

Research Briefing

28 March 2025

By John Curtis

The UK's tilt to the Indo-Pacific and what's next for its policy to the region



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Summary

Origins of the tilt

In 2021 the Conservative government proposed that the UK should “tilt to the Indo-Pacific”, meaning strengthening its defence, trade and foreign policy relations with the region.

The proposal was set out in the [2021 Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#), the government’s strategy for national security, development, defence and foreign policy up to 2030.

The 2021 Integrated Review said the UK would become the “European partner with the broadest, most integrated presence in support of mutually beneficial trade, shared security and values” in the region (the Indo-Pacific region was not defined in the review).

Tilt achieved? Goals reached under Conservative government

In a [2023 ‘refresh’ of the 2021 Integrated Review](#), the Conservative government stated it had achieved its original ambition for the tilt, citing several goals proposed in the 2021 document that had been achieved, including:

- Concluding free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand
- Reaching agreement to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP) trade bloc
- Becoming a dialogue partner of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) organisation
- Sending a Carrier Strike Group led by the aircraft carrier HMS Queen Elizabeth on a deployment to the Indo-Pacific region

Not originally envisaged as part of the tilt, in September 2021 the UK along with the US and Australia established AUKUS [a new trilateral defence and security partnership](#) between the three countries. A significant development in the UK’s engagement with the Indo-Pacific.

The Conservative Government also strengthened bilateral relations with key partners in the region, including Japan, South Korea, India and Australia.

Reports by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs and Defence select committees, both published in 2023, questioned to what extent the then government had articulated a clear strategy to the region.

The [Foreign Affairs Committee welcomed the tilt](#) but said it should not come at the expense of the UK's commitment to other regions, including the Middle East, and questioned the extent to which the tilt had achieved a permanent rebalancing of UK foreign policy. The [Defence Committee said](#) it “reject[ed] the notion” that the ‘tilt’ had been “achieved” from a defence perspective. It argued the UK was currently under resourced to sustain its existing defence commitments to NATO and the Euro-Atlantic region, and “if we aspire to play any significant role in the Indo-Pacific this would need a major commitment of cash, equipment and personnel. Without this, the UK may need to curb its ambitions in the region”.

The tilt under the Labour Government

The Labour government has [launched a strategic defence review](#) which is expected to report in the first half of 2025. A [new national security strategy](#) is also due to be published before the end of June 2025.

These documents may provide further detail on how the government will prioritise its resources and focus between Europe and the Euro-Atlantic region, with that of the Indo-Pacific region.

Some analysts have [emphasised that the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific regions are interlinked](#), and that the UK should not have to choose between better relations with Europe or focusing on the Indo-Pacific, rather [it should pursue both goals at the same time](#).

The government has said it remains committed to the AUKUS partnership. While [emphasising the UK's security priorities are in Europe and its 'NATO first' defence policy](#), the government has also talked of [developing its existing ties to the Indo-Pacific](#). It has also continued to develop bilateral relations with countries in the region.

1 Overview of the tilt, the 2021 Integrated Review and 2023 Integrated Review refresh

This section looks at the origins of the tilt to the Indo-Pacific as first outlined in the 2021 Integrated Review, and how it was assessed in the 2023 'refresh' of that review. It also examines which goals as set out in the 2021 Integrated Review were achieved, and an analysis of the tilt by the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee.

The defence elements of tilt are explored in more detail in section 2, and the trade elements in section 3.

1.1 2021 Integrated Review

In March 2021, the previous Conservative Government set out its strategy for achieving the UK's defence, national security, development and foreign policy goals up to 2030 in two key documents: [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#) (the Integrated Review) and the command paper [Defence in a Competitive Age](#).

These documents proposed a 'tilt to the Indo-Pacific', saying the UK needed to engage with the Indo-Pacific region more deeply for its own security, for the economic opportunities, and to promote its values in the region.¹

The Integrated Review set the goal that the UK would become the "European partner with the broadest, most integrated presence in support of mutually beneficial trade, shared security and values".² Some of the actions it proposed to do this included:

- **Trade:** Concluding new bilateral trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand, and agreeing an Enhanced Trade Partnership with India, as well as joining the Indo-Pacific trade bloc the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP, see section 3 for more).

¹ Cabinet Office, [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#), 16 March 2021, p66.

² As above.

- **Defence and security:** “Strengthening defence and security cooperation, including in maritime security, building on our overseas military bases and existing contribution in the Indo-Pacific [...] and increasing our engagement with regional security groupings”, as well as “cooperating and building capacity on cyber security” (see section 2 for more).³
- **Values and aid:** “promoting open societies and protecting public goods through conflict prevention, strong rule of law, respect for human rights and media freedoms, girls’ education and humanitarian response”; and “using our ODA [international aid] more strategically, in support of many of these objectives”.⁴
- **Other areas:** Becoming an Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) Dialogue Partner and tackling climate change “through influence with major and growing emitters and the most vulnerable countries, linked directly to our wider COP26 strategy”.⁵

For the defence elements of the tilt in the Integrated Review and Defence Command Paper see section 2 of this briefing.

What is the Indo-Pacific?

The 2021 Integrated Review did not define the Indo-Pacific region.

Asked in November 2022 which countries the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) included in its definition of the Indo-Pacific region, the then Minister of State for Indo-Pacific, Anne-Marie Trevelyan, did not answer directly but responded:

The Indo-Pacific Directorate-General in the FCDO has lead responsibility for relations with the following countries and territories: India and Indian Ocean (Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, and Sri Lanka), North East Asia (China, Hong Kong, Japan, Mongolia, North Korea (DPRK), South Korea (RoK), Taiwan), South East Asia (Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Timor Leste, Vietnam) and Oceania (Australia, Fiji, Kiribati, Marshall Islands, Micronesia, Nauru, New Zealand, Palau, Papua New Guinea, Samoa, Solomon Islands, Tonga, Tuvalu, and Vanuatu). There is close coordination with other departments leading work on neighbouring countries, especially Pakistan and Afghanistan.⁶

The Foreign Affairs Committee in a 2023 report on the tilt (see section 1.3), commented that while this response does “provide an indication of geographical scope that was absent from the Integrated Review”, it “is a list of responsibilities, not a definition, and it does not contain an explanation of the criteria for inclusion and the underlying concept”. The Committee added “it should also be noted that Pitcairn Island and British Indian Ocean Territory

³ As above p67.

⁴ As above.

⁵ As above.

⁶ [PQ 88890 \[Indo-Pacific Region\]](#), 24 November 2022.

