

INDIA AND BRITAIN IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: A NEW LEGACY FOR A NEW ERA

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India and the UK share a long and complex history. Since India's independence 76 years ago, both countries have cultivated "deep and vibrant people-to-people ties", fostered by an over 1.6 million strong Indian diaspora in Britain.¹ Over the last few years, both countries have steadily expanded their relations, with a view of greater cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. India's growing profile in the region and globally, including through its presidency of the G20, has put New Delhi under the spotlight and highlighted its importance as a critical partner in not only the Indian Ocean, but the Indo-Pacific at large.

This paper looks to answer two key questions: How is the UK's Indo-Pacific policy changing in recent times, amid growing competition and contestation in the region? What opportunities does this present for greater collaboration between India and the UK to bring about a more secure Indian Ocean Region (IOR)?

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1. Prime Minister's Office, *UK-India Joint Statement April 2022: Towards Shared Security and Prosperity Through National Resilience* (London: Government of UK, April 2022), <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/prime-minister-boris-johnsons-visit-to-india-april-2022-uk-india-joint-statements/uk-india-joint-statement-april-2022-towards-shared-security-and-prosperity-through-national-resilience>. Accessed on March 18, 2023.

Through an exploration of these research questions, the paper makes the argument that while India-UK relations have been on a sound upward trajectory, there remains much room for greater cooperation in the Indo-Pacific domain.

UK's INDO-PACIFIC OUTLOOK: A TILT OR A PILLAR?

In search of a new global role, the UK has increasingly demonstrated an interest in returning east of the Suez by portraying its recommitment to the Indo-Pacific region. The 2021 *Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development, and Foreign Policy* (hereafter, IR 2021) was a landmark policy document that sought to define Britain's global role post its departure from the European Union (EU).² It sought to inject clear policy objectives and define priorities for the country post Brexit. It laid down the UK's ambition to establish the broadest and most integrated presence in the Indo-Pacific of all European states. This included a commitment to enhance Britain's regional defence engagements (such as through consistent military deployments) in the region.

While the UK's 'tilt' was welcomed as a positive effort toward greater burden-sharing in the Indo-Pacific by the regional powers, including India, others viewed it with scepticism. For instance, they questioned London's degree of enthusiasm and the sustainability of its tilt and ambition in the region.³ The war in Ukraine only added to such scepticism, as many believed that the event would further reduce Britain's capacity to commit defence resources to the Indo-Pacific. At the same time, political instability within the UK, such as with the resignations of former Prime Ministers Boris Johnson and Liz Truss, also created greater uncertainty around its economic and foreign policies.

Nevertheless, the Sunak government has managed to maintain a consistent foreign policy tone while advancing the primary goal

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2. Cabinet Office, "The Integrated Review 2021," Government of UK, March 16, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/the-integrated-review-2021>. Accessed on March 18, 2023.
 3. Ben Barry, Bastian Giegerich, Euan Graham and Ben Schreer, "The UK Indo-Pacific Tilt: Defence and Military Implications," IISS, June 8, 2022, <https://www.iiss.org/blogs/research-paper/2022/06/the-uk-indo-pacific-tilt>. Accessed on March 18, 2023.

of a 'Global Britain'. Since the release of the IR 2021, Britain has continued to strengthen its relationships and engagement with the region, making its 'tilt' toward the Indo-Pacific more of a 'permanent pillar'. The most important indicator of this is the recently revised *Integrated Review 2023 (IR 2023)* produced in response to changes in world events since the release of the first iteration of the document, including the war in Ukraine, and China's willingness to use all levers of state power to achieve a dominant role in global affairs.⁴ As IR 2023 also emphasises, London has achieved several of its key objectives in the Indo-Pacific, including attaining dialogue partner status with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), pursuing the final phase of negotiations on accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), launching a Singapore hub of the British International Investments, and co-launching the Partners in the Blue Pacific Initiative.⁵ This was accompanied by a modest increase in regional military presence, through defence diplomacy initiatives like the deployment of a UK carrier strike group and two offshore patrol vessels to the region, launch of the Australia, UK, US (AUKUS) alliance, and the Global Combat Air Programme with Japan and Italy to build next-generation fighter aircraft.

