

Foreign Affairs Committee

Oral evidence: [Global Britain and India, HC 1465](#)

Tuesday 27 November 2018

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Members present: Mike Gapes (Chair); Stephen Gethins; Andrew Rosindell; Mr Bob Seely; Royston Smith; Tom Tugendhat.

Questions 144-185

Witnesses

I: Dr Rudra Chaudhuri, Senior Lecturer, King's College London and Director, Carnegie India, Ranjan Mathai, Former Indian High Commissioner to the UK, and Professor Kate Sullivan de Estrada, Associate Professor in the International Relations of South Asia, University of Oxford.

Written evidence from witnesses:

[Professor Kate Sullivan de Estrada](#)

Examination of witnesses

Witnesses: Dr Rudra Chaudhuri, Ranjan Mathai and Professor Kate Sullivan de Estrada.

Q144 **Chair:** Welcome to this afternoon's session, which is a continuation of our Global Britain and India inquiry. Thank you to all three of you for coming. For the record, please introduce yourselves.

Ranjan Mathai: I am Ranjan Mathai, and I am a retired civil servant diplomat from India. I used to be the Foreign Secretary—that is not a ministerial role but the equivalent of the permanent under-secretary here. After my retirement, I served as the high commissioner in London for two years. Now I lead a retired life near Delhi.

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I am Kate Sullivan de Estrada. I am an associate professor in the international relations of south Asia at the University of Oxford, and am currently director of the university's contemporary south Asian studies programme.

Dr Chaudhuri: I am Rudra Choudhuri. I am a senior lecturer at King's College London and also the director of a think tank called Carnegie India, which is based in Delhi.

Chair: Thank you. I apologise for the late start—we had a bit of business overrun.

Q145 **Royston Smith:** What are the core goals of India's foreign policy? Does it want to be a global power, a regional power or a balancing power?

Ranjan Mathai: I believe that India wants to be a global power. India believes that it has the size and the heritage and the capability of being a global power. Prime Minister Modi has explicitly stated that being a leading power is one of our ambitions. At the same time, there is a degree of realism about what that means and how you can get there. Just in comparison to China, for example, which is a leading power today, our economy is about 20% to 25% the size of China's economy.

We believe that we have the capability of doing it. We believe that we need to be ready to act on a global stage if it comes to that. We are realistic about the fact that our capabilities today are somewhat constrained, but the ambition remains.

If I may just add, in earlier times, under Prime Minister Nehru for example, it was projected more in an ideological and an idealistic way—of India having influence around the world through the Non-Aligned Movement and so on. Today, it is a more realist appreciation of what India is capable of in the future.

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I would argue that India already is a global power, although it rather depends on how we define a global power. In de facto terms, India is the sixth largest economy as we know in terms



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of nominal GDP. India is in the top five defence spenders. It is a nuclear armed state. It has been ranked the fourth most powerful state, according to one index, in military terms.

But, of course, material power isn't the only thing that makes a global power. If we think about the way that global powers are recognised by international institutions, India is not given the same recognition as a global power. It doesn't have a permanent seat in the Security Council. It has a complicated relationship with the non-proliferation regime. Also, from the inside looking out, India is quite wary of some of the kinds of roles that global powers play. India has been quite reluctant, as Ambassador Mathai suggests, to uphold the traditional international security order in the same way as global powers perhaps have. Also, India has a different perspective on non-intervention than western global powers have. There are some key commonalities and some key differences and perhaps these differences point to the different ways that rising powers, such as India, are envisaging a global order of the future.

Dr Chaudhuri: At the risk of repeating what has already been said, which I agree with, India is a different power. It is a power that has been convinced of the imperatives of its own exceptionalism for a very long time. That is a kind of storyline that remains more or less the same between the '50s, '60s and today. What has grown is the capabilities, and with capabilities will grow ambition.

Let's think about what a global power means. Does it mean sitting on regime structures, whether that is to do with chemical weapons or non-proliferation or intellectual property for instance? India has a voice in each one of those organisations. The UK has a key role in working with India and in amplifying that voice. The UK has played a key role in helping India with those regime structures.

Structurally, India will be regionally focused. Just look at the geography of the country itself, sandwiched between two countries, with both of which it has complicated relationships.

When we are talking about what kind of power India will be and what kind of ambition it will realise, what is interesting about India is that it will be different. We see that difference play out in every negotiation. Ambassador Mathai has been part of many of those negotiations. India will be a member of the Commonwealth without recognising the Queen as the sovereign. India will be a very different kind of permanent member of the UN Security Council 50 years from now when we reform the council, for instance. I think the point about exceptionalism and understanding what that exceptionalism means is worth keeping in mind.

