

Post-Brexit British Foreign Policy Towards India: Moving Towards Fulfilling ‘Global Britain’ Aspirations

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Abstract

In a post-Brexit world characterised by the UK’s ‘Global Britain’ aspirations, a strong UK-India economic relationship is becoming a British foreign policy priority. It is in this context that several developments in recent years, from the JETCO meeting of 2019 to the February 2021 visit of International Trade Secretary Elizabeth Truss, have all worked towards the goal of achieving a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and strengthening the UK’s economic relationship with India. As it traces these developments, this paper argues that the strategic and geopolitical priorities of the UK and India play a significant role in determining the future trajectory of this economic relationship. This stems from the fact that, for India, its geopolitical and strategic interests are the central priority. Therefore, the UK’s stance on China and the Indo-Pacific, for example, have the potential to act as roadblocks to British foreign policy priorities. These factors, combined with others such as Indian concerns towards visa policies, protests outside the Indian High Commission in London, and the colonial legacy, are thus important considerations as the two countries move towards a stronger economic relationship. Similarly, India’s complicated business environment has been seen as a restricting factor by the UK. While all of this could potentially pose challenges for post-Brexit British foreign policy goals, the paper argues that recent UK moves, such as its shifting tilt towards the Indo-Pacific, its growing focus on the strategic relationship and collaboration in areas such as healthcare and global governance, seem to be working to alter the current situation. These steps seem to be pushing the UK-India relationship in the right direction, in line with the UK’s ‘Global Britain’ aspirations.

Introduction

This paper seeks to analyse post-Brexit British foreign policy towards India in the context of ‘Global Britain’ aspirations. The main argument is that while the United Kingdom (UK) is endeavouring to formulate and maintain a strong economic relationship with India, the strategic

and geopolitical priorities of the two countries remain a significant obstacle. The paper goes on to argue, however, that while past policy decisions sit somewhat uncomfortably with Global Britain aspirations, recent UK foreign policy initiatives seem to be working towards overcoming the roadblocks the relationship is facing.

The rise of India on the international stage, combined with Brexit, reveals the significance of a strong UK-India relationship. The UK sees India as a major partner post-Brexit, central to its ‘Global Britain’ aspirations. In this context, it seeks to build a strong economic relationship between the two countries. However, the priorities do not appear to be the same for India, whose current focus seems to be on strategic and geopolitical concerns, and for whom the defence and security relationship takes precedence. These, and other factors discussed in the essay, pose a challenge to the UK, as it looks to fulfil its own priorities. The UK, however, has shown initiative, and its foreign policy decisions of the past few months seem to be aiming to alter that situation.

I begin the paper by laying out key aspects of the UK-India bilateral relationship, as it has played out traditionally, followed by certain key developments in the recent past. I then move on to discuss UK foreign policy initiatives towards a stronger economic relationship with India. The next section, however, analyses India’s priorities and how strategic and geopolitical factors are significant considerations that should drive British foreign policy decisions towards India. I then consider other potential roadblocks in the future relationship between the two countries, before pointing out that there are visible shifts in the UK’s foreign policy, and several areas where the two countries have emerged as strong partners. The paper concludes by analysing the direction of British foreign policy towards India, how the European Union (EU) plays into those dynamics, and how the UK’s policy decisions seem to be starting to move towards fulfilling their ‘Global Britain’ aspirations.

UK-India Relationship

The shared history of the two countries “is both at the root of the countries’ deep ties, and a source of tension.”¹ Their “deep historical linkages” are visible in the usage of a common language and the huge Indian diaspora in the UK (Niblett, 2021, p.45-46). This also contributes

¹ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, (2019, June 24), Building Bridges: Reawakening UK-India Ties, Eighteenth Report of Session 2017-19. Last Accessed: 22nd February 2021, Retrieved from: <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm201719/cmselect/cmfaff/1465/1465.pdf>.

to their shared values and institutions. India's membership in the Commonwealth also flows from this common past.

