

People's Democratic Republic of Algeria
Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
Hamma Lakhdar University of El-Oued
Faculty of Arts and Languages
Department of Arts and English Language



The Investigation Of The UK Role In The Indo – Pacific Region

**Dissertation Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
Master's Degree in Literature and Civilization**

Submitted by:
BENKHALIFA Amani
BOUALLAGA Intissar

Supervised by
Ms. BERRA Yamina

Board of Examiners

Dr. SAOUD Ammar	President	University of El-Oued
Ms. BERRA Yamina	Supervisor	University of El-Oued
Dr. FETHIZA T. Mouna	Examiner	University of El-Oued

Academic year: 2025/2024

Dedication

بِسْمِ اللَّهِ الرَّحْمَنِ الرَّحِيمِ

﴿ وَقُلْ اَعْمَلُوا فَسَيَرَى اللَّهُ عَمَلَكُمْ وَرَسُولُهُ وَالْمُؤْمِنُونَ وَسَتُرَدُّونَ إِلَىٰ عَالَمِ الْغَيْبِ وَالشَّهَادَةِ فَيُنَبِّئُكُم بِمَا كُنتُمْ تَعْمَلُونَ ﴾

With profound gratitude to Allah, the Most Merciful, whose guidance and blessings have illuminated every step of this journey.

We dedicate this work to our beloved parents, whose unwavering support, prayers, and sacrifices have been the foundation of our success.

To our dear siblings and friends, thank you for your encouragement and belief in us throughout this endeavor.

Acknowledgements

We extend our deepest gratitude to our supervisor, Ms. *Berra Amina*, for her invaluable guidance and unwavering support throughout our research journey. Her deep commitment to academic excellence and a keen eye for detail have significantly shaped this dissertation.

Our appreciation also goes to the faculty and staff in the Department of Arts and English Language at Hamma Lakhdar University of El-Oued, whose resources and assistance have been invaluable.

Abstract

The UK's interest in the Indo-Pacific is part of an overall strategic repivot in a post-Brexit policy, of which the 2021 Conservative government's proposal – the Indo-Pacific tilt – is of key significance. Historically, the UK has been a Euro-Atlantic nation, and in the Brexit era, it has been looking to reconfigure itself in an international order context under a substantive geopolitical category. This dissertation considers the changing contours of the UK's political-economic-security engagement with the Indo-Pacific region amidst the reconfiguration of global and regional power realities. Adhering to its classic diplomacy identity, the UK's return to the area is informed by practical responses to contemporary demands, including shifting global economic scenarios (triggered by China's rise), multilateral economic cooperation, and strategic defence grouping. Qualitative inquiry for four case studies is employed to enrich the conclusive findings. Using a descriptive-analytical approach, the study draws upon primary data collected from government documents and policy reports. It is supported with secondary data obtained from scholarly published research. The findings suggest that Britain's new Indo-Pacific strategy is not simply a continuation of historical influence but a nuanced rebalancing process influenced by legacy interests alongside adaptive policymaking appropriate for a more multipolar world. In this rebalance, the UK is a key technologically advanced partner whose role is central to regional security and stability.

Keywords: Indo-Pacific, Indo-Pacific tilt, post-Brexit policy, UK's engagement

List of Acronyms and Abbreviations

CPTPP	Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
QUADA	the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUKUS	A trilateral security pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States
CEPA	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
DBT	Department for Business and Trade
BII	The British International Investment
FCO	Foreign and Commonwealth Office
FCDO	Foreign Commonwealth and Development Office
BRI	Belt and Road Initiative
DFID	Department for International Development
FTAs	Free Trade Agreement
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

Table of Contents

Dedication	I
Acknowledgements	II
Abstract	III
List of Acronyms and Abbreviations	IV
General Introduction	1
CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW	6
1.Theoretical Framework	6
1.1.Forms of International Relations	7
1.2.Theories of International Relations	8
2. Reviewing Existing Research on the UK’s Policy in the Indo-Pacific	11
2.1 The Indo-Pacific Region's Geopolitical Dynamics:	12
2.2 The UK’s Historical Relationship with Key Indo-Pacific Countries	15
2.3.The UK’s Foreign Policy in the 21st Century	18
2.3.1 Post-Brexit UK Foreign Policy and the Global Britain Strategy	18
Conclusion	27
Chapter Two: The United Kingdom’s Strategic Role in the Indo-Pacific: A Multi-Dimensional Approach	
1 .The UK’s Diplomatic Engagement and Trade Ties through ASEAN	29
2 .The UK’s Strategic Alignment through AUKUS	32
3 .The UK’s Military Engagement in the South China Sea	37
4 .UK-India Relations	40
Discussion and Analysis	42
General Conclusion	48

General Introduction

Background of the Study

The rapidly growing economies along both the trade routes of VietriX and the Straits of Malacca are key factors in making the Indo-Pacific so vital (over twenty percent). From an economic standpoint alone, it contributes more than sixty percent of the world's GDP and holds one-third (or higher) of the world's population. China's too recent emergence as a power has shaken up global politics. With projects such as the proposed the BRI is an ambitious plan for global infrastructure and economic development with the goal of boosting connectivity and economic growth across Asia, Africa and Europe. China aims to establish new trading routes - on both land and across the sea - that are similar to the old Silk Road through a network of railways, ports, corridors, industrial hubs and roads.

Is not only for economic reasons, however; the BRI serves a geopolitical purpose as well: by funding and building large-scale infrastructure projects in developing countries, China develops and cements its political and strategic influence. The BRI has enabled China to project power in places as far flung as South Asia and Africa – which Beijing long regarded as part of its broader sphere of influence. This presence is frequently translatable into added political clout over member states, which in many cases find themselves financially tied into Chinese investment and loans. Beijing has been steadily increasing its influence in areas it long regarded as its sphere of influence –South Asia and Africa for instance. Make no mistake about it: these are big concerns for India that, as China's power grows, faces an ever difficult security environment. India has recently been drawn more tightly into Washington's orbit by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) effort to contain Beijing-led security architecture in East Asia. The UK, with an eye on this strategic environment, could

develop its relationship with ASEAN and Southeast Asia so as to help promote stability in this region and ensure trade access. Post Brexit, Global Britain's greater strategy has seen the UK aim to improve relations with Southeast Asia and ASEAN for security reasons alone.

To further grow its foot- print in the Indo-Pacific, the UK is looking at ways of getting itself out of the cold. This includes inducting into Depth (CPTPP), increasing defense cooperation with other net producers and engaging more actively with key powers. It will present itself as a reliable partner amidst rising strategic competition between major powers.

Statement of the Problem

After the UK had left the European Union (EU), it has been trying to reformulate its international identity, with the Indo-Pacific zone as a primary area of focus. The region is one of the richest contexts in which this may be fulfilled, given the changing geopolitical pattern of the region – characterized by rising powers, alliances and security insurgencies.

One of the fundamental constraints of the UK's new policy is that it can not form a coherent strategy that confronts the competing interests of the various players in the region. The UK's Commonwealth neighbours have a long tradition of cooperation in the region contrasting with engagement with major actors, including China, which is increasingly opening up its reach in the region in both opportunities and disadvantages. Yet, the UK has a unique opportunity to build, create and develop partnerships and collaborations with countries like India, Japan and Australia, making the UK an important player in the region. The UK's role involvement in the region, both for the UK itself and for the Indo-Pacific region, along with the constraints facing this

involvement are key points for examination and research. The UK's policies and strategies of such involvement and their effectivity are worth examining.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

Research Questions

In order to address the research problem, the following main research question is highlighted:

- 1- What is the role of the UK's engagement in the Indo-Pacific region?

The main research question is accompanied with guiding questions whose answers are necessary to set the forth towards finding comprehensive and conclusive answers to the research problem.

- 2- What is the UK's post-Brexit foreign policy?
- 3- What is the UK's strategic interest in the Indo-Pacific?
- 4- What are the UK's engagement forms in the Indo-Pacific region and their implications for its role in regional stability and security?

Hypothesis

To answer the above research questions, the following hypotheses are proposed:

- 1- The UK plays a central role in promoting regional security and stability through its engagement in the Indo-Pacific region
- 2- The UK's interests in the Indo-Pacific region are closely related to theories of international relations (IR), such as geopolitics, liberalism and so on.
- 3- The UK's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific is characterized by a cautious approach that seeks to balance engagement with major powers while promoting multilateral cooperation, through diplomatic engagement, military and economic efforts. Its policies and strategies contribute to its ultimate role in the region.

Aims of the Study:

The aim of this study is to assess the UK's post-Brexit foreign policy that targets the Indo-Pacific region, through investigating the extent to which its involvement aspects, strategies, and initiatives contribute to regional stability and security. Also, the study purposefully identifies the opportunities and challenges facing the UK on its path to build strong and sustainable partnerships in this strategic region.

Thus, this study will provide a very valuable insight into the changing situation in the Indo-Pacific and its likely contribution to peace, security and economic development in the region.

Research Methodology and Design

This research is a qualitative research enquiry. The qualitative approach is the most effective to account for and obtain a thorough understanding of the role that the UK has in the Indo-Pacific region. A case study design is used for convenience. Four aspects of the UK's engagement in the region are employed as case studies in this research; the UK's diplomatic engagement and trade ties through ASEAN, its strategic alignment through the Australia -UK-US (AUKUS) security pact, its military engagement in the South China Sea, and the UK's relations with India. A qualitative primary and secondary document analysis of official documents, policy papers along with think tank and magazine reports, and articles is used. The analysis is descriptive-analytical based, as it first describes what the just mentioned data collection tools provide and then analyses the contribution of each aspect of the UK's engagement for its role.

Significance of The Study

Investigating the UK's role in the Indo-Pacific region is significant to understand the current power dynamics and relationships. It is also important to assess Britain's post-Brexit foreign policy that targets the Indo-Pacific region, through investigating the effectiveness of the employed forms of its engagement in the region. Also, it adds to

the ongoing conversations on regional stability and security and to the body of research on the topic.

