

The UK-India Relationship

Looking to the future of British-Indian cooperation

September 2023

A London Politica-Jack Basu Collaboration

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Executive Summary

The bilateral relationship between the United Kingdom and India forms a crucial component of the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt. With a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, a 2030 Roadmap covering cooperation across multiple sectors, and Free Trade Negotiations Underway, the UK sees India as a significant partner for its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. In this regard, this report explores three approaches, Diplomatic, Economic and Defence, assessing the existing relationship as well as potential avenues for cooperation in the future.

- The Diplomatic section of the report deals with people to people relations, ministerial level dialogues, Track 1.5 and Track 2 Dialogues and Research collaboration between UK and India. These sections altogether highlight the history of Indian immigration both as international students or as a workforce and how they have grown in size and influence over the years. Conversely, the Indian diaspora have participated in a number of fields in the UK. This robust cultural relation further compliments the government to government interaction, or non-government interactions. Furthermore, the report highlights that the educational and workforce underpinning of the Indian diaspora in the UK, opens avenues for research collaboration in crucial sectors.
- The Economic Section of the report looks into existing and potential economic partnerships through the Make in India scheme, investment in Indian startups, the defence economy and closer dialogues between the two countries to facilitate and support business opportunities in both the UK and India. This section particularly highlights the manufacturing sector, the startup ecosystem, and opportunities in the defence sector.
- The Defence section of the report deals particularly with the UK-India bilateral relationship in the Indo-Pacific region. Here, the subsections include the idea of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific, regional security, capacity building and mitigating the threat of Chinese assertiveness in the region. This section altogether deals with the shared idea and interest of a free and open Indo-Pacific and the relevant mechanisms in place between the two countries.
- Lastly, the report ends with a set of recommendations regarding certain objectives that both the UK and India should consider for the long term. These are drawn from the findings across the report.



Credit: EFE, AP, BBC, WION, Royal Navy

UK-India Bilateral Relationship Overview

Ridipt Singh

The strength of UK-India bilateral ties lies in its [multi-dimensional and mutually beneficial](#) configuration which cuts across culture, economy, education, defence and health. This is complimented by historical legacy, people-to-people exchanges and institutional dialogues. Despite India's [experience](#) of colonialism, the two nations share a genuine and progressive relationship.

The [political aspect](#) of this bilateral relationship is buttressed by a Strategic Partnership created in 2004 under former Prime Ministers Tony Blair and Dr Manmohan Singh through the joint declaration “India-UK: towards a new and dynamic partnership”. Most recently, the [2030 Roadmap](#) enshrines the framework for partnership in multiple sectors such as defence, trade, climate, health, education, and science and technology between the two countries.

On the [economic front](#), with investments around \$33 billion in FDI inflows between April 2000 - March 2023, the UK is the 6th largest investor in India with around 618 British companies operating in India. This generates a combined turnover of \$45.6 billion and provides direct employment to around 466,640 people as of 2022. Conversely, with around 954 Indian companies operating in the UK providing employment to 105,931 people, India is the 2nd largest FDI contributor in the UK generating combined revenues of \$65 billion in 2022.

The [cultural aspect](#) of the UK-India relationship can be understood through the Cultural Cooperation Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed in July 2010 between the British and Indian cultural institutions. These included the British Council alongside the British Council Division of the British High Commission in New Delhi, the Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) alongside other institutions under the Ministry of Culture and the Indian High Commission in London were the [participating bodies](#). These respective institutions proactively pursue specific projects aimed at enhancing cooperation between the two countries. The [British Council](#), the UK’s equivalent of the ICCR finances and leads initiatives for building creative connections between the British and Indian people. Similarly, The Nehru Centre (TNC) within the Indian High Commission is mandated with cultural outreach.

Currently, the UK finds itself amidst a [post-Brexit search for identity](#). While it has made strides into the Indo-Pacific through the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and bilateral trade agreements, there is still significant global capacity that the UK is yet to explore. India is one area in which an already essential relationship can be developed to new heights across all spheres of British international affairs. The UK-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) currently under negotiation is just one aspect in which the two nations can use their shared interests to succeed in the 21st century. Both the UK and India will look to use their diplomatic and defence weight to channel the negative aspects of China’s rise to multilateral resolution. Working together to face this issue, which increasingly

dominates security fears in both countries, the UK-India relationship can flourish progressively for the benefit of themselves, and the global community.

1. UK's Indo-Pacific Policy – History and Context

Charlotte Higgs

The United Kingdom's Indo-Pacific policy, also known as the government's "Indo-Pacific tilt", can be traced from the [Integrated Review 2021](#). Post-Brexit UK required a new approach, consequently, the review was based upon two rationales: First, post-Brexit UK foreign policy would require a more agile approach towards an increased number of ad hoc groups. Second, the UK needed to engage more with the increasing global power base of the Indo-Pacific region.

Despite the UK's tendency to give precedence and its commitment to being the "[greatest single European contributor to the security of the Euro-Atlantic by 2030](#)", the significance of the Indo-Pacific is crucial. This will require extensive engagement to succeed "[in the Indo-Pacific as the European Partner with the broadest, most integrated presence.](#)" Consequently, Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and his administration seeks to develop a platform for "[closer alignment of purpose and action](#)" between the UK and "[like-minded partners](#)" in [both regions](#). As a consequence of the economic crisis and unsettled geopolitical tensions including, the withdrawal from Afghanistan, the war in Ukraine and worsening relations with China, the review has also undergone a further revision. Notwithstanding this reappraisal, the narrative from government ministers, likely in its aim to offer a counterbalance for diminished exports, remains ambitious.

Foreign Secretary James Cleverly in September 2022 stated that "[we are well on our way to becoming the European Partner with the broadest, most integrated presence in the Indo-Pacific. I am here to make it clear that the Indo-Pacific Tilt is here to stay. It is permanent.](#)" On a similar note, in his first major foreign policy speech as Prime Minister, Rishi Sunak set out the Indo-Pacific tilt as a key pillar to his foreign policy and advocated "[seizing the opportunities on offer in the Indo-Pacific by building deep and long-lasting partnerships](#)".

1.1. UK-India Vision 2030

On May 4 2021, former UK PM Boris Johnson and Indian PM Narendra Modi through a virtual meeting agreed upon the "[2030 Roadmap for India-UK future relations](#)" outlining ambitions between the two countries for the next 10 years. This included the UK government's 'tilt' to the Indo-Pacific region, which will include a closer collaboration with India across a range of areas.

The 2030 vision to deepen bilateral ties identifies "[the aim of developing a comprehensive strategic partnership.](#)" In this regard, the 2030 Roadmap is a joint framework viewed as "[part of a common vision of a new and transformational comprehensive strategic partnership](#)".