Q146 **Royston Smith:** Since you said that the UK has been helpful to India, how can the UK make sure that it is among India's top strategic partners going forward?

Dr Chaudhuri: The premise of the question seems to suggest that the UK is not one of India's key strategic partners. I have seen some of the earlier



testimony, which seems to suggest that we are in the worst or the lowest ebb of UK-India relations. If the Chair allows me two or three minutes of historicity, we are possibly in the best place when it comes to UK-India relations, which is a fact in the evolution of time and history, than in any time in the past.

If you just categorise UK-India relations in four short categories—I will really only take two minutes on history—the first category you are looking at is roughly '47 to '79, essentially from Attlee to Thatcher. What were the primary drivers of the relationship in that period? India was a country that needed development, so assistance was very big and the argument was, “What can the UK do for India?” This was the age that saw the growth of the diaspora, which is rather large in this country today, a lot of it on the back of the Commonwealth Acts. The relationship itself was also in a sense hijacked in this triangle between India, the UK and Pakistan. You looked at India with an eye to balance.

The second category is roughly from '79 to '97—from Thatcher through to John Major. It is Major who reimagines the relationship when he says that now India is about economic authority. Now you are looking at the kind of period where terms such as prosperity, for instance, make it into HMG's lexicon. From '97 to 2016 is your third category, which is all about opportunity. This is the race. The last two categories gave you enough bandwidth to basically get ahead in the last one and a half decades. This is Blair and Cameron; this is about opportunity, the big economy and dealing with what you might consider an economic paradox—a rich country to some extent that is very, very poor. How do you deal with that paradox in itself?

Where we are from 2016 onwards is the fourth category, which is one of less certainty, a lot of which has to do with what is happening in Britain today, but I would say that you are still better off where you are today than you were even five years ago. I can go into some of the material and factual reasons why that is so.

Q147 Mr Seely: There is a difference between being a global power and being a regional superpower—well, I wonder whether there is such a difference, and how it applies to India. India will be a colossally powerful country, but not one that necessarily has a global relationship with many countries in the world compared with, let's say, Britain and France, which were global powers, albeit weaker now than before. Is that a fair characterisation? How would you add to and enlighten or disagree with what I have just said?

Dr Chaudhuri: First, France was a global power in 1815. India has been an independent power since 1947, so let's give time a little bit of credit over here. Secondly, as I said, India is a country with global ambitions. I do not mean to speak for Indian diplomats, but I am not sure that Indian diplomats would all agree that India's policy imperative would be to be the No. 1 act in the world. That may just not serve Indian interests, given its structural and geographical constraints and the fact that it will be



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hypnotised by the region for security relationships, economic connectivity and so on.

What I will say is that where you have seen a transformation in India, especially in the 21st century and certainly in the last 10 years—a lot of which started with the previous UPA Government and has been jettisoned by the current Modi Government—is not building out only a PR exercise, Brand India to the world, which sank a couple of years ago, but making material progress on international structures. Today, for instance, what do we mean by global governance? In the world of non-proliferation we recall the Nuclear Suppliers Group. There, India already has a waiver—it is already in its place and soon it will have a voice. On intellectual property, for instance, India does not do very well, but it now has a voice and it is part of that council. It will take a while before that voice converts into material outcomes. It will also take a while to figure out exactly what it is that India wants from the world.

Q148 Mr Seely: But it does want to be a global power, rather than just dominating the Indian ocean?

Dr Chaudhuri: I think a country like India, which is essentially an outsized democracy, needs to be a global power. Given your growing capabilities, which will grow in ascendancy over the next 50 years, you cannot only be restricted to your region in itself. Structurally, it is not a question of want; it is a question that it has to, if you see what I mean, in order to survive up for many years. In that sense, it will have to trump the current period of de-globalisation.

Q149 Chair: Do any of the other witnesses wish to add anything to that?

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I wonder if we are just thinking about a global power still in quite self-referential terms, and talking about India being a hegemonic or dominant power in the Indian ocean. I am not even sure that is what India is anticipating or wanting to do itself. I also think that we need to think about where the locus of world politics is shifting to. The Indian ocean is set to be one of the centres. The Indo-Pacific region is certainly the new idea, which automatically puts India at the heart of world politics on a number of issues. It is quite clear that India seeks a global role. The question is, "How are we conceiving of that idea?"