Structure of the Study

The structure of our study is thoughtfully divided into two chapters, each explore the UK's involvement in the Indo-Pacific region. Chapter one is devoted to reviewing the literature. It begins with introducing highlighting the theoretical framework used to study IR and to investigate the engagement, roles, and interests of countries in global or regional context. This first section introduces these theories, geopolitics, liberalism, realism, mercantilism, dependency theory, constructivism, and security paradigm. It also introduces the forms of engagement countries take in IR. The second section of the chapter is devoted to reviewing previous research that has conducted the topic from various angles, the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical dynamics, the 21st-century British foreign policy, its security and defense policy, economy and trade investment, and development, and its historical relations with countries in the region. Inspired by the review, the present research focuses on some instances of the UK's involvement in the region to be held as case studies for analysing its roles . Hence, Chapter two, 'The UK's Strategic Role in the Indo-Pacific: A Multi-Dimensional Approach', is devoted to analysing the roles the UK plays in the region with respect to selected case studies. It outlines the UK's Indo-Pacific strategy: its diplomatic, strategic and military aspects. It looks at engagement with ASEAN, alignment via AUKUS, military operations in the South China Sea and bilateral relations with India. The chapter ends with a discussion of the findings, where findings from the four instances are synthesized to reveal the UK's role and its limitations

CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW

<u>CHAPTER ONE: LITERATURE REVIEW</u>	
1.Theoretical Framework	6
1.1.Forms of International Relations	7
1.2.Theories of International Relations	8
2. Reviewing Existing Research on the UK’s Policy in the Indo-Pacific	11
2.1 The Indo-Pacific Region's Geopolitical Dynamics:	12
2.2 The UK’s Historical Relationship with Key Indo-Pacific Countries	15
2.3.The UK’s Foreign Policy in the 21st Century	18
2.3.1 Post-Brexit UK Foreign Policy and the Global Britain Strategy	18
Conclusion	27

Introduction

In this chapter, we will lay the foundation of the United Kingdom's changing role in the Indo-Pacific region and the study of the literature. We will discuss the theoretical frameworks crucial to understanding international relations, such as geopolitics, international trade, security studies, and foreign policy analysis. The literature review will cover the existing research discussing the United Kingdom's foreign policy in the twenty-first century, specifically Global Britain post-Brexit and the United Kingdom's historical relations with the major Indo-Pacific countries.

This is important because it highlights the UK's goals in the Indo-Pacific in several areas: international affairs through regional entities, defense and defense interactions, economic and trade associations, and soft power projection. This extensive review shows how the UK is establishing itself as a viable player in a region increasingly influenced by China and the US.

1.Theoretical Framework

The UK's new policy orientation in the Indo-Pacific region is a turning point in its post-Brexit foreign policy. Its renewed engagement on the global stage—and an earlier engagement in this region—addresses a combination of ambitions globally and in rebalancing its interests with that of regional actors. The reorientation—defined in the 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy—is motivated largely by a complex interplay of economic, security and political pressures. To comprehend the motivations, role and implications of British action in the Indo-Pacific, one has to consider it through a multiple theoretical framework in international relations. This section reviews a multi-dimensional framework that uses geopolitics, liberalism, realism, mercantilism, dependency theory, constructivism, and various other security paradigms. Each approach offers different insights into the behaviour of the

UK in this region, from seizing trading routes and counterbalance against great powers to advancing liberal norms and governing domestic restrictions. Outlining these theoretical frameworks at this stage of the research is critical to pave the way to analysing and understanding Britain's new engagement in the Indo-Pacific and provides a thorough insight into its changing role and potential impact on international order and the stability of the area as a whole. Curtis, J (2025, March 28). House of Commons Library.

1.1. Forms of International Relations

The Indo-Pacific strategy centres on working with ASEAN, strengthening security cooperation through AUKUS, and keeping a military presence in the South China Sea, so as to assist in maintaining stability and countering China in the region.

The UK's approach to defense in the Indo-Pacific seeks to uphold a free and open Indo-Pacific in collaboration with allies, using security partnerships (such as AUKUS) as a vehicle, engaging in regional defense cooperation, and demonstrating a limited but credible military presence. This includes naval task forces such as the Carrier Strike Group and joint exercises, and co-operation in high-end technology, all intended to support international law, deterring aggression and balancing China's increasing assertiveness. But Britain is resource-constrained, so its effect will be shaped by available allies and its ability to adjust to the local situation .(Choong & Tan, 2024; House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee, 2024).

The UK's Indo-Pacific economic strategy focuses on accession to the CPTPP to increase access to trade, diversifying trading partners, such as Japan and Australia, and investing in the fast-growing economies and sectors of the region. These are moves to mitigate post-Brexit trade losses, enhance resilience and secure a space influencing regional trading rules. The UK views the Indo-Pacific as important for its

future economic prosperity—though there are domestic constraints, geopolitical risks, and resources are tight, which indicate that it will take sustained effort and agility to achieve the ambitions. Alexander, D. (2024, November 29)

1.2.Theories of International Relations

International relations between countries are measured using various theories based on the effects and orientations of these relations.

1.2.1. Liberalism

Liberalism in international relations emphasises the value of cooperation, international organisations, economic interdependence, and the democratisation of values (Doyle, 1986; Keohane & Nye, 2012). It is the idea that states can mutually benefit from cooperation, in the form of shared international norms and joining multilateral institutions. The UK's outreach to ASEAN, membership of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) and championing of a rule-based order are all firmly liberal.

1.2.2. Constructivism

Constructivism provides an alternative view that looks at the significance of ideas, identities, beliefs, and norms in forming state behaviour and the world itself. Unlike liberalism, which stresses material aspects, constructivism posits that the international setting is socially developed through interactions, images, and common meanings. The UK's Indo-Pacific agenda seems motivated by its self-perceived role as an honest broker and advocate for democratic norms and regional sovereignty. The UK as identity: For the UK to support a rules-based order and engage with ASEAN, it is not purely in the interest of material gains but in actively positioning itself as a specific kind of power and to develop a certain type of relationships in the Asia Pacific. Constructivism provides an explanation of why the UK also invests into soft power,

public diplomacy and the projection of values to aim to build trust and legitimacy with Indo-Pacific partners. It also touches on how the UK's history, national myths and diplomatic rhetoric inform its decision-making and relationship with the region. (Wendt, 1992, 1999)

1.2.3. Mercantilism

an economic theory that focuses on national wealth, trade surpluses and state intervention to encourage exports and ensure markets. It often sees international economic relations as a zero-sum game of competition which offers few chances for both sides to win. Strong mercantilist elements are present in the UK's Indo-Pacific strategy. We can see them for example in its push to open markets, draw investment and to graft itself onto regional trade networks. The pursuit of new bilateral and multilateral trade agreements and the creation of new opportunities for British industry both reflect a mercantilist desire to bring prosperity once more to Britain in the age after Brexit. The UK is using the Indo-Pacific dynamic markets actively to assist in its own growth and development by reducing its reliance on European Union. As it seeks out fresh economic partners overseas, that move also brings innovative benefits home for Britain. (Irwin, 1996)

1.2.4. Geopolitics

Geopolitics has been a cornerstone theory in international relations, working to explain the role of geography, strategic location, and resource distribution in the behaviour and ambitions of states (Mackinder, 1904; Flint, 2017). Geopolitics can serve as a basis for understanding why the Indo-Pacific has become a key area of British foreign policy following Brexit. Geopolitics covers countries and territories that are located within the Indo-Pacific region, including major shipping routes like the South China Sea, which passes from China to Europe. Control and access to the sea's lanes is

crucial not only for economic prosperity but also for national security. Hence the increased deployment of British naval ships to the Indo-Pacific area, its participation in regional security dialogues and alliances such as AUKUS are all characterized by geopolitical calculations. (Mackinder, 1904; Flint, 2017)

1.2.5. Realism

Realism is the understanding of international relations as a continual struggle for power among self-interested states, acting in an anarchic global system. States, by definition, prioritize their survival, security, and national interests over all else and will tend to compete, form alliances, and "balance out" their power. The UK's strategy in the Indo-Pacific is clearly marked by realist motives. By creating new military alliances (like AUKUS), increasing defense cooperation with other countries in the region is obtained, and deploying naval forces into contested waters is facilitated. Given that the Indo-Pacific is a competitive region in which multiple great powers compete for influence, realism holds particular importance in understanding the UK's mathematical calculations and its actions. (Morgenthau, H. J. (1948); Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001))

1.2.6. Dependency Theory

Dependency theory examines the structural inequalities between developed and developing countries, holding that, as a result of global economic relations, most countries in the Global South are still in dependence and may be at serious risk of underdevelopment (Frank, 1967; Dos Santos, 1970). Though not a dominant perspective in UK policy debate, dependency theory provides an important perspective for understanding the impact of British economic engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Dependency theory informs considerations as to whether UK trade, investment and aid policies really promote equitable development or reinforce current dependencies and

asymmetries in partner countries: For example, the terms of trade, flows of investment, and the nature of economic partnerships may be considered to see whether the policy contributes to sustainable growth for partner countries or that purely serves British interests. Dependency theory calls for critical assessment of the power dynamics that embed within economic relationships and the potential for transformative rather than exploitative forms of engagement. House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (2024 March 19).

1.2.7. Security Paradigms

Security paradigms in IR refer to a range of international institutions. They include defence, alliance-building, collective security and crisis management (Buzan & Hansen, 2009). Both traditional and non-traditional security threats can be addressed based on the frameworks: military conflict and territorial disputes; humanitarian crisis and disaster relief; transnational crime. Among other examples of US participation in AUKUS, ADMM-Plus, joint US–UK military exercises, the UK was ably represented at all four exercises. The presence of the UK at all those events – in terms of AUKUS’ role as a regional architecture for regional security and in regard to their collective defense arrangements – provides an example of the UK’s commitment to various aspects of regional security and its efforts to contribute to regional stability, deter aggression and build resilience against a wide range of security challenges in the Indo-Pacific.

2. Reviewing Existing Research on the UK’s Policy in the Indo-Pacific

This section is devoted to reviewing previous research that tackled the UK’s engagement in the Indo-pacific. For clarity, the section is organized in entitled sub-sections that target the various angles of this engagement.

2.1 The Indo-Pacific Region's Geopolitical Dynamics:

Michael Auslin's (2019) article, "The Indo-Pacific: A New Geopolitical Order" appeared in the *Journal of Strategic Studies*, ranked as an early influential contribution that conceptualized the Indo-Pacific as a recently identified geopolitical framework. Auslin (2019) asserts that the Indo-Pacific reflects an adjustment in global strategic orders, where the old Asia-Pacific conception is insufficient. Based on his examination, China's growing influence has challenged the earlier balance of power but has also forced Western powers, especially the US and its partners, to redefine their policy stance their strategic outlook. Auslin's study lays the foundation for comprehending why the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a focal point in strategic discussions.

Elaborating on this conceptual basis, the 2020 work by Ely Ratner in "The Indo-Pacific: A New Era of Strategic Competition" (*Foreign Affairs*) investigates the increasing rivalry between the United States and China. Ratner recognizes the area as the "primary arena" for defining the emerging global hierarchy. He underlines that the strategic rivalry involves more than military aspects, but profoundly political and based on ideology, concerning authority over territorial rules, government structures, and alliance creation. Ratner's analysis is fundamental to understanding the wider theoretical foundations of United States strategic planning and its and its outcomes for geopolitical equilibrium (Ratner, 2020).