[between the UK and India.](#)” This agreement encourages a revitalised and dynamic connection between the two nations encompassing re-energised trade, investment and technological collaboration aimed at improving the livelihoods of the respective populations, enhanced defence and security cooperation as well as India-UK leadership in climate, clean energy and health acting as a global force for good. At the same time a joint statement was released which stated that the prime ministers “[agreed to continue removing trade barriers on the path to an FTA, and an ambitious target of more than doubling UK-India trade by 2030.](#)”

There are five key areas to the [2030 roadmap](#) which includes:

- 1. Connecting our countries and people:** As a result of a shared history, there is already a bond between the British and Indian citizens. Believing that this bond could be further enhanced, both countries would “upgrade institutional mechanisms” to help achieve goals in “all areas of cooperation and strengthen avenues for people to people connect[ions] in education, research and innovation, capacity building, employment and culture.”
- 2. Trade and prosperity:** An improved trade partnership would unlock the potential of the dynamic private sectors of both the countries.
- 3. Defence and security:** Both countries would work together to address “cyber, space, crime and terrorist threats and develop a free, open and secure Indo-Pacific region” and “build understanding among diverse partners on international security and [...] help set global rules for cyber security and space taking into account their respective interests.”
- 4. Climate:** In accordance with the Paris Agreement, the UK and India are committed to safeguarding the planet and creating an environmentally sustainable future.
- 5. Health:** The UK and India will use their “combined research and innovation strength to address the biggest global health challenges, save lives and improve health and well-being.”

These fields are further disseminated where [each area is further broken down into sub-sections](#). For instance, “connecting our countries and people” includes sections on “politics”, “migration and mobility” and “education, research and innovation and enterprise.” Similarly, the section on “trade” includes “trade”, “financial cooperation”, “investment” and “economic co-operation.”

2. UK-India and the Indo-Pacific

2.1. Diplomatic

Campbell Clarke, Chirag Bansal & Kaki Chan

India is uniquely placed for the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt. With shared history, democratic values and familiarity with the other's culture, it becomes a natural partner for the UK's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region. The UK houses a significant number of students, working professionals and residents of Indian origin who are active in a variety of fields from business, politics, academia, arts, literature, and more. This dynamic allows space for cooperation in a variety of fields such as trade, defence, research, business, and culture. Increased diplomatic interaction across these areas contributes towards cohesion in the two nations' Indo-Pacific objectives.

2.1.1. People-to-People Relations

People-to-people relations constitute a crucial component of international diplomacy by connecting states on a human level, fostering mutual understanding, and promoting cooperation. In this regard, the robust relationship between the UK and India serves as an exceptional example of how historical ties, cultural exchanges, and shared aspirations have coalesced to create a flourishing framework for collaboration that generates significant value for both countries.

Since the Indian independence in 1947, there have been several waves of migration allowing the Indian diaspora in the UK to grow both in size and strength. Between 1953 and 1962, [approximately 76,000 people](#) from India immigrated to the UK, which was facing acute labour shortages at the time due to World War II-related disruptions to the domestic workforce. To reduce the labour shortage and help rebuild the war-torn economy, the British government passed the [British Nationality Act](#) in 1948, which encouraged workers from Commonwealth countries to relocate to the UK by conferring British citizenship on those who resided in the British Empire and Commonwealth. This led to [thousands](#) of low-skilled workers from the states of Gujarat, Bengal and Punjab migrating to assume commercial positions, primarily in textile mills or foundries.

Following the race riots in 1958, the Conservative government passed the [Commonwealth Immigrants Act](#) in 1962, which severely restricted entry to the UK. However, it permitted family members of existing Indian migrants to immigrate, which had the [unforeseen effect](#) of turning temporary labour migration into permanent family settlement. As a result, [more than 840,000](#) Indians resided in the UK by 1991.

The number of highly-skilled migrants from India has increased consistently since then. A [recent report](#) compiled by Grant Thornton and the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) estimated that the Indian diaspora in the UK is currently comprised of approximately 1.5 million people, although that figure was derived from the [2011 Census for England and Wales](#), and the authors assert that the current size of the diaspora is likely closer to 1.7 million – the largest immigrant group in the country.

The diaspora has significantly contributed to the UK’s economic development and cultural tapestry by imbuing the state with a diverse set of skills, experiences, and perspectives. Commercially, there are now [more than 65,000 companies](#) in the UK owned by members of the Indian diaspora, of which 654 generated annual revenues exceeding £100,000 as of 2020, collectively producing more than £36.8 billion in revenues, employing more than 174,000 people, and contributing approximately £1.0 billion to the economy through corporate taxes.

Furthermore, Indians in the UK have also substantially impacted British politics, science, arts, and sports. In October 2022, for instance, Rishi Sunak, the son of a doctor and pharmacist of Indian descent who previously served as Chancellor of the Exchequer, became the UK’s [first Prime Minister of colour](#) as well as the first Hindu to hold Britain’s highest political office. Moreover, many British-Indian actors, broadcasters, comedians, and musicians have made compelling contributions to British media and culture. Krishnan Guru-Murthy and Naga Munchetty, for example, are some of the most well-known journalists in the UK, while Gurinder Chadha has imbedded herself in Britain’s cultural landscape by directing films such as [Bhaji on the Beach](#), [Bend It Like Beckham](#), and [Viceroy’s House](#).



UK-India Week 2023 , Source: [Business Today](#)

Given the importance of people-to-people relations between India and the UK, it is unsurprising that both states have formed partnerships to enable young Indian and British people to live and work in one another's countries. On May 4 2021, the UK's former Home Secretary, Priti Patel, and India's Minister of External Affairs, Dr. S. Jaishankar, signed a [Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#) pertaining to a new Migration and Mobility Partnership agreement, which was hailed by the UK government as a "historic agreement and part of the government's commitment to deliver an immigration system that attracts the best and brightest individuals from India and around the world."

The agreement sets out the broad basis on which the Indian and UK governments aspire to facilitate mobility of professional skilled workers and students between UK and India. Additionally, it includes a mutual commitment to ease the process of returning unlawful resident migrants to their country of origin and to prevent illegal migration. Crucially, however, the agreement is [not intended](#) to encourage long term or permanent migration. Instead, it entails mechanisms that allow highly skilled and educated nationals from India and the UK to move between the two countries for limited periods of time to enhance economic, cultural, and scientific relations between both states.

The UK-India Young Professional Scheme represents one such mechanism. The program, which is part of the Migration and Mobility Partnership agreement, became available on 28 February 2023, and allows Indian citizens who are between age 18 to 30, hold a degree or diploma, and possess £2,530 in savings – to enter a 48-hour ballot from which 3,000 randomly selected applicants will be invited to submit visa applications. Successful applicants are issued [Young Professional Scheme visas](#) allowing them to live and work in the UK for 24 months. It [represents](#) an opportunity for Indian citizens to gain work experience in the UK, and for UK employers to gain greater access to the Indian labour market.

Education also represents a key pillar of the bilateral relationship between the UK and India, and both countries have actively collaborated to create better opportunities for students in higher education. In 2022, the number of Indian students studying at universities in the UK [surpassed those from China](#) for the first time, as 127,731 student visas were issued to Indian nationals, a 273% increase relative to 2019. On the other hand, 116,476 student visas were issued to students from China, representing a 2% decrease compared to 2019.