The IR 2023 explicitly establishes the Euro-Atlantic theatre as the foremost priority for the UK, with most of its defence capabilities focussed on the region. Security in the Euro-Atlantic region is intrinsically linked to the war in Ukraine, as London considers the potential threat of the Allies' security and territorial integrity. However, the Indo-Pacific is given due attention as a domain that is inherently and inextricably linked to the security of the Euro-Atlantic. Accordingly, it is in London's interest to support regional partners'

4. Louisa Brooke-Holland, Claire Mills, Philip Loft, John Curtis and Nigel Walker, "The Integrated Review Refresh 2023: What has Changed Since 2021?," House of Commons Library, UK Parliament, March 15, 2023, <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9750/>. Accessed on March 18, 2023.

5. Prime Minister's Office, *Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a More Contested and Volatile World* (London: Government of UK, March 2023), https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1143306/11857435_NS_IR_Refresh_2023_Supply_AllPages_Revision_6_WEB_PDF.pdf. Accessed on March 19, 2023.

efforts to develop the security capabilities and institutionalise greater cooperation with the region. In this vein, London has emerged as a leader in the efforts to establish a more permanent European maritime presence in the Indo-Pacific.⁶ In essence, the IR 2023 looks to mould Britain's Indo-Pacific tilt into a more enduring and long-term strategy by building on bilateral, minilateral and multilateral partnerships across the region. It doubles down on Britain's focus on the Indo-Pacific region amid an awareness that tensions in the theatre—especially those emanating from China—could have greater consequences than the Ukraine War.

Notably, the IR 2023 also lays out a much-needed new direction in Britain's China policy. Until recently, UK's China stance has been one of 'systemic competitor'. While the Sunak government has remained just shy of officially listing China as a threat to Britain—an ambition espoused by the short-lived Truss administration⁷—it does nevertheless display a strong shift in rhetoric by identifying China as an "epoch-defining and systemic challenge with implications for almost every area of government policy".⁸ In this context, the UK has also expanded its strategy to include greater investments in better understanding Beijing by enhancing British expertise on China.⁹ This shift embeds a fine line of recognising the China challenge and the need to coordinate a strong response to it while also acknowledging the importance of engaging Beijing on issues like climate change and trade.

6. Ministry of Defence, "UK and France Commit to Greater Defence Cooperation at Paris Summit," press release, Government of UK, March 10, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-france-commit-to-greater-defence-cooperation-at-paris-summit>. Accessed on March 18, 2023.

7. Tony Diver, and Dominic Nicholls, "Liz Truss to Declare China a 'Threat' to the UK," *The Telegraph*, October 11, 2022, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/world-news/2022/10/11/first-time-liz-truss-calls-china-serious-threat/>. Accessed on March 18, 2023.

8. n. 5.

9. Prime Minister's Office, "UK Announces Increased Funding for China Capabilities Programme," press release, Government of UK, March 13, 2023, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-announces-increased-funding-for-china-capabilities-programme>. Accessed on March 19, 2023.

INDIA AND THE UK IN THE INDO-PACIFIC: OUTLINING AREAS FOR COOPERATION

The India-UK relationship is not without its gaps, many brought on by the layers of the British imperial legacy in India. In addition to the colonial past, India's aversion to British interventions in India's domestic politics—including shielding anti-India separatists and lack of probe on attacks on the Indian High Commission by pro-Khalistan protestors¹⁰—as well as structural issues, such as Indian demands to access the UK's labour market, can be persistent roadblocks in bilateral relations. In essence, there is a disconnect in how both countries view each other. As former British Chancellor George Osborne stated in an interview, while the successful British governments view their partnership with India as “special”, India does not share similar views.¹¹ Often, Britain's outlook towards India has been as a market rather than an equal partner.¹² In this context, several strands of their relationship lack harmony. However, Britain's turn towards the Indo-Pacific (combined with its new geopolitical circumstances) has generated new thinking on both sides and created the requisite impetus to overcome persistent roadblocks.