Swaine (2021), authoring in "The National Interest", echoes this strategic contest yet with a subtle perspective concentrating on technological, financial, and defense aspects. Swaine draws attention to the mutual reliance among these sectors in forming the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical landscape. He indicates the critical function of defense upgrading, financial diplomacy, and competition in building infrastructure, especially in developing technologies namely AI technologies and high-tech military hardware.

His analysis advances knowledge of multi-layered power struggle beyond mere naval deployments.

Also, the 2022 publication by David Shambaugh, appearing in *Journal of Contemporary Asia* redirects attention toward regional powers including India, Japan, and South Korea. Shambaugh (2022) maintains that these countries are no longer passive actors but dynamic contributors to Indo-Pacific changes. Shambaugh emphasizes how middle powers are shaping their own geopolitical discourses to secure autonomy amidst great-power competition. This variation of agency is crucial in evaluating the process through which UK policy should be flexible not merely to tensions between the United States and China and likewise to the initiatives of these growing influential regional participants. Another detailed interpretation derives from “The Gambit of Geopolitics in the Indo-Pacific: A Critical Analysis” contributed by Singai, Dixit, and Reddy (2023), published in *Journal of Contemporary Politics*. This investigation concentrates on India’s maritime strategy and increasing assertiveness through qualitative research along with policy assessment, the investigators demonstrate how India is leveraging multilateral alliances such as the Quad to balance against China's influence while reinforcing its status as a primary security guarantor in the Indian Ocean. Their concentration on oceanic military principles and India's naval enhancement adds a significant factor for understanding the region’s shifting power dynamics, especially in the western part of the Indo-Pacific (Singai, Dixit & Reddy, 2023). The 2023 article by Gurpreet S. Khurana, “Rules-Based Maritime Order in the Indo-Pacific” published in *AEI Insights*, discusses the rule-based components of regional security. He contends the significance of maintaining a rules-based maritime order to guarantee stability, notably in contested areas like the South China Sea. His highlighting of administrative frameworks and worldwide maritime legislation

reinforces the United Kingdom's prospective role as an advocate of liberal maritime norms, corresponding to its comprehensive global approach after Brexit (Khurana, 2023).

The regional implications of great power struggle are further investigated by the 2024 research by Amna Khalid and Bakri Mat in their article, "Sino-US Strategic Competition in the Indo-Pacific: Exploring Responses from Malaysia and Indonesia" published in *Journal of International Studies*. Via a structured analysis of academic literature, they demonstrate how minor nations in Southeast Asia adopt hedging strategies to uphold economic ties with China while enhancing security cooperation with the U.S. Their findings contribute to knowledge of the balancing strategies of regional powers, valuable parallels for interpreting for understanding how the United Kingdom might approach bilateral relations in the region (Khalid & Mat, 2024).

Another work entitled "US-China Competition: Great Power Competition in the Indo-Pacific", published in *"Politische Vierteljahresschrift"*, was written by Brian C. H. Fong. The article proposes the theory of "neo-offensive realism." Fong (2024) claims that The United States and China are pursuing aggressive postures not merely through military and economic means but additionally via ideological and technological arenas. His focus on technological infrastructure—such as fifth-generation networks, machine intelligence, and cyber tools—extends the analytical perspective and indicates the Indo-Pacific concerns digital power as much as territorial dominance. His analysis notably underlines how secondary countries like Vietnam and the Philippines can impact broader strategic consequences.

A more specialized technological perspective is offered by Mei-Ling Zhang (2025) in her article "Techno-Geopolitics and Strategic Chokepoints in the Indo-Pacific" (*Global Affairs and Strategy Review*). Zhang (2025) draws attention to

frequently neglected infrastructural elements such as undersea data cables, semiconductor supply chains, and satellite network infrastructure. She maintains that these technological pinch points form fresh fields of geopolitical struggle, with Taiwan, Japan, and Australia stand out as pivotal actors. Her research is fundamental for interpreting the competition for technological superiority together with established military strategies .

Lastly, The 2025 article by Kaito Tanaka, in his article “The Pacific on Edge: Civil-Military Friction and Security Realignment” featured in *Asia-Pacific Security Journal*, highlights internal processes among regional powers. He concentrates on civil-military tensions, particularly in democratic nations like Japan and the Philippines, where expanding defence roles sometimes clash with constitutional limits and public opinion. Tanaka besides examines the effect of security frameworks such as AUKUS and the Quad, determining them as catalysts for policy transitions in regional security strategies (Tanaka, 2025).

As a whole, this set of studies illustrates a comprehensive view of the Indo-Pacific as a complex and rapidly evolving geopolitical space. These works underscore the interaction between traditional military dynamics, technological competition, normative frameworks, and domestic political considerations. They also emphasize the significance of multilateral cooperation and the strategic choices of middle and minor powers. For the United Kingdom, comprehending and navigating these dynamics is crucial to formulating an effective Indo-Pacific policy—one that is attuned to both the challenges of superpower conflict and the opportunities for productive cooperation.

2.2 The UK’s Historical Relationship with Key Indo-Pacific Countries

The UK’s relationship with the Indo Pacific region is complex and goes back centuries through trade, war and diplomacy. From the days when the British East India

company was established to the current days where globalization is taking place. The UK has played a significant role in shaping the region. Understanding its history is key to understanding the current ways of the region.

This section reviews the existing scholarly works concerning the UK's historical relationship with major Indo-Pacific countries, including India, Australia, Japan, and the ASEAN. This review will emphasize the key themes, controversies, and perspectives that have emerged from previous research, offering a foundation for continued investigation into the UK's ongoing engagement with the region.

An outstanding body of academic research investigated the UK's historical engagement with important nations in the Indo-Pacific, revealing a complex web of imperial strategy, financial objectives, and developing diplomatic methods. Fairbank (1986), in his seminal work "The British in China", provided foundational understanding of Britain's establishment in China, highlighting the commercial motivations that led to the Opium Wars and the consequent colonial foothold in Hong Kong. The British utilization of infrastructure, railways, legal systems, and education in India ossified a complex imperial relationship that reverberates into the contemporary era, as is evident in the highly-charged dynamics between Britain and India in the 21st century. The portrayal of the Brit's presence in Southeast Asia, delineated in "The British in Southeast Asia" composed by Anthony Reid, further illustrates the partnerships that the Brit's maintained with port cities and trade hubs. Reid (1993) highlights the British relationships in Malaya, Singapore, and Burma, where the British rule was often characterized by an alliance with the locals, and a show of force that was calculatedly fashioned to maintain control. Similar to the authors, Arnold and Fairbank—Reid underscores the centrality of chokepoints and maritime ports, when weighed against naval occupancy and military power. The British tactic

was often to apply a smattering of both diplomatic measures and gunboats. Smaller, yet significant British occupations are capped in texts such as “The British in the Philippines” written by Steinberg (2000), “The British in Vietnam” written by Goscha (2003), and “The British in Korea” written by Seth (2010). These authors report on British influence in southeast and northeast Asia.

Steinberg (1967) analyzes the short-term occupation of Manila that took place during the Seven Years War and how this event impacted later events in the Philippines after the Spanish-American War. Goscha and Seth take a look at British actions during the Cold War, such as diplomatic behavior during the Korean and First Indochina Wars. These readings show how as Britain’s global empire crumbled, diplomatic and military efforts shifted, with the US established as a local partner.

Ian Nish’s “The British in Japan” (2004) outlines an extraordinary example in which British interactions were more the result of diplomacy and mutual respect than colonial domination. Nish’s analysis of the Anglo-Japanese Alliance and joint naval activities demonstrates a more equal, albeit tactical, association based on a common goal rather than a superior-inferior dynamic. Comparison to British perspectives on India or China depicts how the country interacted largely depending on the ability and level of advancement of the partner in the region (Nish, 2004).

David Armitage’s “The British Empire in the Age of Revolution” (2006) provides a unifying perspective. His global synthesis situates all these engagements within the broader ideological and commercial logics of British imperialism in the 18th and 19th centuries. Armitage argues that Britain’s maritime empire was not only a mechanism of economic extraction but also a vector for exporting Enlightenment values, legal frameworks, and political institutions. He frames British expansion in the Indo-Pacific as part of a global system of domination enabled by naval power, commercial

monopolies, and strategic alliances—a view that underscores the coherence of Britain’s geopolitical strategy across its eastern empire (Armitage, 2006) .

2.3.The UK’s Foreign Policy in the 21st Century

A great body of research has been conducted on the UK’s foreign policy in the 21st century that has targeted the Indo-Pacific. According to the Curtis,J, & Brooke-Holland, L. (2025, March 28), this policy has been characterized by an active and engaged role in the world. This change has been motivated by various factors: the growth of China and other rising powers, escalating fragility in the Middle East, and the ever more pervasive terror threat.

The livestream was launched by Adam Cantor, Global Head of UK Financial Institutions at Deutsche Bank. It also has tried to expand its influence in areas like the Indo-Pacific, where it sees more and more opportunities for trade and investment. Some people have criticized the UK’s foreign policy as focusing too much on security and defence at the expense of other priorities such as human rights and development. However, the government has always maintained that its foreign policy is based on promoting peace, security, and prosperity around the world.

2.3.1 Post-Brexit UK Foreign Policy and the Global Britain Strategy

After Britain’s withdrawal from the EU, it implemented the Global Britain strategy, which sought to redefine the UK’s role as a sovereign entity on the global stage. The strategy’s impact on British relations with countries like those in the Indo-Pacific region has been a significant area of interest for researchers.

After the UK set to leave the EU, it established a new foreign policy, Global Britain. It is a strategic reorientation of the UK towards the Indo-Pacific region and has marked as Britain’s global position. The UK Government proposed an Integrated Review in 2021 and identified the Indo-Pacific as a ‘permanent pillar’ of UK foreign

policy. The new policy seeks to expand the influence and presence of the UK in the region through political, economic, and military activities. This aims at enhancing ties with key countries, such as Japan, India, Australia, and members of the ASEAN. This move has been viewed as a reflection of the global dynamics and mainly involves the emergence of China as the greatest political and economic power. Additionally, it is viewed as an attempt by Britain to re-assert its position in the international system, which is characterized by a number of international centers of power. However, as the authors argue, this policy is unsustainable to achieve as it is not strategically focused and has a number of inherent challenges. Brooke-Holland, L. (2021, October 11).