Although China has historically sent more students to the UK than any other country, the trend is changing for numerous reasons. First, universities situated in the UK are seeking to attract more international students from outside China due to concerns over political tensions, but also because they are [deeply dependent](#) on this market for income. This is largely because the UK government [froze tuition fees](#) for domestic students for the academic years 2023-2024 and 2024-2025 – at a maximum of £9,250 per student – for the sixth consecutive year. As such, the shift [reflects](#) an attempt by academic institutions in the UK to diversify their enrolments so that they can bolster their financial positions with high fees from international students while mitigating threats associated with political tensions over Chinese students. Secondly, government representatives from India and the UK [signed an MoU](#) on

July 21, 2022, to officially recognise higher education qualifications. Enabled by the [2030 Roadmap](#) and [India's 2020 National Education Policy](#), the agreement expands cooperation between the two countries' higher education systems, making it easier for students to meet entry requirements for programs in both the UK and India. Finally, the UK government launched a new [Graduate Route](#) in July 2021, which allows international students who have successfully completed courses above the bachelor's degree level at universities located in the UK to work or look for work in the UK for a maximum period of two years after graduation, and three years for Doctoral students.

Indian students accounted for approximately [41% of granted post-graduate](#) visas in 2022, which reflects their desire to attain degrees from the UK's renowned universities and easily accessible work permits after graduating. Combined, these factors have substantially contributed to the surge in Indian students studying at universities in the UK – a trend that is bound to produce benefits by bolstering people-to-people relations between both the countries.

2.1.2. Ministerial-level Dialogues and State Visits

Over the past two decades, successive UK governments have sought to pursue closer ties with India, but these [efforts were largely unrequited](#). Despite that, a number of institutional mechanisms have been set since the late 1990s, four of which at the ministerial level: the Foreign Office Consultations, the Economic and Finance Dialogue (EFD), the Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO), and the Science and Innovation Council.

The troubled history of British imperialism [in addition to the UK's](#) perceived soft attitude towards Pakistan-sponsored terrorism, and plans to anchor the post-Brexit economy in China were among the potholes that entangled India's intention for warmer relations with the UK. Another centrality was the belief that the UK was distant to the geopolitics of the Indo-Pacific, propelling India to instead prioritise its traditional partners like Russia and France or a more active USA after its declared Pivot to Asia. However, the systematic shift in the international order caused by China's rise as a global power, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and China's alleged revisionist orientation has facilitated multifaceted cooperation between India and the UK, establishing a 'new equilibrium' in their bilateral relations, shaped by geostrategic congruence rather than commercial interests. Post-Brexit Britain seeks to extend its ties beyond European Union (EU) borders to field its [Global Britain aspirations, with revitalising links with India](#) being central to its foreign policy priorities.

The UK's concentrated efforts with the G7 countries to de-risk China and branding it as a "systematic competitor" also dashed the UK's hopes of making China the economic anchor. Thus, the UK increasingly views India, a like-minded democracy trending to become the world's third-largest economy, as a lucrative and politically secure alternative. Rooted in these security, economic and ideological causes, Britain officially tilted towards the Indo-Pacific with the aim of becoming the "European partner with the broadest and most presence in the region". The current Indian government also sees greater value in reinforcing

partnerships with like-minded democracies, having endured sporadic border skirmishes with China since May 2020 and saw its formal strategic convergence with Moscow curtailed for unwillingness to risk its relations with the USA. Apparent signs of India's renewed posture include its attendance at the 2023 G7 Hiroshima Summit and its endorsement of Shinzo Abe's "Free and Open Indo-Pacific" calling for a political and economic confluence of democracies spanning the two oceans. Similarly, as [Walter Ladwig III](#) observes, the UK as a middle democratic power and all-rounder in trade, defence and political cooperation, appeals to India as one of its de-risking options underpinning its swift from traditional non-alignment to multi-alignment to hedge against the US-China rivalry and counterpoise China's intensified belligerence in the Indian Ocean through collective actions.

Increased momentum is seen in the diplomatic space to deepen UK-India relations. Earlier at the [India-UK Virtual Summit in May 2021](#), former British PM Boris Johnson and Indian PM Narendra Modi drew up the 2030 Roadmap, which would serve as an operational framework to deliver a quantum leap on the UK-India partnership in health, climate, education, trade, defence, science and technology in the next 10 years. Under the purview of the roadmap, British-Indian convergence is set to evolve around the twin objectives of restarting the FTA negotiations after almost a decade of New Delhi's scepticism over free trade deals, and elevating the UK-India strategic partnership to a full-fledged comprehensive strategic partnership (CSP). While none of these have yet to see fruition, positive progress has been made through a raft of state and ministerial engagements.

British Foreign Minister Dominic Raab's visit to India in December 2020 paved the way for further developments. Discussions on the Enhanced Trade Partnership (ETP), which entails a new tariff structure and the Indian proposal of an [early harvest agreement within the developing FTA framework](#), were among the most significant breakthroughs. Mutual reciprocity continued to grow as the UK invited PM Modi to the UK-hosted G7 and COP26 Summits in 2021, which was reciprocated by Modi's gesture to invite PM Johnson as a chief guest at India's Republic Day Parade in January 2021 which was later cancelled due to coronavirus outbreak in the UK. Solidifying the legacies left by Daab, Liz Truss visited New Delhi in February 2021, which mapped the path to a potential comprehensive FTA and [secured two investment deals with Indian giants](#) i.e., the Tata Consultancy Services in the field of information technology and Wockhardt in pharmaceutical and biotechnology. A joint ministerial statement was also agreed as a [prelude to advance ETP developments](#) to be officially announced during PM Johnson's state visit in April 2022. In this long-awaited trip, Johnson and Modi continued to inch closer towards an FTA by affirming their commitment to conclude the majority of FTA talks by the end of October 2022, or in Johnson's words, "[done by Diwali](#)" and drew up a £1 billion trade deal spanning across software engineering and health.

While the UK-India FTA negotiations have long passed Johnson's bold pledge of "Done by Diwali" (which means concluded by October 2022), London and New Delhi are inching closer towards an FTA, having [completed 12th round of negotiations](#) and concluded the

discussions on 19 out of 26 chapters proposed [in the duration of 20 months, two state-level visits and engagements as well as nine at the ministerial level](#). While the hopes for this highly coveted trade deal to be signed at the G20 summit this September have now evaporated, there are indications that the deal is likely to be completed by late October or early November of 2023 as [Politico reported](#) that the 10 Downing Street has been lining up plans for Sunak's second state visit to India this fall.

On the defence front, [a joint statement issued after Johnson's state visit to India](#) in April 2022 declared that both the UK and India "resolved to advance the India-UK comprehensive strategic partnership through an annual exchange of visits at the prime minister level." Despite affirming their relations to be a CSP 18 years ago, the British-Indian strategic partnership is [widely perceived as lacking substance](#). While Johnson had reportedly only tangentially mentioned Ukraine out of [respect for India's guarded neutrality](#), he did attempt to wean India off Russian armaments by offering [to help India build its own fighter jets](#).