Ranjan Mathai: With reference to the first question and the way that I answered it, one has to take into account that this global ambition exists, but the regional situation into which we are locked that Dr Chaudhuri referred to is one fact. The other is that every Government in India has been acutely conscious of the fact that to be able to play a convincing role globally, you have to have a far faster process of development within your own country, and you have to get rid of some of your inherent domestic weaknesses, particularly poverty and so on. To take an example, defence expenditure in India hovers below 2% of GDP. For a power that is actually seeking a global role of a hegemonic kind, that is certainly not going to work. The answer is really that India does seek influence. In the earlier era that I referred to and the way in which the Non-Aligned Movement,



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the liberation movements grew and the whole movement of democracy in developing countries, India certainly had an extraordinarily influential role. Translating that into a role in today's world of commerce, military and real power, is a more complicated exercise, and we are in the process of managing that. I think that it will take time but we are certainly ambitious and will get there. We will carry the responsibilities that go with it.

Q150 Stephen Gethins: I want to ask about the diaspora, because I think that is something where we can learn a little bit. From a UK perspective, what impact does the diaspora have on India's foreign policy and how does it utilise the diaspora? I say the UK, but I would actually be quite interested in your reflections on how India actually utilises its diaspora globally to further its interests?

Ranjan Mathai: The Indian diaspora is a curious mixture of three or four different categories. Very broadly, one is called "persons of Indian origin". Those are people who have been out of India for more than a century—third or fourth generation—in places such as Fiji, the West Indies, and Mauritius and so on, and perhaps South Africa. Then there are the more recent migrants in the United States, the UK and so on, where citizens of those countries are contributing by keeping relationships with India a little closer. The third category is the expatriate, which sounds like a small number, but in the Gulf region next to us, we have close to 6 million people of that category. Those are the three different categories. Broadly speaking, the first Prime Minister of India laid down that his advice to persons of Indian origin was, "If you have chosen to live in another country, please be loyal to that country. But in your hearts, keep a place for India." That was the idea; it was a cultural strengthening of bilateral relationships.

Today, I think the diaspora in the UK can play a much stronger role in two or three different ways. First, they personalise a lot of what are otherwise purely commercial, transactional relationships. Those get personalised through family connections and so on. I suggest that even in party-to-party relationships between us as a democracy and the UK as a democracy, certainly the diaspora Members of Parliament and the diaspora members active in council politics and so on, can play a role. They are also potentially a very important factor in science and technology, in the potential of contributing back to India a lot of what they have gained in advanced societies, whether they be doctors, scientists or others. They have a relatively limited influence but they do have an influence. Under the current Government, the notion of "Pravasi Bharatiya"—the Indian living abroad—has been given greater salience in policy making but, at the end of the day, it is a contribution to bilateral and cultural relationships rather than a significant political one.

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I would like to speak to one way that I think the diaspora matters for the UK-India relationship. One of the key ways that the diaspora is significant to India is as a guide to how far Indians are accepted, celebrated and can thrive in a society. Because of that, we do have a competitive disadvantage with, for example, the United States. The visible opportunities that Indian-Americans have in the United



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States are far higher than what we have in the UK. There is a sense in which the UK can appear as a slightly closed society when you look, perhaps, at the quite low levels of ethnic minority representation in the House of Commons. I know that is improving and has improved markedly in just the past two elections, but compared with how things look in the United States, there you actually see ethnic minorities achieving higher political positions. We have got Bobby Jindal, Nikki Haley and Preet Bharara. There is a significant visibility of successful Indian-American stories. I am not sure we see that to the same degree in the UK.

I think it would be useful to see more diversity in the Foreign Office at the senior levels. I was reading back through the testimony of Dr Abraham, and he received a question about whether it would be useful to have a high commissioner of south Asian descent deployed because there was the very successful deployment of Peter Varghese on the Australian side. Before a step like that can happen, you need the requisite diversity at the senior levels in Whitehall. That is something that we as a nation need to work on.

Dr Chaudhuri: I am guessing one of the reasons you have these testimonies is for disagreement—mild disagreement. Mine is on three points. I actually think that what the UK represents as far as the diaspora is concerned is quite unique. Australia does not have it, the United States does not have it and even Canada does not have it. That is for two reasons. At the more pleb level, in the United States, if you are a well-to-do Indian or someone from outside of the United States, the first thing you do is buy a house in New Jersey and put up a big American flag. It is a very different approach to integration.

The UK is unique in that there is no forceful integration into a concrete set of British values. There is a lot of messing around with democratic value systems, which allows for a lot of openness in different ways. I take the point that the large diaspora is not necessarily represented in the top levels of Government, but the large diaspora is hugely represented in the City, in Canary Wharf, in law firms and in banks. Frankly, a lot of smart, well-to-do diaspora communities may not want to join the Government or civil service.

The second thing is that I am always a little bit careful of ethnic determinism when it comes to positions of Government and power. There is a merit-orientated system that will work. If you start looking out for an Indian high commissioner who will replace Dominic Asquith, it will not go down well for a variety of reasons. Just look for the next person who will be good for the post. If they happen to be Indian, super, great. If they happen to be someone of Australian descent based in the UK, super, great. Those two points are what I wanted to say.

