocs could impede – if not prevent – the multilateral cooperation that the international community sorely needs.

Such a dividing line could risk precipitating another Cold War dynamic, this time between the US and China. The D10 would hence need to be structured and packaged positively, not punitively; with steps taken to reassure major powers, irrespective of their governance structures, that the coalition is not intended to shift away from continued bilateral and multilateral engagement with these actors.

#### **D10 to D10+**

Would a D10 in its current proposed form then be fit for purpose? Skeptics contend that the idealism underpinning the constellation may still lack teeth if the proposed D10 will end up being little more than a tweaked G7 or an annual fly-in, fly-out forum, without much substance. Such an arrangement might be better than nothing, but only marginally so.

If the current rules-based international order (as frayed as it is) is to be maintained and reformed, it will require a broad and effective alliance of democracies that does more than just issue an *andyné communiqué* once a year on technology policy issues. In order to achieve this objective, the D10 could – if the initial coalition and its initiatives prove successful – develop into a D10+ with a membership base and policy agenda that grows in size and ambition.

Over time, the D10 could transform its membership structure, just as the G5 became the G7 and, temporarily, the G8. The partnership could act as a magnet for like-minded countries sharing a common worldview, not only in terms of how they perceive global challenges, but in their commitment to promoting democracy, the rule of law, and universal human rights.



While a number of states, particularly in Europe, might arguably meet these criteria, D10+ membership would need to be narrowly constituted to maximize its effectiveness. Membership should be open to states that hold sufficient economic and military assets, soft power resources, and diplomatic influence to provide them with the requisite capability to act in addressing threats to global security and promoting international norms.

Thematically, the D10 proposal might suffer by having to narrow a focus, bringing this new group together primarily on 5G cooperation, when the foundational challenges to liberal democracies around the world are far-reaching. In 2020, the Economist Intelligence Unit *Democracy Index* fell to its lowest-ever global level. Similarly, in its closely followed annual *Freedom in the World* 2020 report, Freedom House, a non-partisan, US government-funded NGO, concludes that global freedom had shrunk for 13 consecutive years between 2006 and 2018. During this period, some 116 countries experienced a net decline in freedom while a mere 63 experienced a net increase, Freedom House said.

Where once democracies might have acted in unison to respond to global crises, authoritarian states frequently step in and attempt to impose their national interests. Moving beyond foundational objectives – inherited from the G7 – of promoting universal human rights, the rule of law, and a values-based international order, an enlarged D10+ could meet these challenges operationally by enhancing strategic consultation, policy coordination, and joint crisis response. If these efforts are successful, the D10+ could potentially tackle acute global challenges ranging from stopping crimes against humanity to preventing genocide – particularly when effective action requires coercive diplomacy, economic sanctions, or the use of force.

### **A coalition for democracy and human rights**

In his work *The End of History and the Last Man* (1992), the American political scientist Francis Fukuyama boldly predicted “the end of history.” Fukuyama optimistically predicted the victory of democracy over autocracy, which had been pursued as part of modernity since the Enlightenment, as the foundation of humanity’s universal values.

The decline in democracy, human rights, and the rule of law since the publication of Fukuyama’s work almost thirty years ago has proven that the tides of history are rapidly turning. As authoritarians fortify themselves at home and extend their global reach and influence, the world is becoming less stable and secure while the freedoms, interests and values of open societies are being challenged.

This tide in international relations can only be reversed if democracies apply their core principles in domestic and foreign policy and cooperate to promote fundamental rights and freedoms wherever they are threatened. Forming a global democratic D10 coalition is a right step in that direction.