Their aligned priorities to counter Chinese assertiveness in both regional and international spheres are well-embedded in the code words featured in top-level doctrines such as the [April 2022 Joint Statement](#). These included a shared vision of an "open, free, inclusive rules-based Indo-Pacific" and "centrality of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea." Furthermore, Johnson asserted that the UK and India ought to unite and confront "our shared anxieties about autocracies and autocratic coercion about the world" in [his speech made in India](#). Substantial actions have been made to articulate these rhetorical objectives. The creation of a [new maritime dialogue](#) (inaugurated in October 2021) and Britain's admission into the India-led [Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative \(IPOI\)](#) are among the nascent evidence of the strengthening of the UK-India maritime security partnership and more broadly, the UK's tilt towards the Indo-Pacific.

Climate change is often deemed as the most likely common ground for cooperation amidst intensified geopolitical rivalries. London and Delhi are no exception and have accelerated their collaboration through a slate of high-level engagement and ministerial dialogues. COP26 Glasgow Climate Change Conference marks the onset of their renewed climate partnership. On top of India's historic pledge to reach net zero by 2070 and derive half of its energy from renewable sources by 2030, [Prime Ministers Johnson and Modi launched](#) the "Green Grids Initiative – One Sun One World One Grid" (GGI-OSOWOG) and Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS). [IRIS aims](#) to support small states to develop resilient and sustainable infrastructure that can withstand climate risks and forms part of London and New Delhi's collective efforts in their bid for climate leadership.

Created as the world's first transnational network of interconnected solar power grids, [GGI-OSOWOG](#) is by far the UK and India's most ambitious renewables joint venture. If this techno-utopian plan is successful, it is expected to generate 2,600 GW of interconnection capacity globally by 2050, delivering estimated power savings of 226 billion euros per year. Almost two years on, this [project remains light on details](#), with little information disclosed on how cables to be laid to connect India with the rest of South Asia in the 1st phase and how the

technical, political and institutional complexities will be navigated, casting doubts on its feasibility.

Aided by geostrategic co-dependencies, the oldest and biggest democracies are working towards stronger economic and political bilateral relationships. While it would be unrealistic to conjecture India to align itself with the UK fully, the UK may still become an important pole of India's multilateralism.

2.1.3. Track 1.5 and Track 2 Dialogues

The '2030 Roadmap for U.K-India Future Relations' outlines an ambitious vision for all sectors of the strategic partnership between the two countries. Although the relationship will be primarily driven through government to government cooperation, Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues can be immensely helpful in aligning policies and shaping the narrative for an even more productive partnership between these two vibrant democracies. These dialogues transcend the boundaries of formal diplomacy and are unique platforms for engaging in policy-focussed discussions.

Going beyond government officials and diplomats, Track 1.5 and Track 2 dialogues integrate a broader spectrum of stakeholders, including non-governmental organisations, academics, experts, and civil society representatives. They can be leveraged for sector-focused policy discussions, bringing in a range of diverse perspectives and expert insights leading to innovative thought leadership. The [Roadmap 2030's clause 1.5 encourages these dialogues](#) between academic institutions and think tanks to work on strategic relations between the two countries. In this regard, the [India-UK Strategic Futures Forum](#) was established as a high-level Track 1.5 dialogue with the aim of advancing closer links and strategic vision between the two countries. Further, the [UK-India Defence and Military Technology Cooperation](#) was initiated by the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS) alongside a defence portal named Bharat Shakti.

Furthermore, [Roadmap 2030's clause 21.9 specifically mentions](#) encouraging climate-related themes at Track II level dialogues and the India UK Track II Dialogue on Climate Change and Energy. The UK Intelligence and Security Committee of Parliament's China report mentions the "[whole-of-state](#)" threat that China poses to the UK. For India, while overt hostilities with China occurred at the borders, the "whole of state" threat must be considered. In this regard, security dialogues at Track 1.5 and Track 2 level can be helpful in bringing together actors and experts from multiple fields for addressing threats and discussing possible mitigation strategies in securing economic, cyber, intellectual property and technological interests etc. These dialogues can be extended to the issues pertaining to the Indo-Pacific like piracy, terrorism, maritime security, maritime domain awareness etc to help the respective governments frame and achieve policy objectives in the Indo-Pacific's context.

2.1.4. Research Collaboration

While India might be overshadowed by China's formidable presence in the global knowledge economy, it is the one and only nation whose demographics and economic potential could enable it to become a [knowledge partner](#) of the UK of matching importance, as the UK strives to reduce its overreliance on China in research and knowledge transfers. More importantly, India presents a risk-averse alternative free of potential geopolitical disruption than China.

A structural diplomatic breakdown between China and Western democracies including the UK is a real possibility if China invades Taiwan. That's being said, unknowable ramifications caused by geopolitical stakes trail long on the UK-China knowledge partnership. From India's standpoint, it is poised to transform itself as a knowledge power and eagerly look to develop its capabilities at pace. The prospect of becoming a second-rank actor in a Sino-centric and unipolar Asia is nightmarish, if not existential to New Delhi. Given the congruence and complementarity of interests, it is fair to say the UK and India are meant to be natural partners in the knowledge economy. But like many other dimensions of their bilateral relations, this blossoming partnership remains far from fulfilling its full potential.

As an overview, while the USA and China remain the UK's top most collaborative research partner, India is slowly progressing from being placed on the 22nd place to the 16th in the space of a decade. For India, the UK casts a heavyweight presence, having emerged as its [second largest international research and innovation partner](#). There is also clear complementarity in their research strengths. Blessed with demographic dividend and an embedded culture celebrating scientific endeavour, [India tops the world in producing STEM graduates](#), which amounts to a global share of about 32%. The Indian talent pipeline is not only alluring to the UK in the practical sense as it struggles to fill the skills gap, but it also aligns with the UK's core security interests. Harvesting Indian talents appears to be a safer choice as the shadow of Chinese expatriates' espionage and knowledge theft continue to loom large, with the "Thousands Talent Plan" being the most notorious machination. [Aspiring to become the top three scientific superpower in the next decade](#), PM Modi has pledged to enhance India's overall research capacity and accelerate the [internationalisation of Indian universities in the 2020 National Education Policy \(NEP\)](#). These are all tangible goals where the UK has demonstrable strengths that can help contribute to India's progress.

Latest developments on this front came when the UK and Indian governments concluded a landmark research agreement in April 2023, admitting India into the £119 million [International Science Partnerships Fund \(ISPF\)](#) and launching a raft of joint research programmes to be funded by ISPF and beyond. Created as a rival to the EU's Horizon Europe, ISPF is currently the UK's largest international research partnership fund after the demise of the larger-scaled [Newton Fund and Global Challenges Research Fund \(GCRF\)](#). [Aligned with the UK's foreign policy trajectory](#), the admission of ISPF is tilted towards the Indo-Pacific which counts India, China, Japan, Taiwan, Singapore and South Korea, alongside with traditional allies like Ireland, Canada, Australia and the USA in its initial call

of thematic, match-funding collaborative projects. Still, India's advent is peculiar in the sense that it is one of the only two countries that has received a ISPF-directly funded project involving very large infrastructure i.e., the £3.3 million [India-UK Technology and Skills Partnership Programme](#) which will enable UK and Indian researchers to further endeavour into frontier sciences like AI, machine learning and bio-imaging. Although this might be pale in comparison to the grandeur of the USA who is granted three directly funded partnerships in the fields of AI, quantum science and technology, it still reflects India's elevated status in British considerations.