My last point is on the diaspora itself. On the UK-India side, one part of the diaspora is highly politicised, and that began as early as 1976. It was Thatcher who chaired the first committee on the Indian diaspora. What you have in this country is a place where key issues of security and foreign policy are discussed in many different ways by two diasporas: the



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Pakistani diaspora and the Indian diaspora. That is one thing where you might want to keep an eye out in terms of the relationship with both those countries.

Q151 Stephen Gethins: How important is the diaspora seen in India by its governing classes? Are there any plans to further develop the work with the diaspora? Is it seen as an important tool?

Ranjan Mathai: I think Professor Sullivan de Estrada spoke to that a little in the sense that direct political influence of the kind that senators and congressmen in the US can bring certainly does concentrate minds in Delhi. It is seen as very useful if members of the diaspora step up to that. We have significantly less influential such groups in other parts of the world. The UK is not the only one. But there are official relations, then there are reactions outside the chambers of the Ministries and the Government.

As I said, in personalisation of relationships between political parties, and building of bridges across politics, this is an area where the diaspora is taken seriously. At every one of our Pravasi Bharatiya Divas—as the Day of the Indian Abroad is called—we have senior politicians from Mauritius, Guyana and Fiji, and senior Members of Parliament from the UK, who come and contribute. They are taken seriously. But at the end of the day when you are talking about the structure of governance, then it depends on what positions are held by those individuals and on their ability to influence policy on a day-to-day basis.

Q152 Chair: Turning it around the other way, as a Member of Parliament with the bulk of my constituents of south Asian heritage or origin, I am very conscious of the fact that from time to time the diaspora gets engaged—or elements within it do—in internal issues that are controversial in India. I will throw in a couple: Gujarat and Punjab. In the past, we have also had the issue of Ayodhya. All of those issues have at times been controversial within elements of the Indian diaspora within the UK. Do the Indian Government try to engage with those debates, or are they more cautious? Do they actually try to step back from them?

Ranjan Mathai: We certainly do engage in debate, but I would make a distinction here between issues that are part of democratic politics in India, and issues that go outside the realm of democratic politics and involve non-democratic means of expression. Within the democratic debate, yes, certainly, we do engage and have discussions with the diaspora. Visiting political leaders from India are generally requested to address groups here, and so on. By and large, this is a debate that plays itself out within the community here.

Q153 Andrew Rosindell: I wonder whether the panel could tell us their assessment of the UK's diplomatic network within India. How strong is it at the moment? Do you feel that Britain is taking that diplomatic relationship as seriously as it should, bearing in mind the position we are in today—promoting Global Britain, and India being such an important partner? Finally, are we doing enough to engage with the Governments of



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the states and regions of India, in terms of our network around the whole country?

Dr Chaudhuri: It is a fact that compared with any part of the world, the UK has the largest diplomatic network in India. In terms of the network, and its connectivity and growth over the last 15 years, I think that the Foreign Office-led network in different parts of India is gradual. It had a strong starting point compared with many other countries, like Japan, Australia and others, which really grew in the last 12 years or so.

To answer your question, first, yes, the network is large and well resourced. I am sure that the Foreign Office will say that it needs more resources, but that is so in any department of work. Secondly, the interesting part is that in the last five years we have really seen a drilling down of that network. The network is not about the urban metropolitans any longer; it includes different parts, whether it is Chandigarh or whether it is Bangalore in the south. Each of these areas focuses very much on key domains. In Bangalore, your deputy high commission focuses an awful lot on technology, as it should. In Chandigarh it is about agro-products. These are all the key networks that will really get electrified in March 2019 when you need to build out different kinds of economic relationships.

I have seen some oral testimony that suggests that the UK needs to do a lot more in tier 2 and tier 3 cities. I would echo that, but it is worth keeping in mind that any Foreign Office or diplomatic service is dealing with resources. It would be great to have a British diplomatic outpost in 30 of the 80 tier 2 cities in India, but you can't, because the money is not there. Take one of the local ones, whether it is in Hyderabad or wherever. Perhaps you could do more in building Hyderabad out to cover the tier 2 cities, so it is more of a bridge between the areas that Hyderabad, Bangalore and Chandigarh cover, rather than just focusing on those local states.

Q154 **Andrew Rosindell:** Tell us your assessment of how knowledgeable Britain is towards India, in terms of our engagement. Do you think that, when we approach India, our diplomats based in New Delhi and elsewhere show knowledge and understanding of the history between Britain and India, or do you feel that India is treated just like any other country? My other question follows the comment made by Mr Chaudhuri earlier. He mentioned that the Queen is not sovereign, which is correct, but is there still respect for the Queen? Is she still seen as somebody with very deep connections with India? Although she is not constitutionally their monarch, are Indians generally attached to that British family?