## **Daniel Schatz**

*Daniel Schatz is a political scientist, writer on international affairs, Visiting Scholar at Georgetown University’s Center for European Studies and International Security Program Fellow at New America. He has served as a Visiting Fellow at Harvard University’s Weatherhead Center for International Affairs, Stanford University’s Freeman Spogli Institute for International Studies, and the European Institute at Columbia University.*

## **D10 – A Global Coalition for Democracy in the Making?**

### **Continuing the conversation with Hans Kundnani and Jonas Parello-Plesner**

Daniel Schatz points out that the specific idea of a D10 grouping of democracies goes back to a proposal by the Atlantic Council in 2008. But it also forms part of a longer history of proposals for an alliance, coalition or community of democracies. In particular, it was generally a neoconservative idea. Thus the risks of the idea of a D10 are not just practical (which countries should be included?) or tactical (around the extent to which the interests of democracies align and whether it could lead to a hardening of blocs) but more fundamental. Although a community of democracies would now be more about democracy defence than democracy promotion, it is still problematic in some of the same ways as the original neoconservative vision.

In particular, there has been a tendency within what Jan-Werner Müller has called the “democracy defence industry” to externalize internal problems. Those who call for a community of democracies tend to blame democratic dysfunctionality in Europe and the United States on “foreign interference” – as if our democracies were in great shape until China and Russia interfered in them. The reality, however, is that the causes of the current crisis of liberal democracy are extremely complex but largely internal. Thus instead of focusing primarily on external threats as most versions of the D10 do, it would do better to focus on jointly solving the internal problems that democracies face. Put another way, it should be less about “resilience” and more about reform.

There is a particular problem with the idea of the D10 as a way for democracies to set standards on technology or jointly develop technology. Schatz is right to say that digital technology can either liberate or oppress. But supporters of a “technology alliance” tend simply to assume that democracies use digital technology in a democratic way and authoritarian states use it in an authoritarian way. The reality is more complex. In fact, the way that technology is being used in both democracies and authoritarian states – in particular, surveillance of citizens through a combination of the state and corporations – may even be blurring the distinction between them.

*Hans Kundnani is Senior Research Fellow in the Europe Programme at Chatham House.*

Dr. Schatz's essay gives a good overview of the risks and opportunities for a D10/11. My view is that this agenda should be pushed even further based on the below suggestions.

In the Alliance of Democracies Foundation, our founding ambition is to unite the world's democracies. Our own yearly *Democracy Perception Index* shows the strain democracies face, both from within and from autocratic currents without. The way for the democratic world to regain strength is to work together.

That is why we were delighted to see President Biden take office with an ambition to gather a Global Summit for Democracy. President Biden was also part of the efforts of the Alliance of Democracies Foundation by speaking at the inaugural summit in Copenhagen in 2018.

Similarly to the Biden administration, this year, the UK has an opportunity to position itself as a global force on democratic values. It should be undertaken both through uniting the G7, and democratic allies, in a D10/11.

The UK's swift actions following China's implementation of the draconian National Security Law, which turned off the lights for Hong Kong's remaining freedoms, stands out. By speaking the truth to raw authoritarian power, and calling out the Chinese breach of the Sino-British Joint declaration, the Johnson government took the moral high ground. And equally so by granting up to three million Hong Kong citizens with BNO passports the right to prolonged residency in the UK and a path to full citizenship. This example underlines the kind of role a 'Global Britain' should carve out for itself in the international system.

That is why the concept of the D10/11 – the expansion of the G7 alongside the democracies of India, Australia, South Korea and South Africa is timely. In early May 2021, UK Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab brought together that group and ASEAN. It showed a major step towards uniting a G7 with a renewed focus on issues that threaten to undermine democracy, freedom, and human rights.

In the *Democracy Perception Index 2021*, we surveyed global attitudes to such a D10/11 initiative by the UK. In the UK, 59 percent supported it. Among possible new D10/11 members there was enthusiasm, with 67 percent support in India, 63 percent in Australia and South Africa, and 57 percent in South Korea. Still, among current members of the G7, several were less enthusiastic, with less than half in Japan, France, and Italy (the lowest at 39 percent) finding it a good idea. Expectedly, only 13 percent of Russians and 22 percent of Chinese liked the suggestion.