Deregulation of human flows between the two countries is also progressing. In July 2022, the UK and Indian governments signed a [MoU to mutually recognise academic qualifications](#) from A-levels up to doctorates, excluding professional degrees. Although it does not encompass all disciplines, it is widely [praised as a historic move by the UK universities and Indian press](#) to enable people to move seamlessly between the two countries' education systems and job markets. In this regard, the [thorny issue of visa liberalisation](#) which has hampered the UK-India FTA negotiation appears to have taken a positive twist. While the UK Business Secretary Kemi Badenoch asserted that immigration issue does not fall into the ambit of FTA, [time-limited visas](#) for highly qualified workers from India were reportedly under discussion.

The UK and India have been undertaking collaborative research in some critical and emerging fields. On hazard mitigations, the UK Research and Innovation's (UKRI) Natural Environment Research Council (NERC) and India's Ministry of Earth Sciences have jointly launched a £6 million [Solid Earth Hazards programme](#) which aims to [improve understanding of geohazards](#) such as earthquakes in India and develop mitigation strategies. On vaccine development, Oxford University partnered with Serum Institute of India (SII), the world's largest vaccine manufacturer, for the manufacturing and delivery of AstraZeneca during the pandemic and their partnership prospered even after the pandemic waned. In December 2021, Oxford received a £50 million donation from SII to [establish the Poonawalla Vaccines Research Building](#), which is the biggest gift given to Oxford for vaccine research. In April 2023, it was announced that a new malaria vaccine, [R21/Matrix-M, developed by Oxford University and manufactured by SII](#), is cleared for use in Nigeria and Ghana.



The Poonawalla Vaccines Research Building to be established in the Old Road Campus, Oxford, Source: [University of Oxford](#)

Looking into the future, British Science Minister George Freeman indicated that the UK and India are set to conclude a framework agreement to [bolster cooperation in advanced sciences](#) encompassing semiconductor, high performance computing and AI this year. Coincided with the UK-based SARM & MARM Technologies' ₹30,000 crores investment into the Indian semiconductor ecosystem, it is speculated that these concerted efforts towards India are at the heart of the [UK balancing strategy to navigate the intensifying chip war](#).

Aided by geopolitical urgencies and uncertainties, the British-Indian convergence has never been this close in the realms of research and innovation. Despite this, there is still a way to go before a fully-fledged knowledge partnership can be discussed.

2.2. Economic

Milla Gajdos & Ojus Sharma

On July 18, 2023, the [eleventh round of negotiations](#) for the UK-India FTA reached its conclusion, marking a significant step in the evolving partnership between the two nations. The [anticipated outlook](#) of the UK-India FTA reflects the pursuit of tariff reductions on goods such as automobiles and whisky, coupled with market access in the digital data, and legal services sectors. A notable focus lies on chemicals, pharmaceuticals, communication, and technology sectors, each offering substantial opportunities for UK exporters to engage with the Indian market. Additionally, the UK's intent to diminish its reliance on China creates avenues for India to enhance its market share in sectors where China traditionally held a significant presence, such as fashion, homeware, electronics, and industrial machinery. Compared with recent trade agreements with other Indo-Pacific countries like Singapore and Japan, sectors like automobiles, textiles, pharmaceuticals, food and beverage, machinery, chemicals, and agriculture are of particular interest to the UK, potentially leading to similar concessions in the UK-India FTA.



India's Minister of Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, and UK's Secretary of State for International Trade Anne-Marie Trevelyan at the launch of FTA negotiations. Source: [Reuters](#)

For both economies, the FTA holds immense potential. Lord Gerry Grimstone, the UK's Minister for Investment, emphasises that a fresh trade pact with India's flourishing economy carries [substantial possibilities for British businesses](#). The trade deal holds the promise of bolstering the already robust trading relationship between the two countries, which is currently valued at over £24 billion annually. In light of this promising outlook, it is the right time to ask the question of how the UK could establish enduring ventures within India. The notion of delving into strategic investments within India's rapidly growing startup ecosystem takes centre stage, and aligns well with the current trajectory.

2.2.1. Make in India

The [Make in India initiative](#) was introduced by PM Narendra Modi in 2014 to transform India into a global design and manufacturing hub amidst a challenging economic landscape. The initiative responded to India's economic slowdown and the decline of emerging markets and led to increased foreign investment in key sectors placing advanced manufacturing and Industry 4.0 at the core of India's economic vision. Prominent global companies have already set up manufacturing plants in India due to its improving skills, growing market, and export potential. In this regard, the UK's expertise in advanced manufacturing and Industry 4.0 presents an opportunity for strategic collaboration in fulfilling India's aspirations.

The UK and India are among the top 10 manufacturing countries in the world. [According to the most recent data available by the United Nations Statistics Division](#), India's share of total world output was 3.1% as of 2019 ranking 5th, while the UK came as 9th on the list with 1.8% of global output. The UK has advanced expertise in high-value and advanced manufacturing. This underpins sectors such as aerospace, automotive, energy, transport and process industries. Manufacturing production in India [averaged 5.82 percent](#) from 2006 until 2023. The combination of the UK's advanced manufacturing expertise, well-established innovation initiatives, along with the considerable scale of India's manufacturing sector and its expanding markets creates a distinctive opportunity for both nations. This partnership could [address the issues encountered by India](#), ranging from ensuring access to clean and affordable energy to tackling challenges in areas with food insecurity and poor mobility. Additionally, considering the imperative of sustaining economic growth, reducing trade deficits, and providing employment for a growing population, India needs to prioritise the promotion of its manufacturing sector.

The 2017 report from the Technology Strategy Board identifies several advanced manufacturing sectors with strong [potential for increased collaboration](#), such as automotive, automotive supply chain, aerospace and aviation, biotechnology, chemicals and pharmaceuticals. In pursuit of deeper collaboration in manufacturing, several initiatives have emerged. For instance, the [UK High Value Manufacturing Catapult](#) centres collaborate with Indian companies and those owned by Indians operating within the UK, the [UK India](#)

[Business Council Joint Economic Trade Committee](#) (JETCO), serve as platforms to foster closer economic ties and discussions between the two nations.

The Make in India initiative by the Indian government offers a distinct chance to enhance this collaboration. This scheme seeks to attract both investment and innovation essential for establishing top-tier manufacturing infrastructure, ultimately fostering growth, productivity, and employment. The UK government's endeavour to stimulate growth and productivity through a contemporary industrial strategy presents an opportunity to further develop the existing connections between governmental bodies, industries, and educational institutions of both nations.