Traditionally, the two countries have taken several steps towards facilitating and broadening their political and economic relationship. At the political level, several institutionalised mechanisms have been established. The two have also focused on a common fight against terrorism. The presence of the Indian diaspora has led to the establishment of mechanisms to strengthen 'people-to-people' ties. Their multifaceted defence links are reflected in the bilateral Defence Consultative Group (DCG), the Defence and International Security Partnership (DISP), and joint military exercises. India has procured some defence supplies from the UK and there has been some cooperation in defence technology and research (Scott, 2017). The two have also displayed a robust economic relationship, providing more than half a million jobs to each other. For example, about 400 British firms operate in India as the UK has become one of the largest G20 employers and investors in India.² The India-UK Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO), Economic and Financial Dialogue (EFD), India-UK Financial Partnership (IUKFP), India-UK CEOs Forum among other initiatives are embodiments of this relationship. Clearly, investment forms a key aspect of the relationship between the two. Department of International Trade's inward investment figures for 2019-2020 show that India has become the second-largest foreign investor in the UK, investing in 120 projects and creating 5,429 new jobs.³ The large diaspora also contributes to over 6% of the GDP. The UK market is also home to an increasingly large number of big Indian corporates. In terms of trade, the picture is bleaker. The UK's rank amongst India's trade partners has fallen over the years, with it ranking 14th in 2019-20.⁴

There have been disagreements in terms of the strategic priorities of the two countries. Among other factors, India's priorities do not fall in line with the UK's growing focus on China and lack of focus on the developments in the Indo-Pacific. However, the UK has been modifying its policy stances, allowing Indian perceptions to change as well.⁵

² A. Hammond, (2020, December 30), With His Post-Brexit Trip to India, UK PM Boris Johnson Aims to Send a Statement of Intent, *Arab News*. Last Accessed: 20th February 2021, Retrieved from: <https://www.arabnews.com/node/1785021>

³ Department for International Trade, (2020, July), Inward Investment Results 2019-20. Last Accessed: 20th February 2021. Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/899385/Department_for_International_Trade_inward_investment_results_2019_to_2020.pdf

⁴ High commission of India, London (Economic & Commerce Wing), (2021, January): Brief on India-UK Economic Relations. Last Accessed: 26th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.hcilondon.gov.in/docs/16122486771.pdf>

⁵ W. Ladwig, (2021, January 8): Are the UK and India Finally Getting Serious About Each Other?, *RUSI*. Last Accessed: 28th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://rusi.org/commentary/are-uk-and-india-finally-getting-serious-about-each-other>

Recent Developments

As a recent Chatham House research paper remarks, “India’s importance to the UK is inescapable” (Niblett, 2021, p.45). This is especially true in a post-Brexit world where the UK is looking beyond EU borders, seeking a new role and position for itself.

From the perspective of UK’s foreign policy towards India, there has been an increased momentum in recent months, beginning with Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab’s visit to India in December 2020 which, according to a major Indian newspaper, “came with a declaration and immediate and longer-term goals for the India-U.K. relationship.”⁶ Invitation to PM Modi for the upcoming G7 and COP26 summits are seen as further steps towards strengthening ties.⁷ In a similar vein, PM Johnson’s visit as chief guest on the occasion of India’s Republic Day in January 2021, that had to be cancelled due to new strain of the COVID-19 virus in the UK⁸, would’ve marked his first bilateral visit post-Brexit.⁹ His visit later this year is supposed to culminate the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) negotiations which have been put on the roadmap during International Trade Secretary Elizabeth Truss’ February visit to India.¹⁰

UK’s Priority – Economic Relationship

As mentioned above, the UK and India share a significant economic relationship, the development of which forms the utmost priority for the UK, as India’s rise puts forth trade and investment opportunities (Scott, 2017). Thus, the growing momentum has focused largely on developing and strengthening the economic ties between the two countries. PM Johnson thus seeks a post-Brexit trade deal with India, providing UK firms greater access to the large consumer base of the Indian market.¹¹ India could also benefit from a trade deal as it seeks to reduce its dependence on trade with China, as the relationship between the two takes a rocky turn. Additionally, the deal could help reduce the effects of the economic setbacks India has

⁶ Shackles and Ties: On Transition Period of U.K.’s Exit from EU, (2020, December 18), *The Hindu*. Last Accessed: 19th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/editorial/shackles-and-ties-on-transition-period-of-uks-exit-from-eu/article33358229.ece>

⁷ Shackles and Ties, (2020, December 18), Ibid.

⁸ K. Bhattacharjee, (2021, January 5), Boris Johnson Cancels Republic Day Visit to India over COVID-19 Crisis in U.K., *The Hindu*. Last Accessed: 12th April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/uk-pm-boris-johnson-cancels-india-visit-citing-need-to-oversee-virus-response/article33501617.ece>

⁹ Shackles and Ties, (2020, December 18), Ibid.