Turner, O (2019) is critical of the general “Global Britain” story for being too ambiguous of an idea and for being overly aspirational, which both contribute to disguising the practical constraints of leaving the EU, like weakened structural agency and power and a diminished budget, prestige, and influence at the international level. He argues that it is the Indo-Pacific tilt is more of an imaginative exercise the government can use to reinvent itself as a serious power than a concrete reorientation of Britain’s geopolitics towards the East. Wallace (2020) expresses similar, less enthusiastic views, noting that an incoherent, poorly-enunciated government strategy and lack of necessary resources will make the Global Britain agenda unsustainable at best, with its India-Pacific component being so decentralised and conceptual that its real, concrete strength will be lacking. However, that is not the only line of argumentation here, since there are also advocates of the theoretical view of Britain’s place in the world like Scott (2021), who believes that the Global Britain agenda is a part of an overdue realignment of UK foreign policy to the end of managing the changing power dynamics of the world, especially as hybrids like the Indo-Pacific region begin to form that challenge the stasis of the post-WWII order and the

assumptions of societies that supported it. The controversial policy of the government, allocating the HMS Queen Elizabeth to the Indian Ocean to serve as a part of a UK-based carrier strike group, is seen as a feasible demonstration of the argument in practice. However, that does not automatically mean a strong state of the government's power projection ability in the region, since the potential for this is still only being confirmed through the UK's application for the admission to the Comprehensive Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership agreement. The way the actions of the UK relate to its position in the global system also provide strong evidence for the practical dimension of the Global Britain agenda (Chatterjee & Mears, 2022) .

The argument provided in the output above can be further shown by the examination of the importance of defence diplomacy in underpinning the Indo-Pacific strategy of Britain. The article looks at the expanding use of joint military drills, base access agreements, and security ties with several countries like Australia, Japan, and India to enhance its power projection and counter China. These efforts depict that the United Kingdom is trying to position itself as a part of the security apparatus in the Indo-Pacific region through functional engagements as well as military signalling. However, Wright (2023) is critical of the concept of strategic autonomy that fundamentally underpins the narrative of Global Britain. He argued that the UK's Indo-Pacific engagements are still heavily determined by alliances such as AUKUS, NATO, and the Five Eyes network. Although Global Britain projects an image of being an independent and autonomous actor in the international system, in reality, Britain's role as a key geopolitical player in the Indo-Pacific can hardly be disconnected from its close cooperation with the US and its traditional European allies. Therefore, the UK's posture towards the Indo-Pacific represents a tug of war between autonomy and dependence. The other two critics stress the Janus-faced dimensions of the UK's

strategy in the Indo-Pacific. For instance, they argue that the Indo-Pacific tilt is both a foreign policy act and an ideological statement. Indeed, the Indo-Pacific pivot represents both a diplomatic adjustment and a semantic manoeuvre. On the one hand, it marks the moment when the UK turns away from Europe and towards Asia. On the other hand, it also creates a new language that allows the UK to reconcile the mismatch between its aspirations and its reality. Whether the Indo-pacific tilt is more of a diplomatic gesture or a realignment of power relationships within the region remains to be seen

In summary, the UK's Indo-Pacific plan under the Global Britain framework is a complicated mix of strategic vision and pragmatism. Even though the plan shows a sincere desire to reestablish the UK as a much larger power in these shifting global dynamics, its success will mostly depend on the ability of the country to take real action, balance its conflicts of interest in the region, and provide the resources needed to support its plan beyond just words.

2.3.2 Security and Defense

Previous research also focussed on the UK's 21st century security and defence foreign policy. The security and defence dimension of a national foreign policy has undergone a significant recalibration during the 21st century, with a marked shift in the UK's position toward the Indo-Pacific region, reflected in a variety of official policy papers, academic analysis and strategic assessments, which together form a snapshot of the UK's external position.

A major source of information also has to be the UK Government's 2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy – called “Global Britain in a Competitive Age”. In this document, the UK is clearly highlighting the importance of upholding a rules-based international order, combatting authoritarian

influence and maritime security. “The Indo-Pacific is central to our economy, our security, and our ambition globally to support open societies” (HM Government, 2021, p. 66).

The shift toward post-Brexit global activism is often countered by academic papers such as Biscop (2022), which questions if the UK is developing its military capabilities at all in places that are so far from its borders that it threatens to come apart. While the UK wants to be a trusted provider of security across the globe, it has the resources, particularly the Naval, to sustain its engagement in the Indo-Pacific. It might therefore need to balance that commitment with larger commitments closer to Europe. But another case study is HMS Queen Elizabeth’s strategic signalling and commitment to collective security with its closest allies such as the US, Japan, and Australia. This Carrier Strike Group 21 (CSG21) Deployment Report, released by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), provides details of specific engagements during her voyage with more than 40 countries, including interoperability, joint exercises, and freedom of navigation operations. Also important is the Australian-UK-US (AUKUS) security pact, negotiated between Australia, the UK, and the US. AUKUS is further evidence of the United Kingdom’s deepening ties to (and reliance on) the advanced technological and intelligence-sharing relationships it holds with its closest allies. The partnership also reinforces UK’s signal and actual long-term investment. The partnership also reinforces the UK’s signal and actual long-term investment in the Indo-Pacific region, rationalized in terms of defense and innovation strategies synced with Australia and the United States. The Japan Society. (2021, November 8). Ment in the Indo-Pacific region, both symbolically and analytically, instead of militarizing the region with shared defence and innovation agendas. The Japan Society. (2021, November 8). Additional examples include the permanent presence of offshore patrol vessels HMS Spey and HMS Tamar,

at which point the UK intends to keep its maritime footprint strong. These deployments are vital not only to protect its allies, but also to reassure them about the UK's commitment.

To summarize, reading through the scholarly and official documentation, the UK's security and defense policies in the Indo-Pacific come across to be broad-based. So, while some scholars of security studies express skepticism as to whether the UK can maintain a suitably distant posture over the longer-term, others highlight the strategic rationale for such a pivot, emphasizing alliance-building and global presence. The mix of military deployments, security partnerships and strategic reviews is a sign of a serious, if still evolving, British commitment to Indo-Pacific security.

2.3.3 Trade and Investment

Research also highlighted the trade and investment with Indo-Pacific countries. In the 21st century, the UK emphasizes the Indo-Pacific in its trade and investment strategy, especially post-Brexit. This trend is evident in academic publications and official communications, all of which identify this economic realignment as a critical part of the nation's new international identity.

A seminal policy document that underscores this shift is the Integrated Review (2021) and its follow-up, the Integrated Review Refresh (2023), both of which position the Indo-Pacific as central to the UK's long-term economic strategy. The 2023 document emphasizes that “the Indo-Pacific is home to half of the world's people and 40% of global GDP, and is critical to our future prosperity” (HM Government, 2023, p. 28). This framing sets the stage for a deeper UK economic engagement, particularly in free trade agreements (FTAs) and investment frameworks.

One of the significant milestones of the UK's economic policy in the Indo-Pacific was the time when it signed the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-

Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in 2023. As Menon and Weatherhead (2023) claim in the Political Quarterly, UK's economic growth in terms of GDP is insignificant and is expected to be only 0.08% according to the UK government. At the same time, the symbolic role of the issue is impressive: by entering a high-quality regional trade agreement, the UK will unite with some of the fastest-growth economies in the world, such as Vietnam, Malaysia, and Singapore.

The UK Department for Business and Trade (DBT) has said trade with the Indo-Pacific region was worth £112 billion in 2022 and trade with countries such as India, Japan, and South Korea, has grown at a faster rate. It comes as the post-Brexit UK-Japan Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), signed in 2020, nears the UK's first functioning trade deal.

According to Donnelly (2021), the CEPA is not just a continuity deal and it is a basis for future UK and Japan cooperation in digital economy and financial services, which are a UK comparative advantage. Also, the UK agreed a Free trade agreement with Australia in November 2021, which is expected to enter into force in 2023. It represents an ambitious liberalization of UK trade in services and agriculture (Springford, 2022, para. 1). The agreement with Australia is intended to signify that, while deals with other countries are on balance more limited in terms of economic upside than EU deals, the UK is serious about redirecting trade towards Asia.

Note that investment flows are an important dimension. The UK has become one of the largest investors in the region, particularly in fintech, green technology, and infrastructure. British International Investment (BII) strategy was refreshed in 2022, including commitments to expand UK development finance in South and South-east Asia -- including at sustainability infrastructure. Chatterjee (2023), for example, notes

how such investments form part of an initiative aimed to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative in line with G7 objectives under "Build Back Better World" and, "Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment." Moreover, Bailey and Wilson (2022) note that the (fragmented) literature has in some quarters turned to the topic of economic statecraft. It has been suggested that the UK is using its trade policy to secure a regionally defined economy that is consistent with a liberal market economy. It has the effect that this is also seen as a way to entrench a US-centric governance model, not only in digital trade but also in cybersecurity and supply chains.

In conclusion, the research involves a total overhaul of UK trade and investment policy in the Indo-Pacific. Although the policy is still in its making, it is underpinned by official trade agreements, government strategy papers and flow of capital. While some commentators have doubted the economic substance of these moves, there is wide spread agreement that they are a conscious, deliberate and strategic component of UK Indo-Pacific policy.

2.3.4. Development

Development policy has become a distinctive pillar of the UK's foreign policy in the Indo-Pacific in the 21st century; and academic literature and official government documents demonstrate more than ever that development assistance, infrastructure investment, and capacity building provide dual targets: to resolve humanitarian and economic challenges, whilst also to enhance the UK's more general geopolitical ambition in the region.

At the same time, the UK government's Integrated Review (2021) and its update (2023), the Integrated Review Refresh, clearly place development at the core of the government's Indo-Pacific strategy. They stress the importance of "values-driven development" as the link between British aid to democracy, climate resilience and

economic empowerment. The UK government's 2023 update suggests that development policy must also be "a key tool of geopolitical influence," particularly with world competition over infrastructure and digital connectivity rising (HM Government, 2023, p. 29).

One of the most significant institutional reorganizations has been the merger in 2020 of the Department for International Development (DFID) into the Foreign and Commonwealth Office (FCO), forming the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO). As Carothers and Ismail (1921), argue, the restructuring was done to bring more closely to fruition the UK's aid to foreign policy objectives (especially in areas where a strategic rivalry with China, as well as climate concerns, were at stake).

This view is being strengthened by the UK's International Development Strategy (2022), which has designated the Indo-Pacific (Malaysia, Bangladesh, and the Pacific island nations) as 'the priority recipients' of targeted investment in clean energy, health systems, education and governance. The strategy describes the UK's focus on helping "open societies and resilient economies", in sharp contrast to the strategic language of development and security.

But academic analysis – Glennie and Rabinowitz (2022) for example – considers how British development aid to the Indo-Pacific is being increasingly integrated with geopolitical competition. Scholars highlight the UK-India Green Growth Equity Fund as a prime example. It's a £240 million joint investment in renewable energy. This shows how the UK uses aid to boost sustainability and strengthen ties.