(BIOT) are absent from this response, and that the UK's commitments to its Overseas Territories in the Indo-Pacific are also important".⁷

1.2 2023 Integrated Review refresh

In March 2023, the Conservative Government published an update to the 2021 Integrated Review: [Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world](#) (IR23). The IR23 was produced in response to significant world events that have taken place since the 2021 strategy. These included the war in Ukraine and what then Prime Minister Rishi Sunak described as "China's willingness to use all the levers of state power to achieve a dominant role in global affairs".⁸

The IR23 stated that the UK would still prioritise the Indo-Pacific region, but that the Government had delivered its ambition for the original tilt, and it was time to put its approach to the region on "a long-term strategic footing, making the region a permanent pillar of the UK's international policy".⁹

In particular, IR23 said the UK "believes that a free and open Indo-Pacific is one where a regional balance of power ensures no single power dominates", citing the importance of territorial integrity, freedom from coercion, disinformation and interference, and regard for international rules and norms.¹⁰

Acknowledging that it has less overall resource and geographic presence in the Indo-Pacific compared to the Euro-Atlantic, the IR23 stated the UK will work to align its regional strategy with the Indo-Pacific strategies of partners such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Canada, the EU, France, Germany, India, Japan, the Republic of Korea and the US. Bilateral and institutional relationships across the region will be strengthened, both as an ASEAN Dialogue Partner and by seeking accession to CPTPP.

For more on these developments, including on changes to the UK-China policy, see the following Library briefings:

- [The Integrated Review Refresh 2023: What has changed since 2021?](#), 15 March 2023.
- [UK-China relations: recent developments](#), 15 July 2024

Further analysis of defence developments since 2021 are in section 2.3.

⁷ Foreign Affairs Committee, [Tilting horizons: the Integrated Review and the Indo-Pacific](#), 18 July 2023, Box 1, p8.

⁸ Cabinet Office, CP 811: [Integrated Review Refresh 2023: Responding to a more contested and volatile world](#), Foreword from the Prime Minister, March 2023.

⁹ CP 811, p22.

¹⁰ CP 811, p22.

1.3

Analysis of the tilt and goals achieved after the 2023 IR refresh

August 2023 Foreign Affairs Committee report

On 31 August 2023, the House of Commons Foreign Affairs Committee (FAC) published a report: [Tilting horizons: the Integrated Review and the Indo-Pacific](#), which reviewed the tilt. The FAC “welcome[d]” the Conservative Government’s focus on the Indo-Pacific as “the global geopolitical and economic centre of gravity is moving eastward”, yet it cautioned that “this policy shift should not be at the expense of regions like the Middle East to which the UK has long-standing commitments and responsibilities”.

The FAC report also criticised “the Government’s inability to set out clearly the long-term objectives and desired outcomes of the Tilt, either in the form of a written strategy, or before the Committee”. They said such actions risk “failing to meaningfully deter the threats to UK sovereignty from a more aggressive People’s Republic of China (PRC), and hinders the ability of the UK to take full advantage of the opportunities of greater engagement with the Indo-Pacific”.¹¹

The report stated that “it is not yet clear whether the Tilt has achieved a permanent rebalancing of UK foreign policy”, and that “it will only have done so if prioritisation is maintained consistently over a long period during which relationships can be built and sustained on the basis of the original Tilt”.¹²

Goals achieved under the Conservative Government

Some of the significant goals set out in the 2021 Integrated Review as part of the tilt to the Indo-Pacific that were achieved by the Conservative government while in office include:

- Joining the CPTPP trade agreement (agreements for the UK to join took place under the Conservative government, though the UK only formally acceded in December 2024 under the Labour Government)¹³
- Becoming an ASEAN dialogue partner in August 2021¹⁴
- Negotiating free trade agreements with Australia and New Zealand

¹¹ UK Parliament, [Foreign Affairs Committee Reviews Government’s Tilt to the Indo-Pacific](#), 30 August 2023.

¹² Foreign Affairs Committee, [Tilting horizons: the Integrated Review and the Indo-Pacific](#), 30 August 2023, Para 30.

¹³ Commons Library, [The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership \(CPTPP\)](#), 16 December 2024.

¹⁴ British Embassy Manila, [UK becomes ASEAN Dialogue Partner](#), 6 August 2021

- Agreeing an 'Enhanced Trade Partnership' with India (which was described as a "stepping stone" to a later full FTA in the IR21)¹⁵

The military goals set out in the Integrated Review and Defence Command Paper are explored below.

¹⁵ FCDO and Prime Minister's Office, [Policy paper: 2030 Roadmap for India-UK future relations](#), 4 May 2021

2

Defence elements of the tilt

2.1

Overview and the 2021 Integrated Review

Overview of UK defence presence in the region

In defence terms the UK has a relatively minimal permanent presence in the Indo-Pacific. The UK has long had a naval facility in Singapore for visiting warships and in 2018 opened a new facility in Oman to support naval deployments outside of the Persian Gulf. The UK has both naval and airfield facilities in Bahrain and Qatar. Diego Garcia, an island in the UK's overseas territory of British Indian Ocean Territory in the middle of the Indian Ocean, also provides a potential support option.¹⁶

The army's main presence is in Brunei, home of the jungle warfare school and a permanently stationed infantry battalion of Gurkhas.¹⁷

As set out in section 1.1, in the 2021 Integrated Review the UK proposed developing further its defence presence in the region as part of the tilt to the Indo-Pacific strategy.

2021 Defence Command Paper and tilt to the Indo-Pacific

The [2021 Defence Command Paper](#) set out in more detail how defence would contribute to the wider tilt to the Indo-Pacific, with goals to:

- Increase the UK's capacity building and training across the Indo-Pacific, delivered through longer and more consistent military deployments and by better leveraging our existing regional facilities.
- Maximise regional engagement as part of the Carrier Strike Group deployment in 2021.
- Increase the UK's maritime presence in the Indo-Pacific region through the deployment of Offshore Patrol Vessels from 2021, Littoral Response Group from 2023 and Type 31 frigates later in the decade, including to uphold freedom of navigation.

¹⁶ Commons Library, [Integrated Review 2021: The Defence tilt to the Indo-Pacific](#), 11 October 2021.

¹⁷ Commons Library, [Integrated Review 2021: The Defence tilt to the Indo-Pacific](#), 11 October 2021.

- Make a bigger and more consistent contribution to the [Five Power Defence Arrangements](#) (established in 1971 as a security arrangement between the UK, Australia, New Zealand, Malaysia and Singapore).
- Pursue closer defence cooperation with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member states.
- Guarantee the UK's regional access through existing UK bases, including the British Indian Ocean Territory, access to allied facilities, and the development of an enhanced training facility at Duqm, Oman.
- Deepen and expand defence industrial relationships in the region, including with Australia, Japan, Republic of Korea and India, underpinned by co-operation on science and technology. Seek to enhance the UK's programmes of exercises, exchanges and capability development with these key partners.

For more see Library research briefing: [Integrated Review 2021: The Defence tilt to the Indo-Pacific](#), 11 October 2021.

2.2

Developments since 2021 and the 2023 Defence Command Paper update

Of the defence elements of the tilt since the 2021 Integrated Review and Defence Command paper were published, the maritime aspects have been the most visible.