As the UK looks to build closer alignment of purpose and action built upon shared interests—rather than shared values—India is an important aspect of such a strategy. The IR 2021 document positioned India-UK relations in the context of London's tilt toward the Indo-Pacific. Importantly, it outlined Britain's goal for an elevated partnership with India, encompassing the full range of their shared interests, including areas like commerce, investment, defence and security, and climate change. Recognising India's ascent as an international actor of growing importance, the *UK-India Roadmap 2030*—released shortly after—looks to re-energise trade and investment with Delhi, enhance defence cooperation in the

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10. Abhinandan Mishra, “Two Months on, UK Still not Probing Attack on Indian High Commission,” *The Sunday Guardian*, May 21, 2023, <https://sundayguardianlive.com/top-five/two-months-on-uk-still-not-probing-attack-on-indian-high-commission>. Accessed on August 4, 2023.
 11. Patrick Wintour, “UK Faces Difficult Path as it Resumes Courtship with India,” *The Guardian*, April 6, 2021, <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2021/apr/06/uk-faces-difficult-path-as-it-resumes-courtship-with-india>. Accessed on August 4, 2023.
 12. Jitendra Nath Misra, “The Paradoxes of India-UK Ties,” ORF, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/the-paradoxes-of-india-u-k-ties/>. Accessed on August 6, 2023.

Indian Ocean region, and build UK-India leadership to tackle shared challenges on climate change, clean energy, and global health. This agenda was reinforced during the meeting between the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi and British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in November 2022, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit. Simultaneously, the UK has also joined the India-led Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), as a pillar lead on maritime security.

Alongside this, India and the UK have also taken notable steps to enhance their bilateral relations. Both countries are currently and actively negotiating a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that encompasses 26 areas (discussions have been concluded on 13 of these) with hopes for an early, fair, and equitable deal.¹³ As a growing economy, India represents a massive opportunity for Britain (the UK and India rank as the fifth and sixth largest global economies with bilateral trade currently standing at roughly GBP 30 billion); an FTA would be a crucial step for Britain to solidify its regional engagement. At the same time, both states are also making progress on their defence and security partnership, with on-going discussions on next generation collaborations across the land, sea, air, space and cyber domains. This includes deliberations on potential for cooperation in the defence sector in view of the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (self-reliant India) initiative and cyber security in the Indo-Pacific.¹⁴

From an Indian perspective, despite the UK's intention to establish itself as a firm friend of the Indo-Pacific,¹⁵ its capacity in the region is naturally limited owing to its position as an external actor. London's priority theatre being the Euro-Atlantic can further generate structural tensions when it comes to British engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Yet, deeper British engagement can also have substantive positives as India looks to actively shape the changing

13. Melissa Cyrill, "India, UK FTA Negotiations: Key Updates," India Briefing, March 15, 2023, <https://www.india-briefing.com/news/india-uk-fta-25699.html/>. Accessed on March 19, 2023.

14. "India, UK NSAs Discuss Cooperation in Indo-Pacific," *Hindustan Times*, July 22, 2022, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/india-uk-nsas-discuss-cooperation-in-indopacific-101658430194689.html>. Accessed on March 19, 2023.

15. Prime Minister's Office, "Prime Minister: The UK will be a Firm Friend to the Indo-Pacific," press release, Government of UK, November 15, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-the-uk-will-be-a-firm-friend-to-the-indo-pacific>. Accessed on March 20, 2023.

balance of power in the region. For one, a stronger presence of the UK further strengthens the coalition structure that can be mobilised—if needed—to check China’s advances and protect the global liberal order. Importantly, New Delhi views AUKUS positively in this context; the agreement that strengthens deterrence against Chinese expansionism is a welcome development. In fact, in January 2023, Britain suggested expanding AUKUS with the involvement of India and Japan.¹⁶ While India’s inclusion in an AUKUS-like pact remains speculative at the moment, it nevertheless opens the doors for deliberations on what a potential security-centric minilateral cooperation in the region involving Delhi and London will look like.