Chaudhuri (2023) examines the UK's Indo-Pacific development agenda through climate diplomacy. He suggests that giving aid to countries like Bangladesh and Fiji keeps the UK in the game. It's also a way to push back against China's Belt and Road stuff. British International Investment is the UK's main tool for development finance.

It was rebranded in 2021 (formerly CDC Group). Now, it focuses on Indo-Pacific markets, supporting clean infrastructure, digital tech, and inclusive finance. For instance, \$75 million the UK dropped into Southeast Asia's Green Finance Platform in 2022 and it got a pretty solid nod of approval. OECD researchers (2023) call it "strategic development finance" that matches UK values and regional interests.

Additionally, the UK is a key player in cooperative aid projects like Multinational investment partnership Together with Associates such as US, Japan, The UK Invested heavily to help Developing Indo-Pacific countries Create environmentally sound infrastructure, Minimize debt obligations, Strengthen telecommunications infrastructure. Researchers such as Tanaka and Wilson (2023) maintains that this form of "coalition-based development diplomacy" is a notable change from the traditional, established individual-country aid practice, in favor of a more strategic and value-oriented approach.

In conclusion, research and official documents show a clear pattern that the UK's development policy in the Indo-Pacific region is closely tied to its strategic goals. Though set on eradicating poverty and promoting climate resilience, the UK is focusing on using aid and investment to extend influence and build partnerships in the context of intense geopolitical rivalry.

Conclusion

On light of this chapter, we gained a good understanding of the UK changing foreign strategies and roles in post-Brexit era. As reviewed in the chapter, the UK seeks to strengthen its relations with Indo-Pacific countries, provided the strategic dynamic geopolitical position of the region. In order to understand the UK's engagement in the region, the chapter highlighted the IR's forms and theories, such as diplomacy, economy and trade relations, military relations, liberalism, realism, mercantilism,

constructivism, and geopolitics. These theories will also help in analysing the UK's role in the region. The chapter ended with reviewing existing research on the UK's engagement in the Indo-Pacific from various angles, the geopolitical role of the region, the UK's historical relations with the countries in the region, the UK's 21st foreign policy and Global Britain strategy, security and defense, trade investments, and development. This literature review helps to understand the topic of interest from different perspectives while narrowing the scope to approach the current research from new angles.

**Chapter Two: The United Kingdom's Strategic
Role in the Indo-Pacific: A Multi-Dimensional
Approach**

Chapter Two: The United Kingdom’s Strategic Role in the Indo-Pacific: A Multi-Dimensional Approach.....	
1 .The UK’s Diplomatic Engagement and Trade Ties through ASEAN	29
2 .The UK’s Strategic Alignment through AUKUS.....	32
3 .The UK’s Military Engagement in the South China Sea.....	37
4 .UK-India Relations	40
Discussion and Analysis	42
General Conclusion	48

Introduction

The UK has changed its global position after leaving the EU. In this repositioning, it has placed an emphasis on the Indo-Pacific region, which shows economic growth, hostilities, and security risks. Its interest in the region is part of its strategy of becoming a global power moving away from the EU. This chapter demonstrates the engagement of the UK with the Indo-Pacific region. Three significant aspects of this engagement is examined in the chapter, the UK's engagement with ASEAN, its security strategy that is encapsulated in the AUKUS pact, its military presence in the South China Sea, and its relations with India. These initiatives demonstrate how the UK is using its soft power, alliances, and military power to become a major player in the Indo-Pacific region. The chapter, hence, employs four case studies, addressing the three just mentioned aspects, to examine the role of the UK in the region .

1 .The UK's Diplomatic Engagement and Trade Ties through ASEAN

The UK's diplomatic engagement with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) represents a cornerstone of its Indo-Pacific strategy, reflecting a deliberate effort to deepen multilateral ties and enhance its influence in a region of rising geopolitical and economic significance. The UK was granted Dialogue Partner status by ASEAN in August 2021, marking the first new dialogue partner admitted in 25 years and the eleventh overall (ASEAN, 2021). This status enables the UK to participate in key ASEAN-led forums such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), which are critical platforms for discussing regional security, economic cooperation, climate change, and digital development (ASEAN, 2025). Through these mechanisms, the UK

gains opportunities to contribute to shaping regional norms and governance structures, thereby reinforcing ASEAN's central role in maintaining stability and cooperation in Southeast Asia.

The UK's approach to ASEAN emphasizes multilateralism and the projection of soft power, promoting a rules-based international order, democratic values, and freedom of navigation—principles that resonate with many ASEAN member states. Unlike the more overt military dominance of the United States or China's economic statecraft, the UK positions itself as a principled, neutral actor that supports regional autonomy and cooperation (The Diplomat, 2021). This stance allows the UK to influence regional dynamics constructively, without provoking the sensitivities that often accompany great power competition. The UK's diplomatic engagement is further institutionalized through the ASEAN-UK Joint Cooperation Committee and the ASEAN-UK Plan of Action (2022–2026), which prioritize connectivity, maritime cooperation, economic collaboration, and sustainable development, including education, health, and climate action (ASEAN, 2025; ASEAN, 2022).

Economically, ASEAN is a vital partner for the UK, serving as its third-largest trading partner outside the EU. In 2023, trade between the UK and ASEAN reached approximately USD 35.09 billion, with UK foreign direct investment inflows totalling USD 2.54 billion, making the UK ASEAN's eighth largest trading partner and a significant source of investment among dialogue partners (ASEAN, 2025). The UK-ASEAN Business Council, established in 2011, facilitates trade and investment by providing UK businesses with a platform to deepen their presence in the region (ASEAN, 2025). Complementing these efforts, the UK's accession to the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP)

embeds it within regional trade frameworks, signalling a long-term commitment to economic integration and diversification beyond Europe (ASEAN, 2025). These economic initiatives align closely with the UK's broader Indo-Pacific economic strategy, which seeks to expand market access and foster innovation-led growth.

Despite these positive developments, the UK faces several challenges in deepening its engagement with ASEAN. ASEAN member states traditionally exercise caution regarding external influence on sensitive security matters, especially those related to sovereignty and territorial disputes (ASEAN-UK Plan of Action, 2022). The UK's geographic distance and relatively limited historical engagement in parts of Southeast Asia constrains its ability to integrate fully within the region's complex political landscape (ASEAN-UK Plan of Action, 2022). Additionally, ASEAN's consensus-driven decision-making process slows progress on contentious issues, limiting the scope for decisive collective action. Nonetheless, the UK's diplomatic strategy through ASEAN reflects a calculated and pragmatic approach to diversifying partnerships, promoting regional stability, and maintaining influence through constructive multilateral engagement rather than unilateral or coercive measures.

Security cooperation through ASEAN also forms an important dimension of the UK's Indo-Pacific policy. Since 2021, the UK has held observer status in the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups on Military Medicine and Maritime Security and has been admitted to additional working groups for the 2024–2027 cycle (ASEAN, 2025). This participation allows the UK to contribute to capacity-building initiatives and regional security dialogues, complementing its broader defense posture in the Indo-Pacific. The UK's involvement in humanitarian assistance and disaster relief efforts,

such as supporting ASEAN's response to the Myanmar crisis, further underscores its commitment to regional stability and cooperation (ASEAN, 2025).

In summary, the UK's diplomatic engagement through ASEAN is a vital component of its Indo-Pacific strategy, leveraging multilateralism, economic integration, and security cooperation to enhance its influence in Southeast Asia. By embedding itself within ASEAN's institutional frameworks and regional mechanisms, the UK balances its global ambitions with respect for regional autonomy and sensitivities.

While geographic distance and ASEAN's cautious stance on external influence present challenges, the UK's Dialogue Partner status and associated initiatives reflect a pragmatic, values-driven approach to sustaining its presence in a strategically important region. Continued political will, economic investment, and adaptive diplomacy will be essential for the UK to consolidate and expand its role within ASEAN and the broader Indo-Pacific in the coming years.

2 .The UK's Strategic Alignment through AUKUS

Since its inception, AUKUS has progressed through multiple high-level meetings and working groups focusing on the two main pillars: the nuclear-powered submarine program and advanced military capabilities. The partners have committed to uphold the highest nuclear non-proliferation standards, with Australia establishing a Nuclear-Powered Submarine Taskforce to ensure responsible stewardship of this sensitive technology (Prime Minister of Australia, 2023; Defence.gov, 2021). The trilateral collaboration includes sharing of naval nuclear propulsion information under the Exchange of Naval Nuclear Propulsion Information Agreement (ENNPIA), signed in

November 2021, which facilitates the transfer of critical technology while adhering to strict safeguards (Wikipedia, 2025).

The announcement of the AUKUS security pact in September 2021 marked a significant milestone in the UK's Indo-Pacific policy, representing a bold and strategic leap into the core of the region's security architecture. AUKUS, a trilateral agreement between Australia, the UK, and the United States, primarily focuses on enabling Australia to acquire nuclear-powered submarines, a capability that substantially enhances its naval reach and endurance. Unlike conventional submarines, nuclear-powered submarines can remain submerged for extended periods, offering strategic advantages in stealth, speed, and operational range, which are critical in the vast Indo-Pacific maritime domain (UK Parliament, 2021; Defence.gov, 2021).

Beyond submarines, AUKUS encompasses collaborative initiatives in cutting-edge domains such as cyber security, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and undersea technologies. This broad technological cooperation aims to deepen interoperability among the three allies and maintain their qualitative edge amid rapid military modernization by regional actors, particularly China (Prime Minister of Australia, 2023; SPF, 2021). For the UK, participation in AUKUS aligns closely with its "Global Britain" vision, reinforcing transatlantic and Indo-Pacific ties while positioning the UK as a technologically advanced and reliable security partner. The participation in AUKUS allows the UK to show what it can do not just in terms of fire power, but as a curious and forward-thinking tech superpower. By investing in cutting-edge technology including quantum computing, artificial intelligence and cyber defence, the UK is showing that it is committed to working with allies to shape the future of warfare and security. This tech sufficiency only strengthens its credibility and

trustworthiness as a partner capable of genuinely helping build long-term security architectures.

Furthermore, the UK's prowess in R&D and its membership of not only NATO but Indo-Pacific security architectures makes it a bridge for Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific theatres. By doing so, its position inside AUKUS enhances its reputation as a reliable ally that is able to innovate while engaging in long-term strategic commitments—both essential ingredients when dealing with tomorrow's challenges and preserving common deterrence. It also bolsters the UK's defense industrial base by fostering innovation and joint development, thus sustaining critical capabilities and supply chains (UK Parliament, 2021; Defence.gov, 2021).