In 2021 the first deployment of a Carrier Strike Group, led by HMS Queen Elizabeth, was notably to the Indo-Pacific. And since 2021 the Royal Navy has permanently deployed two offshore patrol vessels to the region.

In the IR23 the Government proposed establishing a “permanent European maritime presence” in partnership with France.¹⁸

This was referenced in the [UK-France Declaration 2023](#), in which the two countries discussed increasing the coordination of their maritime military and aircraft carrier deployments to the region and committed to “exploring opportunities” to “demonstrate for the first time the sequencing of more persistent European carrier strike group presence in the Indo-Pacific”.¹⁹

The Defence Command Paper update, published in July 2023, said the Government will now “maintain the progress we have made” and will put the tilt on to a “long-term, strategic, sustainable footing”.²⁰ This includes training

¹⁸ [CP 811](#), p13.

¹⁹ Prime Minister's Office, [UK-France Joint Leaders' Declaration](#), 10 March 2023.

²⁰ Ministry of Defence, [Defence Command Paper 2023: Defence's response to a more contested and volatile world](#), 18 July 2023, p85.

and exercising with key partners to help enhance their resilience and capabilities. The Littoral Response Group would be periodically deployed to the Indo Pacific from later in 2023, and the Carrier Strike Group would return to the Indo-Pacific in 2025. For more, see [Defence Command Paper 2023: Defence's contribution to a more contested and volatile world](#) (CP 901).

AUKUS

In September 2021 the UK, Australia and the United States announced a new security partnership called AUKUS, to “help sustain peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific”.²¹ The three countries agreed to collaborate on new nuclear-powered submarines for the Royal Australian Navy (‘pillar 1’) of the agreement) and work together on areas such as cyber and artificial intelligence (‘pillar 2’).

It was announced on 14 March 2023 that the UK and Australia will build a new fleet of nuclear-powered, conventionally armed submarines, based on a UK boat design and incorporating US submarine technology. The SSN-AUKUS class will replace the Astute attack submarines that are currently entering service with the Royal Navy.

The US and UK will increase port visits to Australia, with the UK expected to increase visits from 2026. The US will also sell a number of Virginia-class submarines to Australia in the 2030s, to fill the gap until the new class enters service.²²

Three Library research briefings give further details of the AUKUS programme:

- [The AUKUS agreement](#) (CBP 9335)
- [AUKUS submarine \(SSN-A\) programme](#) (CBP 9843)
- [AUKUS pillar 2: Advanced capabilities](#) (CBP 9842)

2.3

Analysis of the defence elements of the tilt after the 2023 IR refresh

Commons Defence Committee report

The House of Commons Defence Select Committee looked at the tilt in an October 2023 report: [UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific](#).

The report noted that defence “was only a small element” of the tilt, and the result “has been a modest increase in UK military presence in the region”. This has “manifested primarily through increased presence in the region of naval

²¹ Prime Minister's Office, [UK, US and Australia launch new security partnership](#), 15 September 2021.

²² Prime Minister's Office, [British-led design chosen for AUKUS submarine project](#), 13 March 2023.

capabilities, and an increase in defence diplomacy and work on enhancing relationships with allies”.²³

Commenting on the government's statement in the 2023 IR refresh that the tilt had been achieved, the committee said: “we reject the notion that the ‘tilt’ has been “achieved” from a Defence perspective”. It went onto detail:

With only a modest presence compared to allies, little to no fighting force in the region, and little by way of regular activity, Defence's tilt to the Indo-Pacific is far from being achieved. Fundamentally UK Defence is already under-resourced for its role within NATO in the Euro-Atlantic, which is the core current and medium-term security challenge for the UK and Europe. If we aspire to play any significant role in the Indo-Pacific this would need a major commitment of cash, equipment and personnel. Without this, the UK may need to curb its ambitions in the region.²⁴

The committee said that the government's “future strategy for the Indo-Pacific is still unclear”, and called on it to create a dedicated Indo-Pacific strategy “which sets out how military instruments can be used in support of the UK's wider pursuit of its goals and interests in the region in peacetime and during conflict”.²⁵

Echoing the Foreign Affairs Committee's report on the tilt, the Defence Committee recommended “This strategy should also identify the specific aims of the Tilt and make clear how the Government intends to achieve these, whilst being realistic about what is achievable”.²⁶

Other analysis

Alex Bristow, writing for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) in March 2024, described defence as having provided “the most eye-catching embodiment of the tilt”, in particular the Carrier Strike Group's visit to the region in 2021. However, he argues that “the real substance of the tilt in defence terms has been London's rigorous pursuit of deeper partnerships in our region”.²⁷

Bristow questions the potential for the UK's defence assets in the region to be used in a crisis. Saying “robust rhetoric and defence posture aside, questions remain about how much of a stake any British government would have in an Indo-Pacific crisis or conflict where it lacks legally binding security commitments equivalent to the North Atlantic Treaty”. He says further in terms of what the UK can practically contribute to a conflict or crisis in the region, this would be determined by the situation in Europe:

²³ Defence Committee, [UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific](#), 24 October 2023, para 96.

²⁴ Defence Committee, [UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific](#), 24 October 2023, para 96.

²⁵ Defence Committee, [UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific](#), 24 October 2023, para 97.

²⁶ Defence Committee, [UK Defence and the Indo-Pacific](#), 24 October 2023, para 97.

²⁷ ASPI, [Beyond the tilt: assessing Britain's strategic recoupling with the Indo-Pacific as a UK general election looms](#), 14 March 2024

Whatever plans are made during peacetime, any UK role in an actual Indo-Pacific crisis or conflict would have to be calibrated against the security situation in Europe. Backfilling in Europe or providing maritime security that frees up US forces might be just as valuable as any direct military contribution in the Indo-Pacific.²⁸

Analysis by the Navy Lookout website argues that “the Indo-Pacific is the new centre of global economic and military competition” and so “the UK needs remain engaged and maintain relationships in the area”. It says that the 2021 Carrier Strike Group (CSG) deployment reinforced the UK’s commitment to the region “reassuring allies such as Japan, Australia, and South Korea that Britain remains a dependable security partner”.²⁹

However, the article also states that “deploying a carrier strike group thousands of miles from home stretches the RN’s resources and will involve the greater part of the operational fleet” and “escort numbers are at an all-time low, evidenced by the reduction in the number of vessels allocated to the CSG”. So, it questions if CSG deployments to the region can be justified in terms of resources, and if these should instead be focused on Europe:

There is also an argument that the funds spent on this deployment could be better spent on plugging some of the obvious gaps in equipment, infrastructure and munitions stocks [...] From a containment and deterrence perspective, maintaining as much combat power in the European theatre makes sense.³⁰

²⁸ ASPI, [Beyond the tilt: assessing Britain’s strategic recoupling with the Indo-Pacific as a UK general election looms](#), 14 March 2024

²⁹ Navy Lookout, [Is the Royal Navy Indo-Pacific ready, or should the carrier strike group stay closer to home?](#), 17 March 2025.