¹⁰ India-UK Enhanced Trade Partnership to be Launched, (2021, February 8), *The Hindu BusinessLine*. Last Accessed: 14th April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/economy/india-uk-enhanced-trade-partnership-to-be-launched/article33784902.ece>

¹¹ A. Hammond (2020, December 30), Ibid.

faced as a result of the pandemic.¹² Clearly, the new economic and geopolitical scenarios that have followed the pandemic and Brexit, make a fast-track trade deal a significant consideration for both India and the UK. Thus, even amidst the pandemic, when in-person meetings haven't been occurring across the globe, the UK sent ministers to India to lay down the foundation for an FTA.¹³

The development of this FTA has therefore been a major theme of the bilateral relationship for the past few years. In July 2019, within the JETCO meeting framework in London, the two countries reached an agreement to set up three new business-led bilateral working groups to identify and address non-tariff trade barriers in the food and beverage, digital and data services, and healthcare sectors.¹⁴ This was followed-up on during the 14th JETCO meeting held virtually between UK International Trade Secretary Elizabeth Truss and her Indian counterpart Piyush Goyal in July 2020.¹⁵

During the 10th EFD in October 2020, the two agreed to intensify their economic relationship with the aim to create and secure more jobs in the UK. This manifested in the form of a new UK-India Partnership on Infrastructure Policy and Financing, UK-India Sustainable Finance Forum as part of a larger goal of engaging private capital in green investments and greening the financial system, a new mandate to hunt for closer financial relations in areas comprising of Financial Technology within the business-led India-UK Financial Partnership framework, creation of a new Financial Markets Dialogue for elimination of barriers in terms of regulation and market access for firms on either side, among other agreements.¹⁶

During Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab's December 2020 visit, discussions about a ten-year roadmap for bilateral relations, the 'Enhanced Trade Partnership' (ETP), a new structure for

¹² S. Khorana, (2021, February 5), India: UK Is on a Charm Offensive to Win a Free-Trade Deal – Will It Work?, *The Conversation*. Last Accessed: 19th February 2021. Retrieved from: <http://theconversation.com/india-uk-is-on-a-charm-offensive-to-win-a-free-trade-deal-will-it-work-154745>

¹³ S. Khorana, (2021, February 5), Ibid.

¹⁴ India, UK Set up 3 New Bilateral Trade Working Groups (2019, July 15), *The Economic Times*. Last Accessed: 22nd February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/india-uk-set-up-3-new-bilateral-trade-working-groups/articleshow/70232732.cms?from=mdr>

¹⁵ High commission of India, London (Economic & Commerce Wing), (2021, January), Ibid.

¹⁶ UK Government, HM Treasury, News Story, (2020, October 28), UK and India Agree to Strengthen Economic Relationship to Boost Jobs. Last Accessed: 28th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-and-india-agree-to-strengthen-economic-relationship-to-boost-jobs>

tariff, and the Indian proposal for an early harvest framework within the FTA formed significant talking points.¹⁷

Consequently, between February 5-9, 2021, when the Rt. Hon. Elizabeth Truss visited India, terms for an ETP were agreed upon with Shri Piyush Goyal. This is part of charting out a roadmap to the possible eventuality of a comprehensive FTA and deeper ties in terms of trade, as well as consideration regarding an Interim Agreement on preferential basis. Major investments from giants such as Tata Consultancy Services (information technology), Wockhardt (pharmaceutical and biotechnology) and others were confirmed.¹⁸ It was also agreed that this partnership would officially be announced during PM Johnson's India visit later in 2021.¹⁹

Clearly, then, several steps and initiatives have been taken towards the establishment of stronger economic ties. These however do face a number of challenges that need to be overcome before the plans manifest into reality. The next section discusses the significance of strategic and geopolitical considerations for India, which could formulate a major part of how the above developments play out.