Strategically, AUKUS symbolizes a coalition of liberal democracies united by shared values and a common interest in countering authoritarian influence, especially the rise of China. Unlike China's Belt and Road Initiative, which leverages infrastructure financing and economic influence, AUKUS emphasizes capacity-sharing and coalition-building. This approach allows the UK to distinguish itself from more dominant powers by promoting collective security and technological collaboration, the UK powerfully reinforces its role as a credible middle power: not one wedded to hêgemonism but one based on strategic partnerships, diplomatic engagement, and technology offer. Unlike the superpowers of the world, who tend to dominate with a more unilateral approach, the UK is using multilateralism to show that we are still committed to the rules-based international system. Its AUKUS participation enables it to serve as a balancer that transcends interests in the transatlantic and Indo-Pacific, enabling regional balance without necessarily trying to contain it.

This middle power role raises the UK's (soft) power and diplomatic legitimacy, as it presents itself as a player interested in sustainable security cooperation, not coercive influence. The UK's own role in maintaining regional stability—worked out through capacity building and interoperability with partners—is significant—especially in the light of China's more aggressive stance. This has been bolstered by its Global Britain agenda, which aims to exert an influence through positive and values-led engagement rather than through traditional power plays. (SPF, 2021; Suoneto & Wrist, 2021).

However, the pact also introduces potential risks and complexities. The announcement triggered diplomatic tensions, notably with France, which lost a multibillion-dollar submarine contract with Australia, describing the move as a “stab in the back” (UK Parliament, 2021). More broadly, AUKUS has raised concerns among some Southeast Asian nations about an escalating arms race and the militarization of the Indo-Pacific, complicating the UK's diplomatic relations with countries that prefer non-alignment or balanced engagement with China (House of Commons Library, 2021). The UK must therefore maintain a nuanced posture—assertive in its security commitments yet collaborative and sensitive to regional dynamics—to manage these concerns effectively (SPF, 2021). Means that AUKUS, despite augmenting the strategic profile of the UK, also poses diplomatic challenges, especially in a region in which several states uphold strategic autonomy and non-alignment. Indonesia, Malaysia and some ASEAN members are among those nervous about the risk that AUKUS will further encourage regional militarisation and deepen the geopolitical divide. These fears may also complicate the UK's attempts to deepen bilateral and regional

relationships with Southeast Asia, particularly with those countries who wish to stay clear of the US-China spat.

In negotiating this complex terrain, the UK needs to project strength and commitment to regional security through AUKUS, but do so in a way that shows respect for regional partners' differing strategic preferences. This would involve highlighting the defensive and collective nature of AUKUS, promoting transparent communication, and reaffirming its commitments to ASEAN centrality and inclusive regional architectures. By taking a more nuanced position, the UK can reduce allegations, and appearance, of partisanship, maintain diplomatic goodwill, and maintain a broader Indo-Pacific engagement strategy.

For the UK, AUKUS offers a unique avenue to “punch above its weight” in the Indo-Pacific, enabling it to deepen its regional presence and influence security outcomes alongside its closest allies. The partnership exemplifies the UK's strategic ambition to be a technologically sophisticated and dependable partner in a contested region, supporting a stable and rules-based international order (UK Parliament, 2021; Defence.gov, 2021). However, according to SPF (2021) and the Suoneto & Wrist (2021), sustaining this role requires enduring political will, financial investment, and diplomatic agility to navigate the evolving regional security environment and avoid entanglement in great-power rivalry.

In conclusion, AUKUS stands as a transformative element of the UK's Indo-Pacific strategy. It enhances military capabilities, fosters technological innovation, and reinforces strategic partnerships, all while embodying shared democratic values. The pact's success depends on balancing assertive defence cooperation with careful diplomacy, ensuring that it contributes to regional stability rather than exacerbating

tensions. For the UK, AUKUS is both a security and diplomatic tool that advances its global ambitions and commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific.

3 .The UK’s Military Engagement in the South China Sea

The UK’s military presence in the South China Sea stands as one of the most visible and strategically significant demonstrations of its Indo-Pacific engagement. In 2021, the deployment of the HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group marked a renewed and assertive British naval presence in the region, signalling London’s commitment to upholding freedom of navigation and reinforcing international legal norms, particularly those enshrined in the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (House of Commons Library, 2021). This deployment was part of a broader UK strategy, articulated in the 2021 Integrated Review, which outlined the “Tilt to the Indo-Pacific” policy aimed at enhancing British influence and security partnerships in a region increasingly defined by great power competition (House of Commons Library, 2021; Agora Think Tank, 2024).

The South China Sea is a critical maritime domain, through which a significant portion of global trade—including British maritime commerce—passes. The security of these sea lanes is thus not only a strategic imperative but also an economic necessity for the UK, which relies heavily on uninterrupted trade flows for economic resilience (Agora Think Tank, 2024). By maintaining a naval presence in this contested region, the UK underscores the inseparability of security and economic interests in its Indo-Pacific policy. The carrier strike group’s operations included joint exercises with key regional partners such as Japan, Australia, and the United States, which serve to enhance collective deterrence and demonstrate solidarity among like-minded democratic nations (Sengputa, 2021; Australian Strategic Policy Institute, 2024). These

exercises promote interoperability and foster a shared strategic culture, reinforcing the UK's role as a credible security actor committed to a rules-based regional order.

The strategic message conveyed by these deployments extends beyond military signalling. The UK's presence in the South China Sea is a diplomatic assertion of support for international law and regional stability, countering unilateral attempts to alter the status quo through coercion or force. This is particularly relevant given China's expansive territorial claims marked by the "nine-dash line" and its construction of military outposts on disputed islands (Agora Think Tank, 2024; ASPI Strategist, 2024). China's growing military modernization and assertiveness in the region, including commissioning new destroyers, amphibious assault ships, and an aircraft carrier, have heightened tensions and raised concerns among regional and global powers (Agora Think Tank, 2024). The UK's naval deployments, therefore, serve as a tangible counterbalance to these developments, reinforcing the principle that no single power should dominate these vital waterways.

However, the UK's military engagement in the South China Sea is not without controversy and challenges. China has vocally criticized British naval activities as interference in its internal affairs, warning of potential retaliatory measures (Global Times, 2021). This criticism reflects broader geopolitical tensions and the risk that increased foreign naval presence could escalate regional militarization. Moreover, sustaining a meaningful and consistent military presence poses logistical and resource challenges for the UK, which maintains a relatively limited permanent footprint in the Indo-Pacific, relying on periodic deployments and partnerships with regional allies (House of Commons Library, 2021; Sengputa, 2021). Balancing assertiveness with

diplomacy is therefore critical for the UK to avoid being perceived as an external provocateur while still defending its principles and interests.

The UK's naval operations also fit within a broader context of European engagement in the Indo-Pacific. Countries such as France, Germany, the Netherlands, and Italy have increased their naval activities in the South China Sea and surrounding areas, signalling a growing European interest in regional security and the maintenance of a free and open Indo-Pacific (Joint Project, 2021; ASPIStrategist, 2024). The UK has sought to coordinate with these partners, including through joint exercises and diplomatic dialogues, to enhance collective presence and influence (House of Commons Library, 2021) .

This multilateral approach complements the UK's bilateral partnerships and its participation in security frameworks such as AUKUS, underscoring a comprehensive strategy that blends military capability with diplomatic engagement.

In conclusion, the UK's military presence in the South China Sea exemplifies its broader Indo-Pacific strategy of combining defense diplomacy, alliance-building, and economic security considerations. The deployment of the HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group and subsequent naval activities demonstrate the UK's commitment to upholding international law, supporting regional allies, and maintaining open sea lanes critical to global trade. While facing geopolitical pushback and operational constraints, the UK's approach reflects a pragmatic balancing act—asserting its principles and interests without escalating tensions unnecessarily. As the Indo-Pacific continues to evolve as a center of global power competition, the UK's targeted defense diplomacy in the South China Sea will remain a key element of its effort to sustain relevance and contribute to regional stability.

4 .UK-India Relations

The UK-India relationship has evolved into a multifaceted and comprehensive strategic partnership deeply rooted in historical ties and shaped by converging economic, defense, and geopolitical interests. Following India's economic liberalization in the 1990s, the UK recalibrated its policy to recognize India not only as a post-colonial partner but as an emerging global power with growing strategic importance. This evolution was institutionalized through a series of formal agreements: the 2004 Strategic Partnership, the 2010 'Enhanced Partnership for the Future,' and the 2021 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership under the Roadmap 2030 initiative .

These developments reflect a deliberate UK strategy to position India as a key partner in its broader Indo-Pacific vision, especially post-Brexit under the "Global Britain" agenda (HM Government, 2021; Lords Library, 2024). Economically, the partnership is driven by mutual interests in expanding trade and investment. The UK has identified India as a priority market, aiming to double bilateral trade by 2030 through a Free Trade Agreement (FTA) currently under negotiation. The Enhanced Trade Partnership launched in 2021 laid the groundwork for this objective, focusing on key sectors such as financial services, fintech, digital innovation, healthcare, education, and green technology. This aligns with the UK's liberal economic agenda emphasizing free markets, open societies, and institutional cooperation. India's view of the UK as a strategic economic partner stems from the UK's ability to contribute meaningfully to India's development priorities are focused around India's flagship initiatives such as Make in India (for boosting manufacturing in the country) and Digital India (towards making the country a digitally empowered society and a knowledge economy).

The UK's expertise in value-added industries, including fintech, advanced manufacturing, higher education, and clean energy are a natural complement to India's desire to transform its infrastructure, reskill its workforce and build on an innovation-driven growth strategy. Furthermore, British universities and research institutions are considered important educational and technology transfer partners – promoting academic exchange, collaborative research and the building of human capacity. This multi-dimensional engagement strengthens not only India's domestic developmental aspirations, but also deepens interdependence, reinforcing the strategic logic of an ambitious Free Trade Agreement and long-term economic partnership. (UKIBC, 2024; Open Access Government, 2025).

Defence and security cooperation form a central pillar of the partnership. Regular joint military exercises, including the biennial "AJEYA WARRIOR" and naval engagements like "KONKAN," enhance interoperability and foster mutual understanding. High-level dialogues focus on emerging defence technologies, maritime security, and industrial collaboration, reinforcing strategic convergence. The UK supports India's defence self-reliance through partnerships in manufacturing and co-development, signalling a shift toward a more equal and mutually beneficial relationship. Both countries share vital security interests in ensuring regional stability, combating terrorism, and preserving freedom of navigation in key maritime routes such as the Indian Ocean and South China Sea. These priorities reflect a strong commitment to upholding a rules-based international order in an increasingly contested Indo-Pacific landscape (HM Government, 2021; PIB, 2023; Indian Narrative, 2025).