The growing significance of EV production is underscored by recent global trends towards reducing dependence on China and fostering self-reliance in green sectors. [Investment Minister Dominic Johnson had earlier stated](#) that "Having a world class automotive EV industry is absolutely at the core of the government's long term strategy,". In India, [expansion of the road network](#) coupled with sustained economic development has led to [a rapid increase in the total number of vehicles](#) across the subcontinent leading India to overtake Japan as the world's [3rd largest car producer](#) in 2023. In this regard, EV production is a potential area of UK-India business cooperation. Beyond this, India holds the position of the [3rd largest civil aviation market](#) on a global scale. Additionally, there is a long-standing tradition of [collaboration between the Indian and UK aerospace sectors](#), particularly for military aircraft. Furthermore, India's status as a [top-tier destination](#) for biotechnology, [6th largest producer](#) of chemicals and [3rd largest pharmaceuticals manufacturer](#) by volume holds immense promises and could unveil a variety of fresh avenues for business across the industries mentioned earlier.

In order to establish long-term UK businesses in India, a set of weaknesses and threats should be kept an eye on. Firstly, cultural differences present a barrier that is exacerbated by the memory of Britain's colonial past. This can lead to tensions and disincentivize businesses from cooperation. Secondly, there is currently a relatively reduced demand for manufactured goods due to a global economic slump. Potential job losses due to advances in automation need to be kept in mind in both nations. Finally, the UK needs to out-compete international competitors that are also offering expertise in advanced manufacturing, such as Germany and Japan.

Despite these challenges, there are several reasons for optimism. The two countries share common goals for high-value manufacturing and overlapping manufacturing sectors eg. defence, aerospace and automotive. Collectively, a successful FTA between India and the UK, coupled with increasing sentiments for heightened cooperation, could pave the way for advancing collaboration within pivotal industries. This, in turn, holds the potential to fortify the economies of both nations and create even more opportunities in the future. Overall, the UK should embrace Make in India for its potential to boost british business, and resist understanding it as a challenge to the UK's own manufacturing sector.

2.2.2. UK Investment in Indian start-ups

The UK stands as the 6th largest investor in India, [channelling \\$33.87 billion](#) in FDI between April 2000 and March 2023. As of 2022, India hosts 618 UK companies with a combined revenue of approximately \$45.6 billion, contributing to direct employment for around 466,640 individuals. The sectors drawing UK investment in India encompass education, retail, consumer goods, life sciences, healthcare, and infrastructure.

India has established itself as the third most significant hub for startups on a global scale, boasting [more than 99,000 startups officially acknowledged](#) by the Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT) as of May 31, 2023. India holds second place in terms of innovation quality, excelling notably in the quality of its scientific research publications and its universities among economies of middle-income status. The innovative landscape in India ranges over a diversity of sectors. There are startups addressing challenges across 56 diverse industrial domains, with 13% focusing on IT services, 9% on healthcare and life sciences, 7% on education, and 5% each on agriculture and food & beverages.

Between 2015 and 2022, the Indian startup landscape has undergone [remarkable expansion](#). Startup funding has surged by a staggering fifteen-fold, the number of investors has multiplied by nine, and the number of incubators has increased seven-fold, according to Invest India's report from 2023. These startups are not only pioneering innovative solutions and technologies but are also playing a significant role in generating extensive employment opportunities. As of May 31, 2023, India proudly boasts 108 unicorns, companies valued at over \$340.80 billion collectively. Among these unicorns, 44 emerged in 2021 with a combined valuation of \$93.00 billion, and 21 made their debut in 2022, amounting to a total valuation of \$27.00 billion.

In India, Bengaluru is at the heart of India's high-tech industry housing the largest concentration of unicorn companies' headquarters. Following closely are Delhi-NCR (Non Capital Region) and Mumbai. Although the presence of unicorns is notable in Tier I cities, this ecosystem is not confined to these areas and is expanding to even the farthest districts across the country. While conventional sectors like E-commerce, Fin-tech, Supply Chain & Logistics, and Internet Software & Services remain prominent, a noteworthy surge of non-traditional sectors such as Content, Gaming, Hospitality, Data management & analytics, and more, are carving out their own space on this list.

The robust strength of India's startup ecosystem becomes evident when examining the year 2022 up to the present. [According to a report by YourStory](#), during the first half of 2022, there were 891 instances of funding deals, which represents an impressive 82.8% increase compared to the 541 deals in the first half of 2021. Startups managed to secure over \$17 billion in funding, marking a growth of 1.8 times in comparison to the \$9.4 billion raised during the same period in 2021.

UK's booming venture capital (VC) funds and India's vast start-up talent could provide the perfect combination for a fruitful partnership. [Investment minister Dominic Johnson](#) expressed the potential of increasing investments to India by describing the UK-India FTA as "a gigantic opportunity for us, in terms of being a funnel for investment into India, and benefiting from Indian investment back into the UK".

British VC and private equity funds invested globally a total of £25.1 billion in 2020, up from £22.2 billion in 2017, according to [figures from the British Private Equity and Venture Capital Association](#), with more than a third of it going to the UK alone. Most of the UK's VC continue to invest within Europe, while US peers are increasingly exploring developing economies such as India. The [top ten investors in India](#) include US-based firms such as Tiger Global and Sequoia Capital.

[In 2014, British International Investment \(BII\)](#) — the UK government's development finance institution — began investing in India's digital start-up segment, which has developed into a combined portfolio of \$3.08 billion. According to Abhinav Sinha, Managing Director and Head of Technology and Telecoms at BII, around 2,014 Chinese funds were still active in India. However, Covid-19 left a big gap in terms of Chinese investments in the ecosystem. At this time, Indian entrepreneurs looked to other sources of income, like the USA or the UK. Although China has since backtracked on its zero-covid policy, nevertheless its foreign investments are likely to continue to stay below pre-pandemic levels. This presents the UK with a unique opportunity to channel more of its VC to Indian opportunities and fill the gap left by exiting Chinese firms.

Despite the decreasing Chinese presence, there would still be high competition with American firms. [According to Chandru Iyer](#), Head of Business Development for South Asia at Grant Thornton, "India's tech landscape is phenomenal, but USA and Japanese exposure to it is a lot higher [than the UK's]. This is a challenge, but the FTA will make that difference. It is going to be a watershed moment." Moreover, lingering concerns related to bureaucracy, perceived red tape, and stringent visa regulations further complicate the situation. It is crucial to recognise that these difficulties could potentially find resolution within the context of an FTA. In this scenario, the UK has the opportunity to capitalise on the momentum, setting the stage for mutually beneficial cooperation. This would not only benefit UK investors but also foster an environment conducive to the growth of India's burgeoning startup ecosystem.

2.2.3. Defence Economy

India today finds itself in a dynamic power-play in the Indo-Pacific. Its large size, both geographically and demographically, naturally attracts attention to it as a potential competitor to the waning American and waxing Chinese regional presence. It also, however, highlights itself as a close partner to those seeking to maintain a free and open Indo-Pacific. Britain's presence in the region, such as the British Indian Ocean Territory (Diego Garcia) and Carrier

Strike Group deployments, is among many factors driving closer defence industrial relationships between the nations.