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I would be happy to answer the first question. I have had numerous interactions with the Foreign Office over the last three or so years, and the individuals that I have encountered have an extremely good knowledge of India. A problem of all bureaucracies, particularly diplomatic bureaucracies—there is plenty of academic research to back this up—is that diplomatic bureaucracies have a tendency to produce and reproduce similar positions and framings of issues. It can be quite difficult for new, fresh blue-sky thinking to make its



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way in. One of the challenges for the Foreign Office today will be to create that space for blue-sky thinking and for reframing its approaches as we pursue Global Britain. I have been asked by several people what Global Britain actually means—a new turning out, globally, as a nation.

One of the problems that perhaps we face is that for a long time we have occupied the position of a dominant power. We have occupied the position of a power at the global high tables that hasn't necessarily had to consult with and listen to other states, beyond a very small number of equally powerful states. I think that period is probably coming to an end. We are probably aware of that, and India is definitely aware of that, so learning how to do a different kind of diplomacy that involves far more listening and much more awareness is a challenge that faces us as a nation, in all of our relationships.

Q155 Mr Seely: I want to ask a question about that. I am not sure I accept that, but I am very grateful for your opinion. I just want to test it. Britain has not been a superpower since the 1950s. It is arguably the pre-eminent great power because of its soft power, as well as having enough hard power and a seat at the UN Security Council. I understand that the world is changing and that China and other Asian states are becoming much more economically assertive, but that sense of Britain as being at the top table has been in decline since world war two. Isn't that narrative past its sell-by date?

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I don't know. Look at the institutionalisation of great powers. You have the five recognised nuclear weapons states—we are one of those. You have the five top-tier countries in the Security Council—we are one of those. We are a state that has engaged in military interventions in the recent past, in conjunction with the United States. There are certainly ways in which we appear to be not just a mid-tier power, or ways in which we have not behaved like that.

The question is: are things changing? You can argue this from whichever perspective you like, but the important perspective to understand is the perspective in India. An increasing number of voices in the strategic community speak of the diminishing status of the UK. The International Court of Justice vote was a critical moment, around which this idea of India's status increasing and the UK's status decreasing was on display.

Q156 Mr Seely: Was that a binary issue? Are you presenting India increasing and the UK decreasing as a binary thing? Is it linked to hard power or to the rising economic power of Asia and India?

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: It was binary on that issue, because it was a two-way contest over a single seat. The interpretations that I saw in the media of both countries drew wider conclusions about the diminishing and increasing status of the UK and India respectively. Yes, materially, we are a power that is not going to be able to coerce other powers or push our weight around in the way that we have been able to. The question is: what do you do when your material power is in decline or when there is less political or domestic economic appetite for the deployment of that

power? Interestingly—Ambassador Mathai just pointed this out—India had a history of wanting to have global influence with reduced material power. There are a lot of lessons we could learn, which is perhaps turning the tables slightly. It is about projecting internationally a positive role that provides public goods rather than trying to shape international politics in a particular way.

Chair: Very briefly, Bob, and then we will come back to Andrew.

Q157 **Mr Seely:** Having listened to all the incredibly interesting evidence we have had from people such as yourselves, it seems to me that we are slightly on a hiding to nothing with our Indian relationship, because of the baggage and this sense that the UK is less important. What can we do about that? I know that is a broad question and you wanted a very brief one, Chair—I apologise.

Dr Chaudhuri: Why do you think the UK is less important? What makes you think the UK is less important today when it comes to India than it was, say, 10 years ago?

Q158 **Mr Seely:** I don't necessarily think that, but we have to change our relationship with the world and have greater interaction with more people post Brexit. In many ways, I am hoping that Britain will still have an influential role in the world, but all we are hearing from people like yourselves is about the issues we have had and about how the relationship with Britain is not as important as the relationships with places such as France and Israel. I am just trying to take all that in.

Dr Chaudhuri: The UK needs to do a lot and India needs to do a lot on key issues. That is part and parcel of any relationship. I am just a little cautious about browbeating what the UK stands for today with regard to India. The UK represents comfort; there is a lot of comfort when it comes to a range of issues. That comfort is not easy to replicate for countries—such as Japan and Israel, which does very well—that are, at the moment, very transactional and getting a lot of PR. The position with the UK is taken for granted, because the UK already does a lot across India and across its various networks.