Strategic and Geopolitical Considerations

India's priorities, on the other hand, are focused upon the defence and security relationship as well as geopolitical considerations. The Indian Ocean Region and the Indo-Pacific form a significant area of attention within Indian defence and foreign policy, an area where the two countries have the opportunity to cooperate.²⁰ Flowing from this, the UK's position on China is a factor of consideration – its engagement with the Belt and Road Initiative perhaps acting as a signal of it putting China first.²¹ The May administration's continued focus on the "Osborne Doctrine" approach of 2015, that highlighted seeking Chinese investment for the UK

¹⁷ R. Ghanashyam, (2020, December 23), Why Dominic Raab's Visit to India Matters, as UK Heads for Brexit, *ThePrint*. Last Accessed: 12th April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://theprint.in/opinion/why-dominic-raabs-visit-to-india-matters-as-uk-heads-for-brexit/572179/>

¹⁸ UK Government, Department for International Trade and The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, (2021, February 10), Press Release: Liz Truss Deepens Trade Ties, Announces Investment Wins in India. Last Accessed: 22nd February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/liz-truss-deepens-trade-ties-announces-investment-wins-in-india>

¹⁹ UK Government, Department for International Trade and The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, (2021, February 8), Press Release: Joint UK-India statement on Enhanced Trade Partnership Progress. Last Accessed: 26th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/joint-uk-india-statement-on-enhanced-trade-partnership-progress>

²⁰ A. Dave, (2019, March 1), The UK and India in the Indo-Pacific, *RUSI*. Last Accessed: 12th April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://rusi.org/commentary/uk-and-india-indo-pacific>

²¹ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, (2019, June 24), *Ibid*.

as a significant aspect of its Asia policy, might also have sent a similar indication to India.²² For example, one important concern is that of immigration and visas, with Indian students and businesspeople finding the system complex. This feeling is exacerbated by the Indian perception of visa rules being easier for Chinese nationals, who have cheaper access to a two-year multiple-entry visa and the inclusion of China on the “low-risk” countries list for student visas.²³ Although the reintroduction of the two-year post-study work visa and the recent announcement of the points-based immigration system are welcome steps²⁴, this is a significant point for the UK to consider. Recent border skirmishes between China and India²⁵ may have further added to such sentiments in the latter.

Since India puts the strategic and geopolitical factors first, a perception that India is not a priority for the UK, might risk putting the economic priorities on the back burner.

Other Areas of Contention

At the same time, however, there are several other challenges and points of conflict that must be overcome for the envisaged strong bilateral relationship to become a reality. The Indian government has disapproved of the protests outside the Indian High Commission in London regarding Indian decisions around Article 370 (Jammu and Kashmir), the Citizenship (Amendment) Act, and the farmers’ protests.²⁶ Another area of contention is the continued impact of the colonial legacy. A significant instance is that of the Jallianwala Bagh massacre of April 1919. On the 100th anniversary of the massacre the UK Government expressed “deep regret” but “stopped short of a full apology.”²⁷ As Indian writer-columnist and diplomat, Navtej Sarna pointed out, this did not seem sufficient.²⁸

From the British point of view, one constraining factor is the complex business environment in India. British companies tend to find it difficult to operate in India. This arises from the

²² F. O’Donnell, (2018, October 10), The “Global Britain” concept and UK policy toward India, *Stimson Center*. Last Accessed: 28th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.stimson.org/2018/global-britain-concept-and-uk-policy-toward-india/>

²³ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, (2019, June 24), *Ibid*.

²⁴ A. Dave, (2020, May 5), Integrated Review: The UK’s Approach to India, *RUSI*. Last Accessed: 22nd February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://rusi.org/commentary/integrated-review-uks-approach-india>

²⁵ India-China Dispute: The Border Row Explained in 400 Words, (2021, January 25), *BBC News*. Last Accessed: 12th April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-53062484>.

²⁶ Shackles and Ties, (2020, December 18), *Ibid*.

²⁷ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, (2019, June 24), *Ibid*.

²⁸ N. Sarna, (2019, April 12), Jallianwala Bagh massacre: ‘Deep regret’ is simply not good enough, *The Hindu*. Last Accessed: 26th February 2021. Retrieved from <https://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/deep-regret-is-simply-not-good-enough/article26810058.ece>

complexity of taxation, import, FDI laws as well as the federal nature of the Indian state and the consequent variations in business environments of different states.²⁹ In 2019, during the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC)'s 'Global Britain and India' inquiry, Foreign Office Minister Mark Field warned about significant trade disputes that British companies in India were involved in, mentioning that while India is important, it is not a first-tier country for a post-Brexit FTA.³⁰

The above therefore indicates how foreign policy dynamics in one area do not occur in vacuum. Different factors must be considered while formulating decisions to ensure their best implementation and achieve expected outcomes. In that regard, then, the UK must work upon overcoming such obstacles and work towards the convergence of interests of the two countries.