The discussions about transferring technology to India, particularly for enhancing local defence production, have gained prominence recently. One major aspect of this collaboration involves jointly developing an [aircraft engine](#) for India's 5th generation combat aircraft program, called the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA). Additionally, there's an agreement to [share the design details](#) of the Queen Elizabeth-Class aircraft carrier, which might serve as the blueprint for INS Vishaal, India's first indigenous nuclear-powered aircraft carrier, though the Queen Elizabeth class itself is conventionally powered.

With advancing discussions on defence production and technology sharing MoUs, India and the UK are also [in process](#) of establishing an important military logistics agreement, which allows either nation's forces to access and utilise the other's military assets. The agreement would enable maintenance facilities to warships and military aircraft at each other's bases. It would further ensure smooth use of the host nation's existing logistics networks which would reduce the overall costs of the mission and provide a strategic edge to each other's military operation.

The UK-India Business Council (UKIBC) have stated that multiple defence companies in the UK are "[really focused on doing business with and in India](#)". Under the Make in India scheme, manufacturing could be encouraged at the local level in India. From the Indian perspective, this would be crucial given its defence modernization drive in light of hostilities from China. Hence, British defence companies will have a lot of commercial avenues open for them in the country. This approach if sustained over a long period of time can become a crucial component of the defence economy and defence diplomacy in the region allowing India to be an equal partner in all these endeavours.

In conclusion, India's position in the Indo-Pacific region stands as a pivotal factor in the evolving power dynamics, while the strategic importance of UK deployments, particularly in the British Indian Ocean Territory, has spurred a deepening of defence industrial relationships between India and the UK. The dialogue on technology transfer, notably for indigenous defence production, signifies a landmark phase in their partnership. The joint development of aircraft engines for India's AMCA and the sharing of design specifics for aircraft carriers showcases the depth of collaboration aimed at bolstering India's defence capabilities. The prospect of a military logistics agreement between the two nations underscores their commitment to mutual support. As India and the UK progress with cooperative ventures, their combined efforts are poised to set a precedent for the deepening collaboration between India and the West.

2.2.4. Closer Dialogues

The UK-India economic relationship would be greatly improved by greater dialogues. As demonstrated by recent business deals, there is fertile economic soil for close collaboration, and demand in both economies for greater interaction. The compatibility of the two economies, however, is yet to be fully explored and should be pursued through dialogues.

The Indian economy in the past few decades has emerged as a contender for forging trade relations in the [China+1 strategy](#) adopted by leading manufacturers as a way to mitigate volatility caused by doing business in the country. India has in the last 10 years leapfrogged from the 10th largest economy to the 5th largest economy, and is projected to surpass Japan and Germany to become the [3rd largest by 2027](#). While India has undergone high and sustained GDP growth, Britain's economy has [faced stagnation](#). Many economists highlight that it has [still not fully recovered](#) from the 2008 financial crisis, and given additional shocks like the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit, and Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it faces a dire austerity crisis, where despite having limited spending, [deficits have not experienced a reduction](#). India is uniquely positioned for an expanded partnership between it and Britain given its size, [growth potential](#), and scope for collaboration. India being a large country, is currently exploiting opportunities to develop an industrial complex for [key advanced and specialised domains](#), that require a sophisticated roadmap to be brought to fruition.

India's rise has led to an increase in demand for British expertise. This is particularly seen in the aircraft orders by Indian airlines' IndiGo and Air India, which are fitted with Rolls Royce and GE Aviation Systems engines, greatly [contributing to the British aerospace industry](#). In addition, the recent announcement of Tata owned Jaguar Land Rover gigafactory, a [\\$5 billion investment](#), is also a testament to Britain being an attractive investment destination for Indian firms. Such areas of industrial collaboration and complimentary business expertise are relatively underexplored and should be further explored via ministerial and business-level summits and dialogues. Closer dialogues can therefore play a critical role by highlighting how the two economies can best compliment the other, and unearthing the multitude of opportunities.

In conclusion, India's impressive economic ascent and its strategic significance in the China+1 strategy present a promising opportunity for an enhanced partnership with a stagnant British economy. India's growth potential, industrial advancements, and demand for British expertise underscore the potential for collaboration in various sectors, from aerospace to automotive industries. The forthcoming UK-India FTA, coupled with India's emphasis on bilateral deals, positions the two nations for a mutually beneficial relationship that can bypass bureaucratic hurdles. This collaboration not only aligns with India's trajectory towards becoming a global economic powerhouse but also offers a lifeline for Britain's resurgence on the international economic stage.

2.3. Defence

Brahmneet Kaur Narula & Gabriel Pontin

China's aggressive posture in the Indo-Pacific and hostilities with India creates an imperative for defence cooperation between the UK and India encompassing both military deployments and the defence economy. India is under a military modernisation drive particularly to strengthen itself against China and it also seeks to play the role of a [net security provider](#) in the Indo-Pacific. In this regard, British defence companies have the opportunity to work alongside Indian defence companies allowing business opportunities for British companies and improvements for the Indian Armed Forces. Additionally, it opens avenues for collaboration on a variety of domains like cyberspace, piracy, and other transnational threats. Furthermore, military exercises with the British counterparts forms part of India's multi-alignment in the Indo-Pacific and would be helpful in capacity building of both the countries.

2.3.1. Free and Open Indo-Pacific

The UK and India have a [shared vision of a free and open Indo-Pacific](#), where the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations are respected, international law and norms are upheld, and trade and connectivity are secure and sustainable. The Indo-Pacific region is of [vital importance for both countries](#), as it accounts for more than half of the world's population, 60% of global GDP, and 80% of global trade. The region is also home to some of the fastest-growing economies, such as China, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Bangladesh, which offer [opportunities for trade and investment](#). The UK and India also [depend on the sea lanes of communication \(SLOCs\)](#) in the region for their trade, energy and security needs.

However, the Indo-Pacific is also facing [various challenges, such as](#) maritime disputes, piracy, terrorism, climate change and natural disasters. The region is characterised by a complex geopolitical landscape, where multiple actors compete for power and influence. Some of these actors are allies or partners of the UK and India, such as the USA, Japan, Australia, France, and ASEAN countries. Others are rivals or adversaries, such as China, Pakistan, North Korea, and Iran. The region also suffers from a [lack of effective regional institutions and mechanisms](#) to address common issues and prevent conflicts.

To advance their shared vision and interests in the Indo-Pacific, the UK and India have agreed to enhance their cooperation in the region, both bilaterally and multilaterally. They have signed a [new Maritime Information Sharing Agreement to improve their situational awareness and coordination](#) in the maritime domain. This agreement will enable them to

exchange information on maritime threats and incidents, such as illegal fishing, smuggling, piracy, terrorism, and environmental hazards. They have also agreed to conduct joint naval exercises, including carrier operations, to demonstrate their interoperability and commitment to maritime security. These exercises will involve the deployment of the UK's new aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth and its accompanying strike group to the Indian Ocean in 2023. They will also involve [the participation of other Quad members](#) as well as France. Furthermore, they have pledged to work together in regional forums such as the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus) for [capacity-building](#). These forums provide platforms for dialogue and collaboration on issues such as maritime security, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, blue economy, counter-terrorism, and maritime domain awareness.