It is very difficult to make the case that the UK constantly needs to do more. If Australia opens up a pathway for the Indian ocean, it gets a lot of news, because it is new. If the UK and the MOD step up their want for better naval relations with India, as they are doing at the moment, it gets less news, because the UK is always in the news in this domain. That does not mean that you can sit comfortably. You need to do a lot, but it is worth putting it into perspective, comparatively, when we are talking about the UK.

I should disclose that I am the director of the Foreign Office's diplomatic academy hosted at King's College London, so you may want to take my comments on this question with a pinch of salt. At the moment, British diplomats go through an immersive language programme and are exposed to a whole variety of issues.



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I don't think I will be speaking out of turn if I say that what the Foreign Office offers in terms of its diplomats—and across HMG, MOD, DFID, DIT and others—is rivalled perhaps only by the State Department of the United States. Today, France and Germany are countries that come to King's College London and say "Hey, that is the kind of course we want to do, on a smaller scale, because we have a smaller number of people going out to South Asia." I think that says something. Perhaps if I had a recommendation, it would be that the UK Foreign Office could do more in using that course to ensure that it builds, rather than having it replicated in different ways. You could do that in a way that includes European allies; that will be especially important post March 2019.

On the question of the monarchy, I do not have any data or facts. I could talk anecdotally about what I think the monarchy stands for in India, but I don't think that would be very useful. I am sorry, but I am not able to answer that question at this time.

Ranjan Mathai: Perhaps I may link the two questions about how well informed the diplomats are. I think they are very well informed, but the question is whether their personal knowledge or accumulated heritage within the high commission adequately influences British policy towards India as a whole. That is why I picked up on what was said about France. If you are part and parcel of the higher decision making of the government on three or four critical areas: nuclear energy, space, counter-terrorism and defence, France was a heavyweight partner of India for a very long time. As far as space is concerned, the most I found as high commissioner here was condescension towards our space programme, which is recognised as the world's most terrestrially useful space programme. Constant references to, and snide remarks about, India's space programme used to emerge in the media, whereas France collaborated with us.

For nuclear energy, France took the line that India was to be supported in the development of civilian nuclear energy. The United Kingdom had great knowledge of this, and cooperation continues, but this is about actually going out and making sure that the Department of Atomic Energy, which is there in the Indian policy making system, knows that it has a friend and supplier outside. That is what the French stepped in to do.

On defence technology, when it came to submarines, the French stepped in and agreed to build submarines in India. In certain institutional relationships, when you are sitting in government and in an inter-ministerial discussion and you consider "who is doing what for me?", we tend to find that the United Kingdom is a little bit not in the first table on many of those issues. To add to that, occasionally some of the domestic agenda flows into the way that diplomats in India are required to project opinion, whether that is about human rights or different categories of individual preference finding their way into policy making, and so on. Those issues are sometimes important domestically, but in the larger diplomatic relationship they needn't play as large a role as they do now.

Q159 **Chair:** Are you saying that the French and other Governments don't do

the same?

Ranjan Mathai: They do, but let me clarify what I mean. A senior civil servant asked me recently about some of the interactions you see, and what the diplomatic missions put out on their websites and so on. Most concentrate on the core business of Government—business that means something to the Government—whereas others tend to have larger agendas that are not central to the Government agenda. I am looking at this as somebody who worked in the Government to see what kind of relationship it is—how does Britain address India's priorities? That is a Government-driven agenda, and that is the basis of my remarks.

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: Perhaps I can just add to what the ambassador has said, and respond to Mr Seely's question about what Britain can do. Just listening is important. We are trying to push forward trade on goods and services, but we are not willing to talk about freer movement of people from India to the UK. We are looking at the fact that India is the world's largest spender on defence, accounting for 13% of defence expenditure. We are thinking, "How can we get a share of that?" We are thinking in terms of transactions, whereas the French understand that India is really prioritising the building up of its indigenous defence production capacities. It is looking to co-operate and develop its defence capabilities in partnership with countries such as the UK.

That kind of listening would lead us to push different priorities in the defence relationship, rather than just seeking to sell our military hardware. I think we just need to listen on a number of issues and actually be seen to be responsive. I felt that that was coming through in some of what the ambassador was just telling us.

Q160 **Mr Seely:** How strong is the UK-India defence relationship, and how could it be improved?

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I repeat what I have said: we could focus on technology transfer, joint development, strong R&D co-operation and R&D training. Those are things that the Indian Government are prioritising. We can read this in the Make in India focus that the Modi Government are pushing currently, but I think that this is more enduring than that.

Q161 **Mr Seely:** Any specific areas? Are we talking about submarines or power? What particular areas would you suggest?

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: Missile systems are under debate at the moment. I am not an expert on the defence exchange itself; I am just thinking of the tack that should be taken, which is to listen to how that indigenous development can be fostered and supported by Britain. I think it speaks to the general point that we have a lot of soft skills that, on invitation, we can put to good use in India. That could be a more fruitful way of engaging, rather than just engaging in transactional relationships, because it brings people-to-people contact and builds trust.