Recent British Policy Decisions Demonstrating Shifts

There is evidence to suggest, however, that the two countries have been working to address these differences. A 2018 joint statement announced their emphasis on transparency, security and openness in the Indo-Pacific.³¹ More recently, the Rt. Hon. Dominic Raab, during his visit emphasised that the Indo-Pacific is part of the "very highest policy priorities" for the UK.³² He reiterated the visit of the HMS Queen Elizabeth Carrier Strike Group to the Indo-Pacific in 2021.³³ The UK's post-Brexit tilt towards the Indo-Pacific is also visible, significantly, in the decision to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP).³⁴ The 2020 appointment of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) Director-General for the Indo-Pacific is yet another reflection of this trend.³⁵ The Integrated Review of

²⁹ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, (2019, June 24), Ibid.

³⁰ India Not First Tier Country for Post-Brexit FTA, Says UK Minister, (2019, March 19), *The Economic Times*, Last Accessed: 26th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/foreign-trade/india-not-first-tier-country-for-post-brexit-fta-says-uk-minister/articleshow/68488526.cms?from=mdr>

³¹ UK Government, Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (2018, April 18), Policy Paper: UK-India joint statement: shared values, global capability. Last Accessed: 27th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/uk-india-joint-statement-shared-values-global-capability/uk-india-joint-statement-shared-values-global-capability>

³² Eye on China: India and UK Agree to Deepen Indo-Pacific Cooperation, (2020, December 15), *The Times of India*. Last Accessed: 27th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/eye-on-china-india-and-uk-agree-to-deepen-indo-pacific-cooperation/articleshow/79743512.cms>.

³³ UK Government, Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office, (2020, December 15), UK Foreign Secretary Sets out Ambition for Closer Relationship with India. Last Accessed: 27th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-foreign-secretary-sets-out-ambition-for-closer-relationship-with-india>

³⁴ U.K. to Join Asia-Pacific Free Trade Pact CPTPP, (2021, January 31), *The Hindu*. Last Accessed: 27th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.thehindu.com/news/international/uk-to-join-asia-pacific-free-trade-pact-cptpp/article33709538.ece>

³⁵ HM Government, (2021), Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy. Last Accessed: 11th April 2021. Retrieved from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/969402/The_Integrated_Review_of_Security_Defence_Development_and_Foreign_Policy.pdf

March 2021, which lays out a roadmap for this tilt towards the Indo-Pacific³⁶, thus mentions, “In the decade ahead, the UK will deepen our engagement in the Indo-Pacific, establishing a greater and more persistent presence than any other European country.”³⁷ This is a major area of convergence of interest for the two countries, both of whom, based on their common values, intend to promote a rules-based international order.

Within this tilt, China is considered a significant factor. The UK has brought about a “major reassessment” of Chinese actions and plans in the last four years.³⁸ For example, apart from maritime security, Foreign Secretary Raab also spoke about responding to new threats of space and cybersecurity, underscoring the intention to collaborate and further develop 5G networks. This has significance in terms of the increasing security concerns tied to China’s telecom giant Huawei.³⁹ The change in relationship between UK and China after the national security law in Hong-Kong and the consequent steps taken by the UK might also have some strategic impact on UK-India relationship.⁴⁰

He also highlighted the UK’s commitment to the strengthening of the defence and security relationship, discussing an upgrade to a “Comprehensive” Strategic Partnership, with closer cooperation in terms of military, counter-terrorism, climate change and the Indo-Pacific.⁴¹ He underscored that the UK intends to aid the fight against terrorism and piracy in Western Indian Ocean.⁴² Similarly, the appointment of Alex Ellis as the British High Commissioner to India has been seen as an indication of UK’s growing focus on a strategic relationship.⁴³

It must also be appreciated that the two countries have worked closely in several areas and have proven the strength of their partnership, illustrated specifically through the close and

³⁶ R. G. Whitman, (2021, April 2), UK sets its sights eastward, *Chatham House*. Last Accessed: 11th April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/publications/the-world-today/2021-04/uk-sets-its-sights-eastward>

³⁷ HM Government, (2021), *Ibid.*, p.62

³⁸ B. Hayton, (2020, November 27), China and Brexit Drive the UK’s ‘Tilt’ to Indo-Pacific, *Chatham House*. Last Accessed: 11th April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/2020/11/china-and-brex-it-drive-uks-tilt-indo-pacific>