2.3.2. Regional Security

The member countries of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) i.e., India, Australia, Japan and the USA are engaged as strategic partners in defence issues instead of building an alliance. The nature of this alignment will continue to remain the same and the chances of it turning into a military alliance are significantly less. This is primarily because of individual positions taken by each country, especially India which has historically been averse to getting into military alliances with other nations. The joint statement of the [Quad Ministerial Meeting](#) released on 23 March 2023 highlights "Quad's steadfast commitment to supporting a free and open Indo-Pacific, which is inclusive and resilient". This has been one of the underlying positions maintained by the Quad nations without any mention of a security or defence-related alliance. This viewpoint is also evident in one of the statements made by India's former Foreign Secretary [Harsh Vardhan Shringla](#) stating "AUKUS is a security alliance, Quad is a different group of countries working on a different vision". Therefore, the concept of the collective security framework which has collective defence as one of its core principles cannot be directly applied between the UK and Quad countries in the context of the Indo-Pacific.

While collective security and any form of security alliance involving all Quad nations together is not a prospect in the current situation, the UK along with Quad countries has been involved in bilateral or trilateral engagements on defence-related issues in the region. AUKUS, a security partnership between Australia, the UK and the USA is one such example. The UK has also been strengthening its relationship with India on various fronts. The [2030 roadmap](#) is clear evidence of this as one of the objectives highlighted in the document is the vision to introduce an "enhanced defence and security cooperation that brings a more secure Indian Ocean Region and Indo-Pacific". The intention to further strengthen the relationship between the two on security prospects was evident through [PM Rishi Sunak's](#) statements during the G20 Summit organised in Indonesia in November 2022. Sunak highlighted the importance of the Indo-Pacific region and the UK's commitment to forging stronger links with India.

The defence relationship between the UK and the Quad countries can therefore not be looked at as a collective security framework but rather a combination of strategic partnerships and security alliances on bilateral or trilateral levels with the common objectives of keeping the Indo-Pacific region free and open.

2.3.3. Capacity Building

The UK-India relationship in the defence sector goes much beyond the production and sales and arms and looks at the security dimensions from a much more comprehensive viewpoint. The [Roadmap 2030](#) outlines the ambitions of both countries to elevate the relationship to a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) which will include various aspects such as cybersecurity, maritime domain awareness, training, naval drills and intelligence sharing.

In the domain of cybersecurity, former PM Boris Johnson and PM Narendra Modi in May 2021 decided to form an [Enhanced Cyber Security Partnership](#). The partnership is focused on areas like “cyber governance, deterrence, resilience and capacity building”. Both the countries have also been meeting annually for their [India-UK Bilateral Cyber Dialogue](#) with the fifth one having been held in April 2022 in London. In 2017, India and the UK also signed a [White Shipping Agreement](#) which allows the sharing of information across the whole of the Indian Ocean Region.



Lt Cdr Stephen Smith, joined the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) as the The International Liaison Officer (ILO), Source: [Force India](#)

Since the signing of the Roadmap 2030, their maritime cooperation has further increased. In June 2021, the UK posted its first permanent Royal Navy liaison officer at the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre for the Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) to strengthen maritime domain awareness in the region. It was also in the same year that the Carrier Strike Group [HMS Queen Elizabeth](#), one of the two largest warships ever built for the Royal Navy visited the region and conducted Exercise Konkan Shakti, the first tri-service exercise between both countries. In 2022, the UK also decided to join India's [Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative](#) and co-lead the pillar on Maritime Security thus getting further involved in the protection of the Indo-Pacific maritime domain.

2.3.4. Mitigating China

The UK and India both share concerns about China's expansionist moves in the Indo-Pacific, which threaten regional stability. China has been [assertive in its territorial claims](#) in the East and South China Seas, where it has built artificial islands, militarised reefs and violated the sovereignty of other countries. China has also increased its presence and influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), where it has established naval bases, invested in infrastructure projects and deployed submarines. China's actions pose a [challenge to the rules-based international system and the freedom of navigation](#) that both the UK and India value.

To counter China's expansionist moves, the UK and India have adopted a [multifaceted approach that balances engagement and deterrence](#). On one hand, they have maintained dialogue with China on issues of mutual interest and concern, such as trade, climate change and global health alongside [supporting multilateral efforts to address regional issues](#) involving China, such as the Iran nuclear deal, the Afghanistan peace process and the Myanmar crisis. On the other hand, they have strengthened their defence and security cooperation with each other and with like-minded partners such as the USA, Japan, Australia and France. By doing so, they have signalled their resolve to defend their interests and values in the face of China's challenges.

The UK-India cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is not aimed at containing or confronting China, but rather at ensuring a stable and balanced regional order that respects the legitimate interests of all stakeholders. The UK and India recognise that China is an important actor in the region and that they need to engage with it constructively on areas of common concern. However, they also make it clear that they will not tolerate any actions that undermine the rules-based international system or threaten the sovereignty and security of other countries. The UK and India are committed to working together and with other partners to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific that benefits all.

3. Recommendations

The UK House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee released a review report on August 30 2023, titled [Tilting Horizons: The Integrated Review and Indo-Pacific](#). As per the report, while there has been a reiteration of engaging with the Indo-Pacific countries, not much emphasis is given to policy outcomes of the Indo-Pacific tilt, and the priorities towards engagement in the Indo-Pacific need to be maintained over a long period of time. Moreover, the UK's security and foreign policy are yet to be integrated with what the UK seeks to achieve through the Indo-Pacific tilt. Therefore, the UK requires resources directed towards achieving a well-defined set of objectives in the long term. Under the [multi-alignment approach of the Indian foreign policy](#), India is seeking to balance the relations between the Western countries and regional countries. Hence, the UK will need to articulate a set of objectives that would allow it to fit in the Indian approach in the Indo-Pacific.

In this regard, through this report's exploration of the three aspects of the UK-India relationship, the following recommendations should be considered.

- With increased ministerial level dialogues, the two governments should frame agendas for long term in domains of finance, immigration, education, defence and trade.
- Making use of Track 1.5 and Track 2 level dialogues, India and the UK should frame a well-defined set of objectives for long-term strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific and form coherence between the two governments.
- MoUs and agreements for defence cooperation, technology sharing and manufacturing between defence companies of both countries should be encouraged.
- Closer dialogues between the government should be encouraged in order to reduce bureaucratic hurdles and facilitate investments and business opportunities between the two nations.
- MoUs between the Armed Forces of the two countries should be enacted for intelligence sharing, joint training, logistics, exercises and defence cooperation specifically for the Indo-Pacific region.
- Military liaison exchanges, intelligence sharing, joint training, exercises, and dialogues need to be continued over a long period of time to establish the status quo of deterrence against Chinese assertiveness and expansionist moves.
- Taking advantage of the already existing Indian students and working professionals in the UK alongside strong people-to-people relations, the UK government should focus on strategically crucial domains like AI research, defence, aerospace, space activities, semiconductors, and emerging technologies. Success in these fields would encompass R&D as well as commercial activities and would require cross-institutional collaboration between the UK and India.