In particular, India and the UK can pursue greater cooperation in three key areas: *First*, maritime security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which would include combining their respective resources to provide public good to the region. *Second*, improving quality connectivity infrastructure in the IOR. *Third*, defence industry cooperation, such as in the air power domain.

Maritime Security in the IOR

Most importantly, greater minilateral and multilateral cooperation between India and the UK must focus on the IOR. Over the past two years, initiatives like AUKUS have highlighted Britain’s efforts to deepen its active engagement in the Pacific; as London refocusses on the trans-Atlantic partnership, its more active posture in the Pacific has followed naturally as an extension of its already ongoing security alliance with the US. In the Indian Ocean, however, British presence has been comparatively muted. Yet, the IOR is a strategically vital region for the UK. A whopping 80 per cent of Britain’s natural gas imports pass through the Indian Ocean, making it a region critical to British energy security.¹⁷ With the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 destabilising the European gas supply chains and

16. Suchet Vir Singh, “UK’s House of Commons Defence Panel Calls for Expansion of AUKUS to Include India, Japan,” *The Print*, January 29, 2023, <https://theprint.in/defence/uks-house-of-commons-defence-panel-calls-for-expansion-of-aukus-to-include-india-japan/1341460/>. Accessed on March 20, 2023.

17. Rahul Roy-Chaudhury, “India-UK Maritime Security: Convergences and Opportunities,” IISS, September 30, 2019, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2019/09/sasia-india-uk-maritime-security>. Accessed on June 20, 2023.

requiring alternatives to Russian gas imports,¹⁸ the Indian Ocean sea lanes are even more important for the UK's national energy security. Its involvement in the region with a view of safeguarding freedom of navigation is, therefore, imperative.

Moving forward, London can build on its presence via the British Indian Ocean Territories to work with India (and perhaps Australia in a trilateral setting) on maritime security. This can include more expansive joint naval exercises in the Bay of Bengal. Over the years, through exercises like Konkan 2023, India and the UK have achieved growing interoperability and synergy.¹⁹ Such interactions can be expanded to include more complex manoeuvres and platforms. The deployment of the UK carrier strike group to the Indo-Pacific region in 2021, led by the HMS *Queen Elizabeth*, enabled both navies to conduct complex maritime interactions over three days in the Bay of Bengal.²⁰ However, such interactions are ad-hoc rather than regular; the next deployment of a *Queen Elizabeth*-class carrier (including F-35 combat jets) is set to occur only in 2025.²¹ While the permanent deployment of the HMS *Tamar*, an offshore patrol vessel, to the Indo-Pacific can certainly facilitate more regular naval exercises between the two countries,²² there must be a dedicated effort on both sides to upgrade the level of their interactions to enable effective joint operations in the face of shared challenges.

18. See "Trends in UK Imports and Exports of Fuels," Office for National Statistics, June 29, 2022, <https://www.ons.gov.uk/economy/nationalaccounts/balanceofpayments/articles/trendsinukimportsandexportsoffuels/2022-06-29>. Accessed on June 21, 2023.

19. Ministry of Defence, "Annual Bilateral Maritime Exercise Konkan 2023," Press Information Bureau, Government of India, March 23, 2023, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1909937>. Accessed on June 23, 2023.

20. British High Commission New Delhi, "UK Carrier Strike Group Starts Maritime Exercise with Indian Navy," Government of UK, July 22, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-carrier-strike-group-starts-maritime-exercise-with-indian-navy>. Accessed on June 23, 2023.