³⁰ Navy Lookout, [Is the Royal Navy Indo-Pacific ready, or should the carrier strike group stay closer to home?](#), 17 March 2025.

3 Trade elements of the tilt

3.1 CPTPP

Agreement was reached in March 2023 for the [UK to join the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership \(CPTPP\)](#), an Asia-Pacific trade bloc made up of 11 countries: Australia, Brunei Darussalam, Canada, Chile, Japan, Malaysia, Mexico, New Zealand, Peru, Singapore and Vietnam.

Other countries, including China and Taiwan, [have applied to join or expressed an interest in doing so](#).³¹

The UK formally joined the bloc in December 2024, the first new country to join since it was established in 2018 and the first European member. For more see Library research briefing [The Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership \(CPTPP\)](#).

3.2 Other UK trade agreements in the region

Agreements signed

The UK, in preparation for leaving the European Union, renegotiated the EU trade agreements it was part of on broadly the same terms with a number of Indo-Pacific countries and regional trade blocs (so called 'rollover agreements'), these were with: Japan, Pacific States (Fiji, Papua New Guinea, Samoa and the Solomon Islands), Singapore, South Korea, and Vietnam.³²

The UK has also signed three new trade agreements with Indo-Pacific countries since leaving the EU.

A [free trade agreement with Australia](#) was signed in December 2021 and [with New Zealand](#) in February 2022. These agreements both came into force at the end of May 2023.³³

³¹ Peterson Institute for International Economics, [Which countries are in the CPTPP and RCEP trade agreements and which want in?](#), 27 July 2023.

³² Department for Business and Trade, [UK trade agreements in effect](#), 3 November 2022, Last updated 1 August 2023, accessed 31 August 2023.

³³ Department for Business and Trade, [UK's first post-Brexit trade deals go live](#), 31 May 2023.

The UK [also signed a digital trade agreement with Singapore](#) in February 2022, this entered into force in June 2022.³⁴

Ongoing negotiations

The UK is currently in negotiations with two Indo-Pacific countries: India and South Korea.³⁵

The 2021 Integrated Review said the UK and India would launch an Enhanced Trade Partnership (ETP) “as a roadmap to a potential comprehensive trade deal”.³⁶ The ETP was launched in May 2021, and removed a number of trade barriers.³⁷ Negotiations for a free trade agreement were launched in January 2022.³⁸ The UK and India were unable to conclude the negotiations ahead of their respective general elections in 2024. As set out in section 5.4 negotiations have restarted under the Labour government.

The UK and South Korea signed a ‘rollover’ free trade agreement (FTA), largely replicating the EU FTA the UK had been a party to in November 2021.³⁹ In November 2023, the Conservative government announced the launch of negotiations for a new free trade agreement,⁴⁰ saying it hoped to improve upon the existing agreement in areas like digital trade and improved rules of origin.⁴¹

For more on the UK’s current trade negotiations see Commons Library research briefing: [Progress on UK free trade agreement negotiations](#).

³⁴ [HCWS100](#), 14 June 2022.

³⁵ The previous Conservative Government began negotiations with three countries with Pacific coastlines: Canada, Mexico and the US, but these aren’t usually identified as being in the Indo-Pacific region, and all three sets of talks are currently paused.

³⁶ As above.

³⁷ Prime Minister’s Office, [Prime Minister announces £1 billion of new UK-India trade](#), 4 May 2021.

³⁸ [HCWS533 \[UK-India Free Trade Agreement Negotiations\]](#), 13 January 2022.

³⁹ DIT, [UK-South Korea trade agreement](#), 1 November 2021.

⁴⁰ DBT, [UK and South Korea to launch talks on new trade deal as Korean businesses back Britain with £21 billion of investment](#), 21 November 2023.

⁴¹ [HCWS56 \[on Republic of Korea Trade Negotiations Update: Launch of Negotiations\]](#), 21 November 2023.

4 Developments in key bilateral relationships under the Conservative government

This section looks at developments in four of the UK's key bilateral relations in the Indo-Pacific region under the Conservative Government with Japan, South Korea, India and Australia.

For information on the UK's relationship with China see Commons Library briefing [UK-China relations: recent developments](#), July 2024.

4.1 UK-Japan relations

Reciprocal Access Agreement defence treaty

In January 2023, the UK and Japan signed what the UK Government described as the “most important defence treaty” between the two countries for over 100 years.⁴²

Called the [Reciprocal Access Agreement](#), the UK Government said it will:

- Allow the UK and Japan to deploy forces in one another's countries
- Rapidly accelerate defence and security cooperation
- Cement the UK's commitment to Indo-Pacific security
- Allow both forces to plan and deliver larger scale, more complex military exercises and deployments.⁴³

The UK is the first European country to have a Reciprocal Access Agreement with Japan, and only the third country to do so. Australia and Japan signed a similar agreement in early 2022, while United States armed forces operate under a Status of Forces Agreement.

For more see Library research briefing: [UK-Japan defence agreement 2023](#), 13 January 2023.

⁴² Prime Minister's Office, [Prime Minister hosts Japanese PM and agrees historic defence agreement](#), 11 January 2023.

⁴³ Prime Minister's Office, [Prime Minister hosts Japanese PM and agrees historic defence agreement](#), 11 January 2023.

Collaboration on next generation combat aircraft

The UK and Japan, alongside Italy, are also collaborating on developing a new combat aircraft. Known as the Global Combat Air Programme (GCAP), the aircraft is expected to replace the Typhoon in service in the mid-2030s.

The Prime Ministers of the UK, Japan and Italy said the programme will “deepen our defence co-operation, science and technology collaboration, integrated supply chains, and further strengthen our defence industrial base”.⁴⁴ For more on GCAP see:

- Commons Library, [What is the Global Combat Air Programme \(GCAP\)?](#), November 2024
- Commons Defence Committee, [The Global Combat Air Programme](#), January 2025

AUKUS pillar 2

There have been calls for Japan to join pillar 2 of the AUKUS agreement which focuses on developing a range of advanced capabilities, sharing technologies and increasing the interoperability between the partner's armed forces.

In April 2024 the then Defence ministers of the three AUKUS nations announced they would begin consultations with other countries, including Japan, as “as potential collaborators on some advanced military capabilities under Pillar Two”.⁴⁵ Japan was the only potential partner specifically named, and was singled out for its “strengths and its close bilateral defence partnerships with all three countries”.⁴⁶

Hiroshima Accord

In May 2023 the UK and Japan signed a new agreement called the [Hiroshima Accord](#), calling it an “Enhanced UK-Japan Global Strategic Partnership”.⁴⁷

The Accord included new agreements on defence, trade and investment, science and technology collaboration (including on critical minerals and semiconductors), and proposals for joint work on tackling global issues like climate change.