³⁹ Eye on China, (2020, December 15), *Ibid.*

⁴⁰ A. Paliwal, (2020, December 15), India is right to bet on a post-Brexit UK, *Hindustan Times*. Last Accessed: 26th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.hindustantimes.com/analysis/india-is-right-to-bet-on-a-post-brex-it-uk/story-UVjFx8pwqSMQw812gBPwLP.html>; C. Paskal, (2021). Indo-Pacific strategies, perceptions and partnerships: The view from seven countries (Energy, Environment, and Resources Programme and Asia-Pacific Programme). *Chatham House*. Last Accessed: 11th April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/2021-03/2021-03-22-indo-pacific-strategies-paskal.pdf>

⁴¹ Shackles and Ties, (2020, December 18), *Ibid.*

⁴² Eye on China, (2020, December 15), *Ibid.*

⁴³ H. V. Pant, & T. Milford, (2021, February), The UK Shifts to the Indo-Pacific: An Opportunity for India-UK Ties, *Observer Research Foundation, ORF Issue Brief No. 444*. Last Accessed: 11th April 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.orfonline.org/research/the-uk-shifts-to-the-indo-pacific-an-opportunity-for-india-uk-ties/>

multidimensional collaboration during the current COVID-19 crisis. During the pandemic, a large number of medical supplies – including face masks and paracetamol packets – have been sent from India to the UK.⁴⁴ Similarly, a significant aspect of the relationship between the two countries would be the vaccine, with the Serum Institute in India producing and distributing the Oxford/AstraZeneca, first in India, and consequently, in other developing countries through the COVAX project.⁴⁵ Several companies have also partnered with each other to facilitate the relationship in this sector. For example, Smart Respiratory Products, a UK-based respiratory digital health company, has been facilitating remote consultations for Indian doctors, and has now partnered with the Indian ‘Care Ability Healthcare’ for supply of Smart Asthma respiratory solutions. UK’s Artificial Intelligence start-up Behold.AI has also decided to supply a chest x-ray analysis diagnostic tool for COVID-19 patients, and has partnered with the Apollo Group in India. Finally, UK’s Micropore is also settling in Hyderabad from where it intends to provide its membrane emulsification technology to India and other markets.⁴⁶ In terms of research, during the EFD in 2020, the two also agreed to put forth joint investment in the interest of research to study the impact of COVID-19 on South Asian populations in the two countries.⁴⁷ Viewing this as an indication of prospective cooperation related to innovations in global health, Pant and Milford assert that it “demonstrates how the UK and India can work together to counter Chinese influence in the developing world.”⁴⁸

Another area of cooperation has been that of global governance – for instance, the UK has long supported India’s bid for a permanent seat at the United Nations.⁴⁹ The UK has also shown interest in a revival of the relationship built around the Commonwealth. Although for India it has been more or less symbolic, some sentiment in the country indicates its significance with regard to India’s expansion into Africa and the South Pacific (Chaudhari, 2020).

This close collaboration in different arenas is indicative of the UK’s move towards ensuring stronger ties with a country it sees as a major part of its post-Brexit relationships. These recent policy announcements therefore show a shift in British positions as it increases its focus on the Indo-Pacific, which has also led to a change in its stance on China. At the same time, the UK proposes more cooperation in the defence and security arenas with India. Given that India

⁴⁴ A. Hammond (2020, December 30), Ibid.

⁴⁵ Shackles and Ties, (2020, December 18), Ibid.

⁴⁶ UK Government, Department for International Trade and The Rt Hon Elizabeth Truss MP, (2021, February 10), Ibid.

⁴⁷ UK Government, HM Treasury, News Story, (2020, October 28), Ibid.

⁴⁸ H. V. Pant, & T. Milford, (2021, February), Ibid., p.17

⁴⁹ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, (2019, June 24), Ibid.

considers these significant aspects of the bilateral relationship, these are positive developments that may contribute towards the achievement of post-Brexit British foreign policy objectives. Collaboration during the COVID-19 crisis and around issues of global governance is further evidence that the UK is trying to strengthen its relationship with the country.

Conclusion and Analysis

As we have seen, over the years the two countries have developed and enjoyed close ties in various areas. In a post-Brexit world, UK foreign policy intends to take these to the next level. For the UK, the priority is the economic relationship. However, in order to achieve its objectives, it must take into consideration India's strategic, geopolitical and other concerns. Recent rigorous policy steps taken by the UK show that it has begun to move in the direction of a flourishing relationship with India, and while what happens next remains to be seen, the two are cooperating and collaborating on issues that are of significance to both of them.