21. Andrew Chuter, "Britain to Send an Aircraft Carrier to the Indo-Pacific in 2025," *DefenseNews*, May 18, 2023, <https://www.defensenews.com/global/europe/2023/05/18/britain-to-send-an-aircraft-carrier-to-the-indo-pacific-in-2025/>. Accessed on June 23, 2023.

22. "Royal Navy Ship on Permanent Deployment in Indo-Pacific Makes First Port call in India," *The Hindu*, January 6, 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/royal-navy-ship-on-permanent-deployment-in-indo-pacific-makes-first-port-call-in-india/article66346516.ece>. Accessed on June 23, 2023.

Such bilateral drills can be supplemented with minilateral exercises, such as an India-UK-Australia Indian Ocean naval exercise, and continued UK participation in the Malabar Exercises in the Bay of Bengal. The UK's deployment of naval frigates to the Indo-Pacific also creates opportunities for ad hoc engagements similar to British involvement in events like the Australia-India Exercises (AUSINDEX) or Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) drills in the IOR. British presence in Diego Garcia can help support India's regional operations. The Royal Navy's permanent naval support facility in Bahrain (in addition to Kenya, Singapore, Brunei, Nepal, Oman and the British Indian Ocean Territory) and UK Maritime Trade Operation (UKMTO) office in Dubai can be used as points of contact to conduct joint operations against piracy and terrorism, and build stronger trade, political and security linkages between the two nations.

Additionally, both countries can enhance cooperation in areas like maritime domain awareness (especially information sharing on dark shipping) and maritime surveillance, through coordinated patrols in the region. India's Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) and the UK's National Maritime Information Centre (NMIC) can act as points of coordination for this effort. In 2021, the UK posted a liaison officer at the Indian Navy's Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), within the IMAC, in a move demonstrating the desire on both sides to work together for the security of the IOR and the Indo-Pacific at large.²³ For India, improving maritime situational awareness beyond its coastal waters, in the Indian Ocean and the far seas, has become a priority. India's particular concern lies in monitoring China's People's Liberation Army Navy's submarine passages to Pakistan and other regions in the Indian Ocean.²⁴ Despite its growing infrastructure to this effect, collaboration with regional partners is key to ensuring effective

23. Sidhant Sibal, "UK Deputes Officer to India's Information Fusion Centre," WION, June 23, 2021, <https://www.wionews.com/india-news/uk-deputes-officer-to-indias-information-fusion-centre-393203>. Accessed on June 26, 2023.

24. Darshana M. Baruah, "India's Evolving Maritime Domain Awareness Strategy in the Indian Ocean," in David Brewster, ed., *India and China at Sea: Competition for Naval Dominance in the Indian Ocean* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 162-174, <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780199479337.003.0010>. Accessed on June 26, 2023.

tracking of surface and subsurface vessels in the IOR; greater cooperation with the UK can help enhance India's surveillance footprint in the region.

These initiatives would be immensely beneficial to small regional states like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Maldives as they attempt to police their Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs). Not only would such cooperation help tackle shared problems like Illegal, Unreported and Unregulated (IUU) fishing and trafficking, but also help monitor Chinese activities in the region. Hence, building on their existing bilateral collaboration in this area, India and the UK can also collaborate to support the capacity building of the small regional states. This will include helping them enhance their national maritime surveillance and information fusion capabilities. Capacity building could extend to helping states strengthen their ocean governance frameworks and supporting their efforts to tackle climate change impacts in the maritime domains. Such cooperation can take place in an ad hoc manner, or through regional organisations. It would also position India and Britain as vital agents delivering public good to the region. Such cooperation can also involve other Indian Ocean actors, like France and Australia. Furthermore, a key pillar of collaboration must be regional frameworks like the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Such frameworks can be particularly important when it comes to bolstering regional activity in the infrastructure and connectivity domain as well as climate change and marine biodiversity.