Alessio Patalano, Professor of War & Strategy in East Asia at King's College London, in an article on UK-Japan relations, called the Accord:

⁴⁴ Prime Minister's Office and Ministry of Defence, [Joint Statement from Prime Ministers of UK, Italy and Japan: 9 December 2022](#), 9 December 2022.

⁴⁵ Ministry of Defence, [News story: AUKUS partnership to consult with other nations including Japan on military capability collaboration](#), 8 April 2024.

⁴⁶ Ministry of Defence, [AUKUS defence ministers joint statement: April 2024](#), 8 April 2024.

⁴⁷ Prime Minister's Office, [The Hiroshima Accord](#), 18 May 2023.

An ambitious pathway to enhance bilateral cooperation in areas of the economy, resilience, and security. The accord reflects a common maritime worldview, one in which the Euro-Atlantic and the Indo-Pacific are indivisible components of one interconnected space.⁴⁸

4.2

UK-South Korea relations

The UK has historical defence ties to South Korea (officially the Republic of Korea) going back to the 1950-53 Korean War, and remains a member of United Nations Command, which oversees the armistice between the North and South, and has two permanent staff posts to UNC in South Korea and participates in annual exercises. See Library briefing: [UK defence obligations to South Korea](#), October 2017, for more.

These ties have strengthened since the tilt was announced in 2021.

South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol [made a State Visit to the UK](#) in November 2023.

During the State Visit, the UK Government announced that it had [signed a joint accord](#) (PDF) with South Korea that will include a defence agreement which will see both nations jointly enforce UN Security Council sanctions on North Korea for the first time.⁴⁹

The accord will see the two countries conduct joint sea patrols to prevent goods and material being smuggled into North Korea in violation of sanctions. The UK Government stated that this will support closer relations between the Royal Navy and the ROK Navy during future cooperation to counter this activity, and “support the security of the Indo-Pacific region”.⁵⁰

In March 2024, the military thinktank the Royal United Services Institute (RUSI) outlined how the two countries are strengthening military ties stating: “since the deployment of the Carrier Striker Group led by HMS Queen Elizabeth to the Indo-Pacific in 2021, the UK has been expanding its joint military exercises with South Korea”. RUSI’s analysis noted further collaboration:

Following joint naval exercises in 2021, the first joint army exercise, [Imjin Warrior](#), took place in November 2022 and was expanded in 2023. UK forces also took part in the South Korea–US joint military exercises in January and March 2023, where [HMS Spey](#) and the [Royal Marines](#) trained shoulder-to-shoulder with US and South Korean soldiers.

⁴⁸ Engelsberg Ideas, [Middle Powers: don't write off Britain and Japan](#), 19 May 2023.

⁴⁹ Ministry of Defence and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [‘UK and Republic of Korea to enforce sanctions against North Korea through joint sea patrols’](#), 21 November 2023

⁵⁰ Ministry of Defence and Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office, [‘UK and Republic of Korea to enforce sanctions against North Korea through joint sea patrols’](#), 21 November 2023

These exercises are increasing the interoperability between the two countries as well as with their common ally, the US.

The two sides have also signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on joint defence exports with the aim of exploring cooperation and seeking new opportunities in the defence industry. This is significant considering [Seoul's increasing capacity and capabilities in the defence industry](#), and the UK is the first country in the G20 that South Korea has made such an agreement with.⁵¹

In May 2024, South Korea's Defence Minister stated that his government had held talks with the AUKUS alliance countries about joining the pillar 2 part of the programme.⁵²

As set out in section 3.2, in November 2023 the UK and South Korea launched negotiations for a new free trade agreement. This would enhance the 2021 trade agreement that largely replicated the agreement the UK had with South Korea under the EU. Negotiations were not concluded before the Conservatives left office, and now continue under the Labour Government.

4.3 UK-India relations

The 2021 Integrated Review said the government wanted to transform its cooperation with India “across the full range of our shared interests”.⁵³ Its “vision” for areas of collaboration was for:

re-energised trade and investment, rooted in [science and technology] and supporting levelling up in the UK and India alike; enhanced defence cooperation that brings a more secure Indian Ocean region, building on the existing biannual ministerial defence dialogues; and UK-India leadership to tackle global challenges like climate change, clean energy and global health.⁵⁴

The IR said the UK and India would launch an Enhanced Trade Partnership (ETP) “as a roadmap to a potential comprehensive trade deal”.⁵⁵ The ETP was launched in May 2021, and removed a number of trade barriers.⁵⁶

Also in May 2021, the UK and India agreed a ‘[2030 roadmap for India-UK future relations](#)’. The roadmap set out five main areas for future collaboration:

- Connecting our countries and people

⁵¹ RUSI, [South Korea and the UK: Looking Beyond Celebrations](#), 28 March 2024

⁵² “[South Korea discusses joining part of AUKUS pact with US, UK and Australia](#)”, Reuters, 1 May 2024.

⁵³ Cabinet Office, [Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy](#), 16 March 2021, p62.

⁵⁴ As above.

⁵⁵ As above.

⁵⁶ Prime Minister's Office, [Prime Minister announces £1 billion of new UK-India trade](#), 4 May 2021.

- Trade and prosperity
- Defence and security
- Climate
- Health

For more on the roadmap and UK-India relations see House of Lords' Library briefing [UK and India collaboration: Roadmap to 2030](#), 12 January 2023.

Negotiations for a free trade agreement were launched in January 2022.⁵⁷ The UK and India were unable to conclude the negotiations ahead of their respective general elections in 2024.

In October 2023, the UK and India held the inaugural '2+2 Foreign and Defence Dialogue', a meeting between the foreign and defence ministers of both countries.⁵⁸

4.4 UK-Australia relations

The most significant development in UK-Australia relations was the establishment of the AUKUS trilateral security partnership between the UK, Australia and the US (see section 2.2 for more).

The UK and Australia also [negotiated a free trade agreement](#) which came into force in June 2023.⁵⁹

There were further developments in the relationship under the Conservative Government:

- In February 2021, the UK and Australia announced a 'space bridge' agreement to deepen cooperation on space between the two countries' respective space agencies, and increase collaboration and trade between their space sectors.⁶⁰
- In August 2022, Typhoon combat aircraft and a Voyager tanker aircraft from the Royal Air Force took part, for the first time, in Exercise Pitch Black in Australia, a biennial multi-national training exercise for air forces lasting three weeks.⁶¹

⁵⁷ [HCWS533 \[UK-India Free Trade Agreement Negotiations\]](#), 13 January 2022.

⁵⁸ India Ministry of External Affairs, [Inaugural India-UK 2+2 Foreign and Defence Dialogue](#), 16 October 2023.

⁵⁹ DBT, [UK's first post-Brexit trade deals go live](#), 31 May 2023.