Q162 **Mr Seely:** Because UK law is very powerful, we probably sometimes

forget the non-transactional nature of relationships in many countries in the world. Do you agree that India is one of those?

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I would not want to generalise, but I think it is worth looking further into those differences.

Q163 **Mr Seely:** I think you have already answered this next question as well. France is more effective than the UK at developing its defence and security relationship with India. I think you have answered that—if you feel that you haven't, please add to that. How does the United States do in its defence relationship with India, and can we learn anything from that relationship?

Dr Chaudhuri: I can make three very quick points. The first is that I actually don't think the UK has a large role to play when it comes to defence in India.

Q164 **Mr Seely:** Why is that?

Dr Chaudhuri: Two reasons. The first is that the UK doesn't produce what India needs. Secondly, the UK is not competitive in the market. For instance, take fighter jets as part of the EADS consortium. That is a very expensive piece of kit. It did not make it on to the Indian shortlist.

If you just look at the numbers, the hierarchy is something like: Russia, United States, Israel. Their numbers are somewhere around 16% to 30% of imports; the UK is at 3%. Let us be realistic about how far we want to go in terms of India buying high-end kit from the United Kingdom. It would make sense strategically to move away from traditional defence kit, which does not seem like an area that will grow in any remarkable way over the next two decades.

Let us focus on where the UK has co-competency and build that out. There are three key areas where the UK has joint ventures. BAE Systems is represented in India, and you have joint ventures with local companies such as Mahindra & Mahindra. There is a Tata collaboration, which is questionable for a variety of reasons. They produce armoured cars and high-end, autonomous, machine-learning, AI-based equipment. The UK has a lot of Cambridge-incubated companies that do that well. How do you unlock this? Those competencies are not really making a splash in India because the UK has a problem in selling stuff to India due to dual-use technologies.

You asked a question about the United States, Mr Seely. How has the United States really transformed the defence relationship? It went about transforming the relationship in a step-by-step way. They did not offer kit to begin with; they offered structures of global norms on defence governance, which India needed to streamline domestic law with international norms. Once that was done, the kit started coming in—in a huge way.

Q165 **Mr Seely:** Is that dual-use stuff as well?



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Dr Chaudhuri: Yes, that is dual-use stuff as well. India signed in September, if I am not mistaken, COMCASA, which is a compatibility agreement. It basically allows the free exchange of information between US platforms and Indian platforms, and greater interoperability.

What is the first key Indian complaint against the UK, and rightly so? It is that the UK does not provide such technologies to India as knowledge transfers because it is essentially, if I can put it this way, hung up about dual-use technologies. In a way, I really cannot fathom why. That is a great question for the MOD and Ministers, I guess.

Q166 **Mr Seely:** Is it just, then, a question of adopting the UN governance model and doing the same sort of deal with India, and then sharing dual-use technology and treating it effectively like a grown-up, in the same way that we would want you to treat us?

Dr Chaudhuri: To give you a small example, where is one of the UK's defence interests across India today? The big one is the Indian ocean, primarily because of Diego Garcia and the British Indian Ocean Territory, but also because of the Indian ocean's commercial values, white shipping and so on.

How do you then work with India? What do you want to do? First, you want to work with India essentially on anti-piracy, anti-smuggling and anti-terrorism, for instance. Institutionally, do you have a structure to do that? Yes—a naval exercise is held between the two countries where you have a structure for that.

How do you build it out? How do you take it to the next level? You want to create a naval operability. For that, essentially you need a bilateral agreement that is very close to what is called COMCASA. There is another one called LEMOA. Basically, they are logistics and information-sharing governance structures, which by the way take a lot of work.

Q167 **Mr Seely:** You are talking about the US as a model.

Dr Chaudhuri: Yes. That needs to be replicated, obviously tailored to the UK's needs and India's needs. If I am not mistaken—Ambassador Mathai will be able to correct me—these agreements took the better part of 10 or 15 years to hammer out. Keep that in mind, but once you have that structure, you can pour in the kit.

At the moment, you are trying to pour in kit and you are getting closed off by the Indians, because you are saying, "Here are 100 pieces of kit. If 20 get through, super." What is happening is that two are getting through, because you do not have the structures.

Mr Seely: So we need to set up defence governance structures. Thank you.

Ranjan Mathai: One of the reasons this became necessary is because the United States Government engages in what is called FMS—foreign military sales. That is to say that the transaction is not purely a commercial one



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between a company in the United States and the Government in the Ministry of Defence.