Cooperation on Quality Infrastructure

A key focus for India [and the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) nations] in the Indo-Pacific region is the development of quality infrastructure. It is increasingly looking to work with like-minded partners to help support high-standard infrastructure projects in developing nations, as a way to not only bridge the rather vast (trillion dollar) infrastructure investment gap in the region,²⁵ but

25. Here, infrastructure investment gap is defined as the difference between the investment needs of the region and the current investment levels. See Julian Smith and Jennifer Tay, "PwC Presence at the B20 Forum: Bridging the Trillion-Dollar Infrastructure Gap in Asia

also provide a viable counter to China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). The pandemic crisis, the potential for conflict, and the increasingly severe impact of climate change have only highlighted the strategic importance of financing infrastructure development.

India and the UK have long been developmental partners; a prominent example of their collaboration is their co-chairmanship of the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), established by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2019 at the UN Climate Ambition Summit, from 2020-22.²⁶ London also launched a Clean Green Initiative in 2021, which aims to mobilise £8 billion a year by 2025, with £3 billion earmarked for climate financing.²⁷ It already shares a bilateral arrangement with Australia for co-financing infrastructure projects in the Indo-Pacific. Individually too, the UK is looking to be more strategic in its Official Developmental Assistance (ODA) as it supports partner nations, by not only offering grants but also its considerable expertise and returnable capital to address mutual regional challenges.²⁸ Britain is increasingly looking to establish itself as the European power with the broadest presence in the Indo-Pacific, and being a major contributor to the quality infrastructure development agenda—whether via provision of financing or expertise—is essential. In other words, quality infrastructure can

Pacific" PwC, n.d., <https://www.pwc.com/id/en/pwc-presence-at-the-b20-forum/bridging-the-trillion-dollar-infrastructure-gap-in-asia-pacific.html>; Asian Development Bank (ADB), *Meeting Asia's Infrastructure Needs* (Manila: ADB, February 2017), <https://www.adb.org/publications/asia-infrastructure-needs>. Accessed on June 29, 2023.

26. British High Commission New Delhi, "UK Becomes Co-chair of India-led Global Climate Initiative," Government of UK, March 20, 2020, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-becomes-co-chair-of-india-led-global-climate-initiative>. Accessed on July 1, 2023.
27. Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, "Truss Revamps British Development Finance Institution to Deliver Jobs and Clean Growth", Government of UK, November 24, 2021, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/truss-revamps-british-development-finance-institution-to-deliver-jobs-and-clean-growth>. Accessed on July 1, 2023.
28. See Prime Minister's Office, *Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*, presented to Parliament by the Prime Minister by Command of Her Majesty (London: Government of UK, March 2021), 67, https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/975077/Global_Britain_in_a_Competitive_Age_the_Integrated_Review_of_Security__Defence__Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf. Accessed on July 2, 2023.

be used as a strategic tool to pursue British (and other like-minded powers') policy objectives in the region.

As India looks to ramp up its own activities in connectivity corridors and infrastructure development in the IOR, there is significant room for project-specific collaboration between the two nations. As Beijing has expanded its presence in the IOR through maritime infrastructure-related strategic collaborations with countries like Maldives and Sri Lanka, advocating for high quality and fiscally responsible infrastructure initiatives that are based on principles of good governance, internationally recognised norms, transparency and openness are all that more important. New Delhi is already working with Japan on providing viable alternatives to Chinese infrastructure investment. Considering British presence in the IOR, however, both countries must explore the potential for collaborative infrastructure development projects in the region. In 2021, India, the UK and Australia launched a dedicated Infrastructure for Resilient Island States (IRIS) platform,²⁹ under CDRI, which can be used in combination with IORA and BIMSTEC to push for coordinated action. This can be one point for further cooperation between both countries, enabling joint projects for regional development. Coordination of these activities with other regional quality infrastructure initiatives—like that under the QUAD, G7 or other minilateral and bilateral platforms—can help ensure investments are strategic.