⁶⁰ UK Space Agency and Department for International Trade, ['Space Bridge' across the world will help UK and Australia get ahead in global space race](#), 23 February 2021.

⁶¹ Royal Air Force, [RAF jets taking part in large Australian Air Exercise](#), 26 August 2022.

- In March 2024, to underpin the AUKUS agreement and further develop defence ties, the UK and Australia signed a [defence and security cooperation agreement](#) (the treaty was presented to parliament in January 2025).⁶² This agreement included provisions making it easier for their respective forces to operate together in each other's countries. The UK also agreed to contribute to a Combined Intelligence Centre in Australia, within Australia's Defence Intelligence Organisation.⁶³

⁶² See UK Parliament, [Agreement, done at Canberra on 21 March 2024, between the Government of the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland and the Government of Australia for Defence and Security Cooperation](#), accessed 25 March 2025.

⁶³ See: Australian Ministry of Defence, [Australia and the United Kingdom commit to modernising our defence relationship](#) 21 March 2024; and “[Australia, Britain sign defence cooperation agreement](#)”, Reuters, 21 March 2024.

5 The tilt under the Labour Government and the 2025 strategic defence review

5.1 Pre-election statements on UK policy to the Indo-Pacific

In opposition, Labour's foreign and defence policy emphasised the need for the UK to prioritise its defence and security relationships in Europe, while still acknowledging the importance of its commitments in the Indo-Pacific.

In March 2023, as Shadow Defence Secretary, John Healey stated in an interview with Politico that the UK had to be realistic about its commitments to the Indo-Pacific region, stating "alliances with like-minded nations in the Indo-Pacific are important. We can contribute strongly with technology, capability, diplomacy, to the Indo-Pacific, but there needs to be a realism about military commitments into the Indo-Pacific". He added "our armed forces are ill-served by leaders who pretend that Britain can do everything, everywhere", and talked of the UK needing to fill a "Europe-shaped hole" in its foreign and defence policy.⁶⁴

Mr Healey, speaking alongside Shadow Foreign Secretary David Lammy at an event at the Wilson Center in September 2023, talking of the Conservative Government's tilt to the region, said "we'll build on that commitment to the Indo-Pacific, and in particular, we are totally committed to our part in making the AUKUS strategic arrangement work well".⁶⁵

In February 2024, John Healey in a speech at the Policy Exchange think tank stated that Labour's approach "to this new world of increasing danger and disorder" was "NATO first. Rebuilding relationships with European allies. Developing Indo-Pacific partnerships. Standing with Ukraine for as long as it takes to win". He added "and we face the reality that European allies must take on greater responsibility for European security, as the US increasingly focuses on China and the Indo Pacific".⁶⁶

⁶⁴ "[Labour urges 'realism' on UK's Indo-Pacific military ambitions](#)", Politico, 9 March 2023

⁶⁵ Wilson Center, [The UK Labour Party's Foreign and Defense Priorities: A Conversation With David Lammy and John Healey](#), 22 September 2023

⁶⁶ Policy Exchange, [A New Era for UK Defence with Labour](#), 28 February 2024.

In April 2024 Mr Lammy and Mr Healey wrote in a joint article in the Daily Telegraph that “European security will be our first priority”.⁶⁷

5.2

Labour Government announce strategic defence review and audit of UK-China relations

Strategic defence review

Following the general election in July 2024, the Labour Government announced a new strategic defence review (SDR), to be completed in 2025.⁶⁸

The Ministry of Defence, in a press release announcing the review, said it will “consider the threats Britain faces, the capabilities needed to meet them, the state of UK armed forces and the resources available”. It added that the SDR “will ensure a ‘NATO-first’ policy is at the heart of Britain’s defence plans”.⁶⁹

The terms of reference for the review said it will identify ways to “maintain the UK’s defence ties to the Indo Pacific region” and explicitly says: “the UK is committed to the delivery of the AUKUS partnership with the US and Australia”.⁷⁰

For more on the SDR see Commons Library briefing: [‘The forthcoming strategic defence review 2025: FAQ’](#).

China audit and a new national security strategy

Ahead of the July general election the Labour party stated in their manifesto that they would “bring a long-term and strategic approach to managing our relations [with China]”, and that “we will co-operate where we can, compete where we need to, and challenge where we must”.⁷¹

They committed to an audit of the bilateral relationship to “improve the UK’s capability to understand and respond to the challenges and opportunities China poses”.⁷²

⁶⁷ “[At 75, Nato is our best hope of defending democracy](#)” [via Factiva], The Daily Telegraph, 4 April 2024.

⁶⁸ Ministry of Defence, [The Strategic Defence Review](#), 17 July 2024.

⁶⁹ Ministry of Defence, [New era for defence: government launches root and branch review of UK Armed Forces](#), 16 July 2024.

⁷⁰ Ministry of Defence, [Strategic Defence Review 2024-2025: Terms of reference](#), 17 July 2024.

⁷¹ Labour Party, [Change – Labour Party Manifesto 2024](#) (PDF), p120.

⁷² As above.

The audit is not a strategy on China, though the government says it “will examine the UK's interests with respect to China”.⁷³

The government has said that it is being conducted as a “cross-government” exercise led by the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office.⁷⁴ It expects the audit to conclude in early 2025, and said Parliament would be updated upon its conclusion, however it has not committed to publishing the document.⁷⁵

For more on UK-China relations see Commons Library briefing: [UK-China relations: recent developments](#), 15 July 2024.

In February 2025, the Prime Minister Keir Starmer announced plans to publish a new national security strategy (NSS), telling the House of Commons:

As the strategic defence review is well under way, and across Government we are conducting a number of other reviews relevant to national security, it is obvious that those reviews must pull together. So before the NATO summit in June we will publish a single national security strategy and bring it to this House.⁷⁶

The China audit could be one of the reviews that will feed into the NSS.

For more on the NSS see Library briefing: [The forthcoming national security strategy 2025: FAQ](#), 11 March 2025.

5.3

Recent commentary on the tilt and further reading

Lord Robertson comments on threats to the UK

Lord George Robertson, the former Defence Secretary and NATO Secretary General, was asked by the government to lead the Strategic Defence Review. Speaking alongside the Defence Secretary in July 2024, when his appointment was announced, Lord Robertson stated that the UK and its allies are facing a “deadly quartet” of China, Russia, Iran and North Korea who are “increasingly working together”.⁷⁷

He added that the “NATO summit last week in Washington made it perfectly clear that the challenge of China was something that had to be taken very,

⁷³ [PQ22280 \[China: Foreign relations\]](#), 14 January 2025.

⁷⁴ [PQ 16150 \[China: Foreign relations\]](#), 3 December 2024.

⁷⁵ [PQ 16405 \[China: Foreign relations\]](#), 26 November 2024.

⁷⁶ [HC Deb \[Defence and Security\]](#), Vol 762, 25 February 2025, C634.