Strategically, the partnership serves broader geopolitical objectives. From a realist perspective, the UK's engagement with India aims to balance China's rising

assertiveness and maintain influence in a multipolar order. The UK's increased naval presence in the Indo-Pacific, including carrier strike group deployments and maritime patrols, deters adversarial actors and reassures allies.

As Chalmers (2023) notes, these deployments underscore Britain's desire to be a credible strategic actor contributing to regional stability. India, cautious of China's ambitions, views the UK as a partner advancing its strategic autonomy while engaging Western powers on favorable terms. Furthermore, the constructivist dimension of identity politics shapes the partnership: the UK's post-Brexit "Global Britain" narrative drives it to seek partnerships reinforcing its image as a globally engaged, values-driven actor. India's democratic credentials and rising stature make it an ideal partner, though domestic constraints in the UK—such as fiscal pressures and competing security priorities—pose challenges to sustaining a robust Indo-Pacific presence (Wilkins, 2024; IMPRI, 2024).

Together, the UK-India strategic partnership represents one of the most comprehensive bilateral relationships within the UK's Indo-Pacific tilt. It blends liberal aspirations for economic interdependence, realist calculations of power, and identity-driven narratives of global re-engagement. This alignment has profound implications for regional stability, global governance, and the reconfiguration of international power structures in the 21st century.

Discussion and Analysis

The UK's Indo-Pacific strategy is a subtle and multi-tier foreign policy strategy incorporating diplomacy, security cooperation and military presence aims to exert its influence in the region seen as the centre of economic and geopolitical gravity. That strategy is manifested in three intersecting pillars: the engagement with ASEAN, the

participation in the AUKUS security pact, and the direct military operations such as the freedom of navigation exercises in the South China Sea.

In ASEAN, the UK is promoting multilateralism and soft power, buttressing economic interests with a values-based foreign policy that seeks to support regional governance and integration in the context of changing power dynamics. Granted dialogue partner status with ASEAN that puts it at the bar for tables like the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus), the UK's August 2021 award of this diplomatic score was a momentous development (SPF USA, 2024; Chatham House,2024) .

These forums allow the United Kingdom to participate in discussions over regional security, economic integration, climate change, and digital development, augmenting its influence without reliance on pressures. The UK's efforts to join the CPTPP (Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership) are also illustrative of its desire to embed itself within regional economics networks, indicating its long term commitment and support for open markets (SPF USA, 2024).AUKUS re-secures UK security policy by enhancing technology co-operation and deterrence capability with the US and Australia. A trilateral partnership announced in September 2021, it centers on Australia acquiring nuclear-powered submarines, but goes beyond to include collaborations on cyber security, artificial intelligence, quantum computing and undersea technology. Joining AUKUS places the UK on the same side as US strategic interests and also raises London's influence over shaping Indo-Pacific security norms, and maintaining a rules-based order.

Furthermore, the agreement also bolsters the UK's Defence Industrial Base, and interoperability with two of its closest allies, and the ability to "punch above its weight" in a region where great powers are leading (Air University, 2023). AUKUS as a strategic construct reflects a broader coalition of liberal democracies that are bound by shared values and a common interest in responding to authoritarian influence, primarily through a challenge to China's rising self-confidence (UK Parliament, 2023).

Diplomatically speaking, these have been supplemented and alliance-based efforts, Royal Navy deployments to the South China Sea and Indo-Pacific more widely signal Britain's determination to support the Rule of Law and promote stability across the region. The deployment of the HMS Queen Elizabeth carrier strike group in 2021, heralded a new era in British naval presence and a peaking commitment to freedom of navigation and reinforcement of the UNCLOS (War on the Rocks, 2023; RUSI, 2024).

UK working with Japan, Australia, and the United States through joint exercises Key to collective deterrence, promoting greater interoperability and developing a shared strategic culture between democratic allies of the UK. While these operations are small in size, they represent both Britain's strategic commitment to the principal of collective security and to keeping international sea lanes open for global trade (War on the Rocks, 2023). At the heart of this Indo-Pacific strategy lies a deeply engaged UK-India strategic partnership that is distinctive in terms of depth and bilateral geography .

Anchored in historical connections and growing through the development of formal agreements – the 2004 Strategic Partnership, the 2010 Enhanced Partnership for the Future and, now, the 2021 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership under the Roadmap 2030 – the partnership is a reflection of the UK's wider post-Brexit agenda of "Global Britain": a country seeking to exert itself in a multipolar world (HM Government, 2021;

Lords Library, 2024). The alliance offers a mix of realist, liberal, and constructivist dynamics. As much as the reality of the balance-of-power theory can be seen in the UK's "tilt" to counterbalance China's growing assertiveness by enhancing naval deployments, conducting joint exercises, including "AJEYA WARRIOR," and co-operation in defence technology being used to achieve deterrence and reassure its allies (Chalmers, 2023; PIB, 2023).

At the same time, liberalism is the Bread and Butter of the partnership's economic aspect with target oriented approaches such as the free trade agreement negotiations and the Enhanced Trade Partnership among others in the pipeline in areas like fintech, healthcare and green technology which are set to facilitate systemic cooperation and economic interdependency (Open Access Government, 2025; UKIBC, 2024). This political/identity construction of post-Brexit Britain focuses on the UK being a globally engaged, values-led power that is shared with India because of Indian democratic credentials and rise, making the partnership one that is as much about narratives as it is about strategic interests (Wilkins, 2024; IMPRI, 2024). But India's romance with the UK comes with its own set of problems too. The ambitious economic goals collide with regulatory obstacles, geopolitical unknowns and the challenges of India's strategic autonomy, especially in making direct transfer of defense technology. Furthermore, the UK will need to factor in its bilateral engagement with India alongside wider regional dynamics so that it does not alienate other Indo-Pacific players or exacerbate existing tensions, particularly in light of the US-China competition (HM Government, 2021; Indian Narrative, 2025).

The Indo-Pacific posturing of the UK is already beginning to face limits at home, not least in the form of fiscal constraints and competition for attention elsewhere in the Europe (Wilkins, 2024).

Collectively, the elements of the UK's Indo-Pacific strategy—multilateral engagement via ASEAN, security anchoring via AUKUS, symbolic and operational naval presence and the deep bilateral partnership with India—underline the practical and adaptable nature of the approach. The UK recognizes itself as a middle power but one which seeks to leverage influence through partnerships, economic integration and values based diplomacy in line with a free and open Indo-Pacific based on a rules-based international order (FCDO, 2024; Brookings, 2023).

The success of such a long-term strategy will require continued political will, financial commitment, and the ability to maneuver and balance regional complexities without becoming mired in binary great power rivalries. The UK-India partnership is a case in point and serves as an analytical window through which to observe the emerging landscape of regional and global power in the 21st century.

Conclusion

The UK's deepening involvement in the Indo-Pacific symbolises a strategic reorientation when it comes to foreign policy post-Brexit. Via its cooperation with ASEAN, AUKUS alliance and through maritime operations, UK has developed a comprehensive response that implements diplomacy, defense, and economic engagement. Though its commitment is relatively small compared to that of more powerful nations, the UK's capacity to form coalitions, respect international law and help ensure regional stability makes it a valuable actor in Indo-Pacific geopolitics.

As a middle power, the UK does not want to dominate the region but wishes to be a helpful, positive and principled partner. Its approach is indicative of the nuanced understanding of local dynamics and the call for cooperative solutions to global problems. If the UK's Indo-Pacific vision is sustained and well-handled, it could be a model for how non-geopolitical actors can responsibly and effectively work in support of a stable, open, and rules-based world order.

General Conclusion

This dissertation covered the UK's current foreign policy with attention to Post-Brexit Global Britain, which is considered the UK's attempt to reposition itself as a global influential power and reassert sovereignty and independence. Key to this strategy is the Indo-Pacific Tilt, which aims to build ties with Indo-Pacific countries, recognising the region's geopolitical and economic position. The dissertation was organised into two chapters to investigate the role of the UK's involvement in the target region. While the first chapter aimed to review the literature and the theoretical framework, the second chapter was devoted to the actual research work, that is, assessing the role of the UK in the region along with its limitations through predefined criteria and relations .

The first chapter of the dissertation outlined the various theoretical frameworks used to study and evaluate international relations between countries. Theories such as geopolitics, realism, liberalism, mercantilism, and constructivism provide key standards to investigate respectively power dynamics in IR based on geography, conflict-driven and competition relations, diplomatic cooperative relations that promote peace and economic interdependence, economic ties that are shaped by competition for trade dominance and national power, and socially constructed relations that promote shared ideas, norms and values. The chapter also reviewed previous studies held on the UK's involvement in the Indo-Pacific region from different angles to bridge the gap between such studies focus and the present research corner of investigation .

The second chapter aimed to assess the UK's role in the region and the constraints it faces by employing four case studies. Focusing on determined instances is vital to reach focused and comprehensive findings. The first aspect was the UK's diplomatic

engagement and trade ties through ASEAN. The status given to the UK, a Dialogue Partner, by the association enabled it to participate in key ASEAN-LED forums for discussing regional security, economic cooperation, climate change, and digital development. Applying a liberalist theory, the UK's membership in the association helped it to contribute to shaping regional norms and governance structures, reinforcing the role of ASEAN as a multilateral body in maintaining stability, cooperation, and economic interdependence in South Asia. The UK acted as a neutral partner to promote and build democratic values, regional autonomy and cooperation, and trade ties and investment. As for the UK, the engagement in the region was constructively crucial, contributing to its post-Brexit identity. However, the UK's full integration within the region, especially in issues of sensitive security matters, was constrained by its geographic distance and limited historical engagement in the region.

The second aspect of the UK's engagement in the Indo-Pacific is its strategic alignment through the trilateral AUKUS coalition. AUKUS is conflict-driven yet peace-oriented. Accordingly, its agreements and practices can be investigated from both realism and liberalism. It was established as a reaction to the growth of China as a military power and was a military alignment rather than a diplomatic one. However, the coalition aimed to balance power and to limit the superpower of China in the region. Regardless of the coalition's overall aim, the research focused on the role of the UK, as a country, in the region. The UK's membership in the coalition reinforced intercontinental and Indo-Pacific ties, positioned the UK as a technologically advanced and reliable security partner, and bolstered the UK's defence industrial base. The UK promoted collective security and technological collaboration, and thus, enhanced its image as a credible middle power with a meaningful role in regional stability. However,

driven by realism theory, the UK's joining this coalition raised diplomatic tensions and concerns with affected countries such as France, which lost a multibillion-dollar submarine contract with Australia. As AUKUS raised concerns among some Southeast Asian nations about an escalating arms race and the militarisation of the Indo-Pacific, the UK's diplomatic relations with countries that prefer non-alignment or balanced engagement with China were complicated. Accordingly, to maintain its role as a reliable security partner in the region, it should endure political will, financial investment, and diplomatic agility to navigate the evolving regional security environment and avoid entanglement in great-power rivalry.

