



INDIA - UK DEFENCE TIES - GS II MAINS

Q. India-UK defence partnership is a dynamic and evolving phenomenon with significant implications for the Indo-Pacific region. Comment on recent developments (10 marks, 150 words)

News: *Crafting a new phase in India-U.K. defence ties*

What's in the news?

- Defence Minister Rajnath Singh's recent visit to the United Kingdom (U.K.) came after a hiatus of 22 years.
- Opportunities have grown significantly in the past few years as opposed to two decades ago.

Key takeaways:

- The **growth of Chinese military power** and in particular, its expansion into the Indian Ocean which threatens India and also **Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs)**, on which the U.K. depends, have given the British an opportunity to reorient their strategic priorities.
- Rajnath Singh's visit to the U.K. offers plenty of opportunities for the two countries to forge new plans for a joint naval vision

History of India – UK Defence ties:

- The history of India-UK defence ties is complex, shaped by **centuries of colonialism, shared wars, ideological divergence, and ultimately, a convergence of strategic interests in the face of new global challenges.**

Formation of the British Indian Army:

- In the 18th century, the British East India Company raised Indian regiments, gradually forming the formidable British Indian Army.
- Indian soldiers played a crucial role in British colonial wars and expeditions, from securing India's frontiers to fighting in World Wars I and II.

Transfer of Power and Independence:

- After India's independence in 1947, the British Indian Army was split between India and Pakistan.

Post-Independence Divergence (1947-1991):

1. India's Non-Alignment and Soviet Leanings:

- India pursued a policy of non-alignment during the Cold War, often aligning with the Soviet Union for defence equipment and training. This kept India and the UK at a distance in terms of defence cooperation.



2. UK's Focus on NATO and Western Allies:

- The UK, as a key member of NATO, focused on alliances with Western nations and had limited defence engagement with India during this period.

Shifting Strategic Realities (1991-Present):

1. End of Cold War and India's Economic Reforms:

- The end of the Cold War and India's economic liberalization in the 1990s opened new avenues for defence cooperation.
- India began diversifying its arms imports, and the UK emerged as a potential partner.

2. Rise of China and Shared Security Concerns:

- The rise of China as a major power in the 21st century, particularly its growing assertiveness in the Indian Ocean, has brought India and the UK closer together due to shared security concerns.

Current Defence Cooperation:

1. India-UK 2+2 Foreign and Defence Dialogue:

- Diplomatic summits involving the foreign and defence ministers.
- Joint Military Exercises like Ajeya Warrior, a bilateral exercise conducted by the armies of both countries with an aim to strengthen military cooperation and enhance interoperability between the Indian and British armies.

2. Littoral Response Group Deployment (2024):

- In a first, the UK will deploy a specialized amphibious warfare group, the Littoral Response Group (LRG), to the Indo-Pacific region in 2024.
- On the margins of the September 2023 G20 Summit in New Delhi, the leaders of India and the United Kingdom met and agreed to build **'a modern partnership in cutting-edge defence technology, trade and innovation'**.
- The UK government supports India's plans to develop its defence industry, it issued an India-specific open general-export licence – the first given to an Indo-Pacific country – to permit exports of certain military and dual-use goods and technology.
- British and Indian officials participated in a **track 1.5 workshop in London** hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies on bilateral defence and military-technology cooperation, in partnership with India's online defence portal Bharat Shakti.
- Establishment of a joint working group dubbed the **"India--UK electric propulsion capability partnership"**.
- The British have agreed to train, equip and help establish the infrastructure necessary to develop an electric propulsion system.
- Britain's Defence Science & Technology Laboratory and India's Defence Research & Development Organisation (DRDO) undertakes **joint-research, co-design, co-development and joint production of defence technology and systems, particularly in key and emerging military technologies including electric propulsion systems.**



Need of Better Defence Ties Between India and UK:

1. Chinese Presence in Indian Ocean:

- China has emerged as a major naval power whose deployments in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) are expanding rapidly thereby threatening India and Sea Lines of Communications (SLOCs).

2. India's Naval Modernization Plans:

- The Indian Navy has several technological gaps when compared to the Chinese Navy. Securing key technologies from the UK will be important in this regard.

Opportunities in India-UK Defence Ties:

1. Joint Technology Development and Transfer:

- Access to advanced British technologies like electric propulsion for aircraft carriers, missile systems and radar technology can boost India's defence capabilities and reduce dependence on other countries.

2. Enhanced Maritime Security and Regional Stability:

- Collaboration in areas like anti-piracy operations, information sharing and capacity building can contribute to a more secure maritime environment in the Indo-Pacific region, benefitting both India and the UK.
- Joint presence and naval exercises can deter Chinese expansionism and promote freedom of navigation, upholding international maritime laws.

3. Boosting India's Indigenous Defence Manufacturing:

- Technology transfer and joint ventures can provide a vital boost to India's "Make in India" initiative, fostering self-reliance and reducing dependence on imports.
- This can create high-skilled jobs, stimulate local R&D, and ultimately strengthen India's overall defence preparedness.

4. Strengthening International Partnerships:

- A closer India-UK partnership can serve as a cornerstone for broader alliances and coalitions in the Indo-Pacific, creating a united front against emerging security threats.
- This can enhance regional stability and promote a rules-based order in the international arena.

Challenges in India-UK Defence Ties:

1. Legacy Issues and Historical Baggage:

- Colonial past and differing perspectives on events like the Jallianwala Bagh massacre can occasionally resurface and create strains in the relationship.

2. Balancing Divergent Priorities:

- While China's growing power might bring India and the UK closer on defence, they may have differing priorities on other regional issues, such as relations with Pakistan or involvement in certain global conflicts.
- Nettlesome issues surrounding Khalistan and Sikh separatism will cloud the relationship.
- Issues like the ongoing dispute over extradition of Indian economic offenders can further complicate cooperation.



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- Navigating these diverging interests requires careful diplomacy and mutual understanding to avoid friction and maintain the collaborative spirit.

India-UK defence partnership is a dynamic and evolving phenomenon with significant implications for the Indo-Pacific region. As the 21st century unfolds, the success of this partnership will hinge on its ability to navigate the complexities of the changing global order and translate its shared interests into a robust and sustainable security architecture for the Indo-Pacific.