⁷⁷ [“UK and its allies face ‘deadly quartet’ of nations, says defence expert”](#), The Guardian, 16 July 2024.

very seriously”, and that “what happens in the Asia-Pacific can happen in the Euro-Atlantic very quickly afterwards”.⁷⁸

Support for maintaining the tilt

In July 2024, in a Council on Geostrategy analysis of the newly announced SDR, Benedict Baxendale-Smith, a researcher at the Defence Studies Department, King's College London, stated that “despite the government's perfectly valid ‘NATO-first’ defence strategy, this should not come at the cost of the UK's ability to engage with allies and partners in the Indo-Pacific”. Referencing Lord Robertson's ‘deadly quartet’ comments, Baxendale-Smith asserts “as Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine demonstrates, European and Indo-Pacific defence challenges are often inextricably linked”.⁷⁹

Also writing for the Council on Geostrategy, Jennifer Parker an expert associate at the National Security College, Australian National University, said the new government “must avoid undermining Britain's commitment to the Indo-Pacific”, and that the focus on the region since the 2021 tilt “has been a strength of British defence policy that has far exceeded expectations”. She adds that “while the UK's immediate focus will be on the European continent and the direct threats Russia poses, it must remember that much of its economic interests lie in the Indo-Pacific”, specifying that the region: “accounts for 60% of the world's GDP and 60% of the world's population”, and “is primarily a maritime construct”. Noting that a key focus of the UK tilt to the Indo-Pacific has been in the maritime domain, Parker states that “for the UK to be effective in protecting its economic interests in the Indo-Pacific region, the SDR will need to ensure that Britain continues to provide a maritime contribution to support maritime security in the Indo-Pacific”.⁸⁰

Ben Bland, director of the Asia-Pacific Programme at the think tank Chatham House, writing in June 2024 ahead of the July UK general election argued that the UK did not have to choose between pursuing better relations with Europe or continuing to focus on the Indo-Pacific, rather “whoever wins the UK general election [...] can and should combine intensified engagement in the Indo-Pacific with better relations with the UK's closest neighbours”.⁸¹ Mentioning the new AUKUS defence partnership and the UK joining CPTPP, he said “the next UK government must build on this foundation by investing political capital, time and money into expanding these relationships further”. The region he states is “of critical importance to both the UK and Europe” as “it is home to many of the world's most dynamic large economies, the heart of the global manufacturing industry, critical international shipping routes that

⁷⁸ As above.

⁷⁹ Council on Geostrategy, [Britain's World: Big Asks: What is the best approach for the new Strategic Defence Review to take?](#), 26 July 2024.

⁸⁰ Council on Geostrategy, [Britain's World: Big Asks: What is the best approach for the new Strategic Defence Review to take?](#), 26 July 2024.

⁸¹ Chatham House, [The next UK government must bridge the Indo-Pacific and Europe](#), 26 June 2024.

cut through hotly contested seas, and current and future tech powerhouses from China and India to Japan and South Korea”.

Bland also identified the “need for more effective UK-Europe coordination on the Indo-Pacific, and foreign policy more generally”, particularly if Donald Trump would go on to win the forthcoming US elections. But he also noted the “formalization of NATO’s engagement with the ‘Indo-Pacific 4’ – Australia, Japan, New Zealand and South Korea – reflects the strategic necessity of greater cohesion between US allies in Europe and Asia”. While most Asian nations have welcomed the UK’s tilt, Bland cautions that “Asian governments are wary about whether future UK governments will commit the necessary resources and time to the region in the long term. They also want to see a UK that engages them as equals, not junior partners”.⁸²

Writing in March 2025 in the *New Statesman*, Brendan Simms and John Nilsson-Wright, academics at the University of Cambridge, argue that “Europe and Asia cannot be separated in strategic terms”, and that “they are fast becoming one battle space, ideologically and increasingly militarily as well”. They write that “the dispatch of 10,000 North Korean troops (substantially increased by the addition of up to 3,000 more troops in February) to support Russia’s attack on Ukraine is stark evidence of this interconnection”. As further evidence for the interconnectivity they state:

In 2017, China and Russia held joint naval exercises in the Baltic Sea. Furthermore, Moscow and Beijing collaborate in the Arctic and High North. Indeed, the long coastal Northern Sea Route, which connects China and European Russia in the ice-free months, literally links the two spheres.⁸³

Labour government statements and analysis of policy since it came into government

In July 2024 David Lammy and John Healey wrote in a joint article for the *Daily Telegraph* ahead of the NATO 75th anniversary summit, that “We will have a ‘NATO first’ defence strategy” and “European security will be our foreign and defence priority”.⁸⁴

In August 2024, Minister of State for trade, Douglas Alexander, said he would put Europe at the centre of the government’s trade policy, saying “Europe was an absence not a presence in the thinking of trade ministers in the previous government” and “for all the talk about the death of distance, geography still matters with trade”. He added “our strategy won’t be driven by post-imperial delusions or political dogma”. Mr Alexander also talked about restarting the trade talks with India as one of his priorities.⁸⁵

⁸² Chatham House, [The next UK government must bridge the Indo-Pacific and Europe](#), 26 June 2024.

⁸³ “[Why Britain needs Asia](#)”, *The New Statesman*, 17 March 2025.

⁸⁴ FCDO/MOD, [This government will have a ‘NATO first’ defence strategy: article by the Foreign Secretary and Defence Secretary](#), 9 July 2024

⁸⁵ “[UK must drop ‘post-imperial delusions’ over trade, warns Douglas Alexander](#)”, *Financial Times*, 2 August 2024

In August 2024, the Ministry of Defence released a news story, detailing recent military exercises by the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marines in the Indo-Pacific region, including in Australia, India, and Hawaii. John Healey was quoted as saying “This Government is determined to build on our Indo-Pacific commitments”, and “Euro-Atlantic security is inextricably linked to stability in the Indo-Pacific. These deployments of the Royal Air Force, Royal Navy and Royal Marines strengthen our bonds and interoperability with our important partners”.⁸⁶

Writing for RUSI in September 2024, Dr William Choong and Eugene Tan, looking at the new Labour Government’s policy to the region, stated that “all signs point to a desire to strengthen relationships across the Atlantic and the English Channel at the expense of the Indo-Pacific region”.⁸⁷

Patrick Triglavcanin, writing for The Interpreter, an Australian foreign policy website in August 2024, said while “Europe is going to be the focus under Labour”, its first month in office “should reassure those wanting to see a United Kingdom remaining engaged in the Indo-Pacific”. He identified the next step for the government’s policy to the region as “discerning how to continue expanding defence relationships in the region”, stating “The fate of the two offshore patrol vessels, HMS Spey and HMS Tamar, for example, is unclear. Should they continue operations as normal? Be replaced by frigates, as some have suggested? Or be withdrawn entirely?”.⁸⁸

The next section also looks at actions the current government have taken in strengthening or maintaining bilateral relations in the region.