Uniting a D10/D11 should also be a contribution to the ongoing global battle for digital supremacy. From facial recognition, artificial intelligence, to quantum computing, the UK can play a role in setting standards. A *report from last year* showed that 'safety tech' businesses are on the rise, making the UK the safest place to be online with more than 70 companies in London, Leeds, Cambridge and Edinburgh holding a quarter of the global market share. The UK must be bold and proactive on this agenda of a concerted democratic pushback against China's digital authoritarianism. Looking at the many prominent members of the Inter-Parliamentary Alliance on China (IPAC) from the UK, it seems to indicate that the moral backbone would be intact for such an approach. China has even gone as far as to directly sanction prominent UK politicians and IPAC members. Only by the UK working through a united front of democracies, will it be possible to dent China's aggressiveness. Here the essay by Dr. Schatz is more diplomatic but in my view, China has started the global bifurcation by its repressive actions. The D10/11 needs to reply accordingly.

That is also why we have proposed a *charter for an alliance of democracies* with three suggestions to return democratic multilateralism to its ascendancy. On the technology side, Dr. Schatz seems to hold similar ambitions for the D10/11.

Our first suggestion is an *economic article 5 among democracies*, similar to the North Atlantic Treaty Organization's Article 5, which states that a military attack on one ally is considered an attack on all. A democracy – Australia comes to mind with its value fight with China - subjected to economic coercion by an autocracy could invoke the new economic Article 5 to summon the unified support of fellow democracies.

The joint response should have a bite. It would move beyond statements of support to actions, through a catalogue of retaliatory trade measures. Australia wouldn't face China alone but would be aided by the combined trade power of the world's democracies which make up more than half of the world's economic might. Beyond the economic impact, the symbolism of such solidarity would be a potent deterrent. Bullies respond to strength, and exploit weakness. A coordinated response would make them think twice before acting.

Secondly, we advocate a free world initiative for setting standards on emerging technology. Technology has the power to facilitate both democracy and autocratic oppressors. The free world is no longer setting tech standards in isolation. On the contrary, an alternative model has evolved: digital authoritarianism. To counter this, the alliance of democracies should build a multistakeholder technological alliance to find common answers to these existential questions. The alliance should begin by setting common standards for the free world for election integrity, social media, artificial intelligence and data flows and privacy. Civil society should play its part in such standard-setting processes. That would make the free world's model of tech development attractive to all states.

Thirdly, we advocate standing up for democracy's champions – abroad and at home. Although democracies face global weakening, demands for more democracy are visible on the streets of Hong Kong, Belarus, Myanmar, Uganda and Venezuela, especially among young people. Those braving brutality to stand up for their basic freedoms deserve the support – in words and deeds – of those who take liberty for granted. The alliance of democracies should find new means to coordinate penalties against states that use extraterritorial means such as state capture of aeroplanes and targeting exiled dissidents inside democratic countries. This can include targeted sanctions to financial and tangible support for pro-democracy champions.

We hope that the UK government will be inspired by such an agenda in their chairmanship of the G7, and their inclusion of democracies such as Australia, India, South Africa, and South Korea. Signing up to the democratic multilateralism in our Charter could constitute a great platform for the D10/11 to coalesce around. That would also reinvigorate a Global Britain with a worthy mission for democracy worldwide.

*Jonas Parello-Plesner is the Executive Director of the Alliance of Democracies Foundation, based in Copenhagen and a non-resident Senior Fellow at the German Marshall Fund, Washington DC. He has published widely and is quoted in papers such as the Financial Times, Wall Street Journal, New York Times and Politico. Follow him on Twitter at @jonasPplesner*

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**ADDITIONAL  
CONTACT INFORMATION**

**The Global Challenges Foundation**  
Grev Turegatan 30  
114 38 Stockholm  
Sweden

**[info@globalchallenges.org](mailto:info@globalchallenges.org)**  
**+46 (0)73 385 02 52**