The EU: One significant impact of Brexit would be on the foreign policy practices and positions of the UK. The country now has the option to take decisions that do not fall exactly in line with traditional EU positions – an opportunity that allows it to strengthen its relationship with countries beyond the borders of the continent, without facing the restrictions of a common policy and shared ideals with the EU. For example, since 2007, India and the EU have been in negotiations over the EU-India broad-based Bilateral Trade and Investment Agreement (BTIA), which has seen several roadblocks. While these talks reopened earlier this year, Brexit opens a window for the UK and India to intensify their economic relationships through an agreement between them.⁵⁰ The UK's departure from the EU opens up possibilities for an FTA between India and the UK, without the constraints of the EU's common commercial policy (Scott, 2017).

Another consequence of Brexit relates to how Indian businesses choose to engage with the British market. A 2018 article claimed that "India invests more in the UK than in the rest of the EU combined."⁵¹ One reason for this is that for Indian businesses, the UK has traditionally been their entry point to the EU. Thus, access to the UK market allowed them to expand to the

⁵⁰ R. Banga, (2017, April 13), Brexit: Opportunities for India, *Commonwealth Trade Competitiveness Briefing Paper*, Vol. 2017/01. Last Accessed: 28th February 2021. DOI: <https://doi.org/10.14217/ca804af9-en>

⁵¹ R. Bhala, (2018, December 8), Brexit: What Should Brexit Mean for India?, *BloombergQuint*. Last Accessed: 26th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.bloombergquint.com/opinion/what-should-brexit-mean-for-india>

rest of the member-states. However, how Brexit alters the approach of Indian businesses towards the UK remains unclear.

Global Britain: Brexit also alters the UK's position on the international stage. As the Brexit deal comes into fruition, the country aims to re-evaluate and redefine its role in a world that is fast-changing. It is in this context that the UK's 'Global Britain' aspirations come into play: "Global Britain is about reinvesting in our relationships, championing the rules-based international order and demonstrating that the UK is open, outward-looking and confident on the world stage."⁵²

From this viewpoint, the shared values between India and the UK, and the former's growing international importance as a non-EU country, make India a crucial part of these 'Global Britain' aspirations. While the UK has been deeply concerned with the economic ties of the two countries, its decisions and stance in several other areas have not fallen in line with these objectives, especially from an Indian perspective. This is illustrated through the initial post-Brexit pivot towards China and away from the Indo-Pacific. The visa and immigration concerns in India also sat incompatibly with Global Britain ambitions.⁵³ These differences might suggest that the UK-India relationship will encounter difficulties where 'Global Britain' aspirations do not accommodate Indian interests.

However, as we have seen, the recent foreign policy positions that the UK has taken represent a sharp move towards ensuring that the UK and India are on the same page, moving towards the same goal of a strengthening relationship based on both of their priorities, aims and objectives. How this situation unfolds in the near (and long-term) future depends upon whether the two countries deliver on the promises made since December 2020. It is therefore important to observe the dynamic between the two countries, to see how British foreign policy shapes the UK's new role in the world.

⁵² UK Government, Foreign & Commonwealth Office and Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (2018, June 13), Global Britain: Delivering on Our International Ambition. Last Accessed: 26th February 2021. Retrieved from: <https://www.gov.uk/government/collections/global-britain-delivering-on-our-international-ambition>

⁵³ House of Commons, Foreign Affairs Committee, (2019, June 24), Ibid.

A Timeline of Events Since 2019

2019

15th July 2019 – 13th India-UK Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) meeting: 3 new Joint Working Groups established

2020

24th July 2020 – 14th JETCO meeting (virtual): follow up

28th October 2020 – 10th Economic and Financial Dialogue

14th-17th December 2020 – Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab's visit

2021

26th January 2021 – Prime Minister Johnson's visit as Republic Day Chief Guest (*cancelled*)

1st February 2021 – UK applies to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)

5-9th February 2021 – International Trade Secretary Elizabeth Truss' visit

17th February 2021 – COP26 President Alok Sharma's visit to India

26th April – Prime Minister Johnson's visit to India (*cancelled*)

11th-13th June 2021 – Prime Minister Modi's G7 summit visit (*cancelled*)

1st-12th November 2021 – Prime Minister Modi's planned COP26 summit visit

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