Further reading

- [“Why Britain needs Asia”](#), New Statesman, 17 March 2025
- RUSI, [The UK and the Indo-Pacific: The Need to Lean into the Tilt](#), 19 September 2024
- 9dashline, [The ‘Indo-Pacific tilt’ — the new UK government’s ASEAN-UK Dialogue Partnership inheritance](#), 3 September 2024
- Council on Geostrategy, [Britain’s World: Big Asks: What is the best approach for the new Strategic Defence Review to take?](#), 26 July 2024
- Chatham House, [The next UK government must bridge the Indo-Pacific and Europe](#), 26 June 2024

⁸⁶ Ministry of Defence (MOD), [UK shows commitment to Indo-Pacific following major exercises](#), 9 August 2024.

⁸⁷ RUSI, [The UK and the Indo-Pacific: The Need to Lean into the Tilt](#), 19 September 2024

⁸⁸ The Interpreter, [Sturmer’s Labour sets out to sustain Indo-Pacific ties](#), 12 August 2024.

5.4

Other developments in UK policy to the Asia-Pacific under Labour

Below are some developments in the UK's bilateral relations in the Indo-Pacific region under the Labour Government:

- In March 2025, David Lammy in a speech said he had asked the FCDO “to turbo-charge the relationships which will generate the greatest returns on investment for UK PLC in the medium-term”, and “at the top of that list stands the EU, China and the United States of America”. On China he said the government was “pursuing a policy of pragmatic engagement [...] re-establishing economic cooperation and dialogue on global challenges like climate change whilst ensuring we will not undermine our national security”.⁸⁹
- In March 2025, the UK and Japan initiated a new ‘Economic 2+2’ dialogue, which the UK Government described as “a new strategic way for the UK and Japan to coordinate international economic policy”. The dialogue is structured around the UK Foreign and Business Secretaries meeting their Japanese counterparts.⁹⁰
- In March 2025, the UK and the Philippines held the inaugural Joint Economic and Trade Committee (JETCO) meeting, announcing a programme of work “to advance bilateral cooperation over the next 12-18 months”.⁹¹
- In February 2025, the UK and India restarted negotiations on a free trade agreement that were not concluded under the previous government. Areas that are still the subject of disagreement are reported to include “high tariffs in India on Scotch whisky and relaxing fees and visa rules for Indian students and professionals going to the UK”.⁹²
- In January 2025, John Healey confirmed that the UK planned to deploy the UK's Carrier Strike Group, led by the aircraft carrier HMS Prince of Wales, to the Indo-Pacific region in 2025 and that the deployment will include a visit to Japan and exercises alongside the Japanese Self Defence Forces.⁹³
- In December 2024, John Healey and David Lammy hosted their Australian counterparts, as part of an annual meeting called AUKMIN, during which it was announced that the Carrier Strike Group's 2025

⁸⁹ FCDO, [The FCDO means business: Foreign Secretary's British Chambers of Commerce speech, March 2025](#), 20 March 2025.

⁹⁰ FCDO & DBT, [New UK-Japan Economic Partnership to propel growth](#), 6 March 2025.

⁹¹ DBT, [Joint Statement on UK-Philippines JETCO](#), 19 March 2025.

⁹² “[UK and India relaunch trade talks in Delhi](#)”, BBC News, 24 February 2025.

⁹³ Ministry of Defence (MOD), [UK-Japan military exercise starts today as Defence Ministers discuss closer cooperation](#), 15 January 2025.

deployment would include a visit to Australia, and reaffirmed their commitment to the AUKUS partnership.⁹⁴

- In November 2024, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto travelled to London to meet the Prime Minister Keir Starmer, to mark the 75th anniversary of their bilateral relations. After the meeting it was announced that they had agreed to “to pursue a new, deeper Strategic Partnership between the UK and Indonesia that we will launch in 2025”.⁹⁵
- In November 2024, the UK and Australia commenced the first round of negotiations on the Australia-UK AUKUS Pillar I Treaty, which will establish the strategic and operational framework to deliver the bilateral elements of delivering a new nuclear-powered submarine fleet for Australia.⁹⁶ Some analysts [have advocated for the treaty to expand its scope](#) to deepening bilateral UK-Australia defence cooperation further.⁹⁷
- In October 2024, the UK and South Korean Defence and Foreign Ministers met in their first ‘2+2 Dialogue’, which will now be annual. The Government announced this will “sit alongside an Inaugural UK-Korea Hybrid Threats Dialogue, which will enable discussion on issues of shared national interest and identification of new opportunities to tackle shared threats together”.⁹⁸
- In July 2024, David Lammy travelled to Laos for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) foreign ministers meeting. He announced a £25 million UK-ASEAN partnership “to tackle the world’s most pressing global health challenges”.⁹⁹
- Since coming to office in July 2024, several senior ministers have visited China, signalling a thaw in relations. In October 2024, David Lammy met with his Chinese counterpart Wang Yi during a two-day visit.¹⁰⁰ The Chancellor of the Exchequer, Rachel Reeves, travelled to China in January 2025, announcing initiatives to remove market access barriers, and investment agreements.¹⁰¹ In March 2025, the Energy Secretary, Ed Miliband met his Chinese counterparts in Beijing to re-start formal

⁹⁴ FCDO & MOD, [UK and Australia boost growth and defence partnership at summit in London](#), 15 December 2024.

⁹⁵ Prime Minister’s Office, [Joint Statement on a new Strategic Partnership between the Republic of Indonesia and the United Kingdom: 21 November 2024](#), 21 November 2024.

⁹⁶ FCDO & MOD, [Policy paper: Australia-UK Ministerial Consultations \(AUKMIN\) 2024: joint statement](#), 17 December 2024.

⁹⁷ Council on Geostrategy, [Big Asks: What should the new UK-Australia defence treaty contain? The Big Ask | No. 14.2024](#), 4 October 2024.

⁹⁸ FCDO, [Green growth and security to underpin UK relationships with Indonesia and South Korea](#), 20 October 2024.

⁹⁹ FCDO, [Economic ties with Southeast Asia strengthened as Foreign Secretary makes first visit to Indo-Pacific](#), 25 July 2024

¹⁰⁰ FCDO, [Foreign Secretary visits China](#), 18 October 2024.

¹⁰¹ HM Treasury, [Chancellor marks £600m of secure growth for UK economy in Beijing](#), 11 January 2025.

energy and climate discussions.¹⁰² In addition, in November 2024, Keir Starmer met Chinese President Xi Jinping, during the G20 summit in Brazil.¹⁰³

¹⁰² Department for Energy Security and Net Zero, [Energy Secretary visits China to launch climate dialogue](#), 18 March 2025.

¹⁰³ Prime Minister's Office, [PM meeting with President Xi Jinping of China: 18 November 2024](#), 18 November 2024.

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