The third aspect of the investigation was the UK's military engagement in the South China Sea. This military engagement is a leap on the part of the UK to emulate the great powers' competition in the region. Owing to the importance of the South China Sea, it was critical for the UK to secure it for its benefit, both strategically and economically. In addition, the UK's naval deployments in the region served as a tangible counterbalance to the rise of China, reinforcing the principle that no single power should dominate these vital waterways. However, realistically speaking, such engagement posed controversy and challenges as China, geopolitically, criticized it, being interference in its internal affairs and warned of potential retaliatory measures.

The last aspect to be investigated was the UK's relations with India. Regarding the historical ties between the two countries, the relations between the UK and India evolved into a multifaceted and comprehensive strategic partnership. Through several formal agreements, the growing ties were institutionalized and targeted mutual economic interests to expand trade and investment. This bilateral relationships served both liberalist and realist views. Aligning with the UK liberal economic agenda, the

relation with India emphasized free markets, open societies, and institutional cooperation. Given the UK's international position, India viewed the UK as a valuable source of foreign direct investment, higher education collaboration, and technology transfer, supporting domestic initiatives like Make in India and Digital India. The relations also targeted defense and security through regular joint military exercises and naval engagements, which enhanced interoperability, fostered mutual understanding, and reinforced strategic convergence. This cooperation strengthened India's position in the region as the UK supported India's self-reliance to guarantee both countries' shared security interests, along with maintaining a multipolar order rather than China's dominance. The UK as a partner advanced India's strategic autonomy and thus contributed to combating the one dominating power in the region, hence, helped regional stability. The constructivist dimension was again to play in the game, building the UK's Global Britain strategy through identity-driven narratives of global re-arrangement and socially constructed relations with India .

In conclusion, the UK's engagement role in the Indo-Pacific region is effective yet complicated. It can be seen from different lenses, leading to changing and controversial perspectives, either for or against, positive or negative. However, for the context of this research, a neutral perspective is demonstrated by investigating both sides of the engagement, applying multiple theories. As a result of analysing the UK's roles in each of the above four mentioned case studies, the UK plays the role of promoting regional region .

References

Alexander, D. (2024, November 29). *Statement on the eighth meeting of the Commission of the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) in Vancouver, Canada*. UK Parliament.

<https://www.theyworkforyou.com/wms/?id=2024-11-29.hcws267.h>

ASEAN Secretariat. (2025, February). *Overview of ASEAN - UK Dialogue Partnership*. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/02/Overview-of-ASEAN-UK-Dialogue-Partnership-February-2025.pdf>

Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) & United Kingdom. (2022, August 4). *Plan of Action to Implement the ASEAN-United Kingdom Dialogue Partnership (2022–2026)*. <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/FINAL-ASEAN-UK-POA-2022-2026.pdf>

Barry, B., Giegerich, B., Graham, E., & Schreer, B. (2022, June 8). *The UK Indo-Pacific tilt: Executive summary*. International Institute for Strategic Studies. <https://www.iiss.org/research-paper/2022/06/the-uk-indo-pacific-tilt/>

Brooke-Holland, L. (2021, March 23). *Defence command paper 2021: Summary (Research briefing)*. UK Parliament. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9181/>

Brooke-Holland, L. (2021, October 11). *Integrated Review 2021: The Defence tilt to the Indo-Pacific*. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-9217/>

- Chalmers, M. (2023). *The UK's strategic turn to the Indo-Pacific*. Royal United Services Institute. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/uks-strategic-turn-indo-pacific>
- Choong, W., & Tan, E. (2024, September 19). *The UK and the Indo-Pacific: The need to lean into the tilt*. Royal United Services Institute. <https://rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/uk-and-indo-pacific-need-lean-tilt>
- Crabtree, J. (2023, April 11). *Britain's surprisingly enduring tilt to Asia*. Foreign Policy. <https://foreignpolicy.com/2023/04/11/uk-britain-tilt-indo-pacific-asia-strategy-review-aucus-cptpp-geopolitics/>
- Curtis, J., & Brooke-Holland, L. (2025, March 28). *The UK's tilt to the Indo-Pacific and what's next for its policy to the region?* House of Commons Library. <https://commonslibrary.parliament.uk/research-briefings/cbp-10052/>
- HM Government. (2021). *Global Britain in a competitive age: The integrated review of security, defence, development and foreign policy*. Cabinet Office. <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/global-britain-in-a-competitive-age-the-integrated-review-of-security-defence-development-and-foreign-policy>
- House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. (2024, March 19). *Tilting horizons: The Integrated Review and the Indo-Pacific – Government response to the Committee's eighth report of session 2022–23* (Fourth Special Report of Session 2023–24, HC 630). UK Parliament. <https://committees.parliament.uk/publications/43964/documents/218040/default/>

House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee. (2024). *Tilting horizons: The Integrated Review and the Indo-Pacific – Government response to the Committee's eighth report of session 2022–23* (Fourth Special Report of Session 2023–24, HC 630). UK Parliament.

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm5804/cmselect/cmfaaff/630/report.html>

Indian Narrative. (2025). *India-UK relations: A comprehensive overview*. Indian Narrative. <https://www.indianarrative.com/>

Mackinder, H. J. (1904). The geographical pivot of history. *The Geographical Journal*, 23(4), 421–437.

https://ndisc.nd.edu/assets/422105/mackinder_1904_heartland_article_17_pages.pdf

Mearsheimer, J. J. (2001). *The tragedy of great power politics*. W. W. Norton & Company. <https://samuelbhfaure.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/10/s2-mearsheimer-2001.pdf>

Mishra, A. (2024). *India's role in the Indo-Pacific: Strategic imperatives and challenges*. IMPRI Impact and Policy Research Institute.

<https://www.impriindia.com/insights/indo-pacific-multipolarity-india/>

Pugliese, G. (2021). *Europe's naval engagement in the South China Sea*. *JOINT Briefs*.

https://www.academia.edu/49231062/Europe_s_Naval_Engagement_in_the_South_China_Sea?utm_source=chatgpt.com

- Press Information Bureau, Government of India. (2023). *India-UK joint statement*. Press Information Bureau. <https://pib.gov.in/>
- Rickards, J. (2024). *China's military modernisation: Implications for the Indo-Pacific*. Australian Strategic Policy Institute. <https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/>
- Sasakawa Peace Foundation. (2021). *The UK's Indo-Pacific tilt: Opportunities and challenges*. Sasakawa Peace Foundation. <https://www.spf.org/en/>
- Sengupta, S. (2021). *Joint exercises in the Indo-Pacific: Strategic signalling*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/05/joint-exercises-in-the-indo-pacific-strategic-signalling/>
- Smith, M. (2021). *Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy*. *International Affairs*, 97(3), 573–594. <https://doi.org/10.1080/17547075.2021.1935549>
- Suoneto, N., & Wrist, F. (2021, April 14). *The prospects for 'Global Britain' in Southeast Asia: The U.K.'s engagement with Southeast Asia will be a test of London's claim to a major role on the world stage*. *The Diplomat – Asia-Pacific Current Affairs*. <https://thediplomat.com/2021/04/the-prospects-for-global-britain-in-southeast-asia/>
- The Diplomat. (2021). *The UK and collective security in the Indo-Pacific*. The Diplomat. <https://thediplomat.com/>

- The Japan Society. (2021, November 8). *The AUKUS security pact and its implications for the UK and Japan* [Video]. YouTube.
<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y3OWPE6uVOE>
- Turner, O. (2019). *Global Britain and the narrative of empire. The Political Quarterly*, 90(4), 727–734.
https://www.pure.ed.ac.uk/ws/portalfiles/portal/107399563/Turner_PQ_2019_GlobalBritainNarrativeEmpire.pdf
- UK Government. (2023, March 31). *UK strikes deal to join major free trade bloc in Asia-Pacific*. UK Government. <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-strikes-deal-to-join-major-free-trade-bloc-in-asia-pacific>
- UK-ASEAN Business Council. (2024). *About us*. UK-ASEAN Business Council.
<https://ukabc.org.uk/about-us/>
- UK-ASEAN Business Council. (2024). *What we do*. UK-ASEAN Business Council.
<https://ukabc.org.uk/what-we-do>
- West, C. (2024, November 25). *The UK's Indo-Pacific Policy [Speech transcript]*. India House, London. <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uks-indo-pacific-policy-fcdo-ministers-speech-to-the-iiss>
- Wilkins, T. (2024). Britain's place in the Indo-Pacific: A perspective. *Global Policy Journal*. <https://www.globalpolicyjournal.com/>

White House. (2021, September 15). *Joint leaders statement on AUKUS*.

<https://bidenwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefing-room/statements-releases/2021/09/15/joint-leaders-statement-on-aucus/>

ملخص

يُمثل اهتمام المملكة المتحدة بمنطقة المحيطين الهندي والهادئ جزءًا من إعادة نظر استراتيجية شاملة في عالم ما بعد خروج بريطانيا من الاتحاد الأوروبي، وتُعدّ هذه المنطقة محوريةً فيها. لطالما كانت المملكة المتحدة دولةً أوروبيةً أطلسية، وفي حقبة خروجها من الاتحاد الأوروبي، تسعى إلى إعادة هيكلة نفسها في سياق النظام الدولي ضمن إطار جيوسياسي جوهري. تتناول هذه الأطروحة الملامح المتغيرة لانخراط المملكة المتحدة السياسي والاقتصادي والأمني في منطقة المحيطين الهندي والهادئ في ظلّ إعادة تشكيل واقع القوة العالمية والإقليمية. وانطلاقًا من هويتها الدبلوماسية التقليدية، فإن عودة المملكة المتحدة إلى المنطقة تستند إلى استجابات عملية للمطالب المعاصرة، بما في ذلك السيناريوهات الاقتصادية العالمية المتغيرة (الناجمة عن صعود الصين)، والتعاون الاقتصادي متعدد الأطراف، بالإضافة إلى التجمع الدفاعي الاستراتيجي. وقد استُخدم البحث النوعي لأربع دراسات حالة لإثراء التحليل. وباستخدام نهج وصفي تحليلي، تعتمد الدراسة على بيانات ثانوية جُمعت من وثائق حكومية، وتقارير سياسات، وأدبيات منشورة أكاديميًا. وتشير الاستنتاجات إلى أن الاستراتيجية البريطانية الجديدة تجاه منطقة المحيطين الهندي والهادئ ليست مجرد استمرار للتأثير التاريخي، بل هي عملية إعادة توازن دقيقة تتأثر بالمصالح القديمة إلى جانب صنع السياسات التكيفية المناسبة لعالم أكثر تعددًا للأقطاب.