Defence Industrial Cooperation

Significant security cooperation can occur in the air power domain as well. Britain's defence sector was deployed in full force at the Aero India exhibition—India's premier air show—in February 2023 in Bengaluru.³⁰ This year's edition focussed heavily on showcasing India's rapid emergence as a hub for manufacturing military aircraft, helicopters and various other military equipment that integrate new-

29. "Launch of 'Infrastructure for Resilient Island States' (IRIS) at COP26," CDRI, November 2, 2021, <https://www.cdri.world/press-releases/launch-infrastructure-resilient-island-states-iris-cop26>. Accessed on July 4, 2023.

30. "UK Delegation at Aero India Commits to 'Create in India' Ambition," *The Economic Times*, February 13, 2023, <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/uk-delegation-at-aero-india-commits-to-create-in-india-ambition/articleshow/97881876.cms?from=mdr>. Accessed on July 5, 2023.

age avionics. This focus follows the Indian's government's growing emphasis on *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (or self-reliant India) via programmes like 'Make in India' and 'Create in India'. Considering India's rapidly growing defence industry (in Financial Year 2022-23, India's defence exports reached an all-time high of Rs 16,000 crore),³¹ and a concerted effort to move from being a net importer to a net exporter of defence equipment, there is already strong interest in London in accelerating collaboration with India.

At Aero India, the British delegation demonstrated its commitment to expanding defence industrial cooperation with India across research, development and training. This included potential collaboration on a strategic partnership for a jet engine development programme and maritime electric propulsion technology. As British High Commissioner to India Alex Ellis asserted, the UK stands as an excellent partner to realise India's ambition to build indigenous defence capabilities through "sharing knowledge, increasing interoperability, more training and exercising, and through increased industrial collaboration, including through design and make in India".³² British industries like Rolls Royce, BAE Systems, MBDA UK, Thales UK, Collins Aerospace and Leonardo have much to offer India's growing industry.

Much is already being done in this area. In 2022, both countries set up a Defence Industry Joint Working Group to accelerate such collaboration. This was followed by Britain's issuance of an Open General Export Licence to India—the first such licence in the Indo-Pacific—to help shorten delivery times for defence procurements.³³ Importantly, the UK's offer of advanced core technologies would enable India to create indigenous, International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR)-free jet engines, to be manufactured, owned

31. Balwan Singh Nagial, "The Rising Story of the Indian Defence Industry from Importer to Exporter," *The Times of India*, April 1, 2023, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/blogs/col-nagial/the-rising-story-of-the-indian-defence-industry-from-importer-to-exporter/>. Accessed on July 5, 2023.

32. n. 27.

33. Export Control Joint Unit, Department for International Trade and Department for Business and Trade, "Open General Export License (dual use items: India)," Government of UK, June 28, 2022, <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/open-general-export-licence-dual-use-items-india#:~:text=Details,from%20the%20UK%20to%20India>. Accessed on July 6, 2023.

and exported by India.³⁴ With India concluding a game-changing jet engine deal with the US to produce General Electric's F414 engines in India, there is an opportunity for India-UK-US collaboration to co-develop jet engines for India's next generation fighter aircraft.

CONCLUSION

In short, there is immense scope for greater India-UK cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Shared historical ties and increasingly intertwined interests imply working together on issues of maritime security and prosperity in the region. Britain's more permanent turn toward the Indo-Pacific region and intention to institutionalise its engagement make it important for Delhi and London to accelerate cooperation in the region. In 2021, both countries signed a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership; for such a partnership to materialise, it is vital that both states capitalise on their respective expertise and launch cooperative initiatives in the IOR (and the Indo-Pacific at large). Such regional cooperation must be realistic, with achievable goals and demonstrable impact.

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34. "India and UK to Deepen Defence Relations; Rajnath Singh Invites UK Industries to Build in India," *Financial Express*, February 21, 2023, <https://www.financialexpress.com/business/defence-india-and-uk-to-deepen-defence-relations-rajnath-singh-invites-uk-industries-to-build-in-india-2988325/>. Accessed on July 6, 2023.