This is of particular importance because of the way in which any commercial contract in the defence field in India ultimately becomes the subject of much party debate and becomes a controversy. The Government feels very reassured if it has Government-to-Government dealings with a foreign Government and acquires military hardware accordingly. The United States has stepped into this, and therefore a lot of these defence institutional structures became necessary. It was a hard slog, but we got there, and increasingly the United States is offering some of the best technology it has.

Q168 **Mr Seely:** That is because you have your governance in place, but there is also the Government selling it, so it is not private contractors who then get caught up in your politics, or in American politics.

Ranjan Mathai: Or the Government is guaranteeing it, or whatever. There is a system by which the Government is directly involved with our Ministry of Defence.

Q169 **Mr Seely:** How do divergences in the UK and India's relationship such as on policy towards Russia affect our relationship? I know in the past that India has bought a lot of kit from Russia.

Ranjan Mathai: With us it is not just kit. Russia has been a country which in the Indian perception for a long time—for many decades—stood by India on many of India's priorities while the western world was not willing to do that, specifically on our relationship with Pakistan and later on our relationship with China. This is a historical survey.

The Russians have been willing to provide us with not only defence equipment but the building of defence capabilities, and the building of heavy industrial capabilities when we needed it. This is a very strong relationship, and we tend to view our wish to continue the relationship with Russia based on those realities.

The relationship has got more diffuse now because, as everyone has commented, there are other players in the game, whether that is defence, space, nuclear energy or counter-terrorism—all those areas—but Russia remains very important to us. We will continue to give the relationship with Russia a very high priority in Delhi.

Q170 **Chair:** May I now take you to the direct neighbourhood of India? What are your views of the United Kingdom's key interests in the Indo-Pacific region?

Dr Chaudhuri: If I could just put it in one short sentence, I think it would be white shipping—commercial routes. With that comes anti-piracy, anti-terrorism and so on, but the primary goal is commercial. It has been commercial for the last 400 or 500 years and continues to be so.

In terms of how you build out the centres, there are differences in terms of the way the UK views the Indian ocean and the way the Indians do, for

instance. On Diego Garcia, which is obviously key to the UK but more so to the United States, there are territorial differences between the Government of Mauritius and the United Kingdom—

Q171 **Chair:** Does India just support the Government of Mauritius on the issue?

Dr Chaudhuri: It did indeed. It supported the Government of Mauritius.

Q172 **Chair:** No nuance—just complete support?

Dr Chaudhuri: It supported the fact that the Mauritius Government said that this was sovereign territory and you need to go back to pre-colonial—Diego Garcia is in an Act of 1966, and 1968 I think is when the Indians said, “On the letter of the law, we agree with Mauritius,” and they have done. I do not think that is a major area of friction, but there are just different ways of looking at the Indian ocean.

As I said, shipping is absolutely key, but in that area of the Indian ocean—this is where the UK, if you would like a recommendation, could perhaps do more—I do not think this can be done bilaterally. The Indian ocean is just too big. France has 1 million citizens living in the Indian ocean; the UK does not. French interests will continue in the Indian ocean. Japan today sees the Indian ocean very much through the lens of ASEAN, so it is looking at collective responsibility and the rule of law. I think the UK has a role, but that is somewhere where the UK could potentially work with its European allies, primarily France, in trying to actually access some of the advantages of interoperability and connections with India.

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I wonder if I could briefly speak to the Russia point, and then I have Indian ocean points as well. On the Russian relationship, one of the things to bear in mind is that what people are saying is that India is multi-aligned. It is trying to make friends with a range of powers, because that best secures its interests in the future. It is trying to diversify its interests.

The Russian relationship, as Ambassador Mathai notes, is extremely important, and when you think of that military and defence co-operation, it could in a way be compensating for a very weak economic relationship. The economic relationship between India and Russia is not thriving—their trade is about one tenth of India’s trade with the United States. There are lots of problems, such as distance, connectivity, banking systems and so on. We have to read that emphasis on defence co-operation through what the relationship lacks in other domains, and not over-exaggerate it.

On the Indian ocean, we need to be clear what the UK interests are there and also what they are not. It is clear that if the UK is seeking these free trade agreements with Australia, China, Japan and India, of course UK imports and exports across the Indian ocean will grow. That will increase the importance of sea lines of communication and it will increase the strategic logic for the UK to have a naval presence, but we need to be careful about the kind of language that is coming out of our political leadership at the moment—for example, launching the HMS Queen Elizabeth and saying that we will be a force for power projection. We had



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the former Foreign Secretary pledging that one of the new aircraft carriers will sail through the straits of Malacca and that Britain is back east of Suez. This kind of language is worrying in the region, because we do not need another power in the Indian ocean pushing its weight around.

Again, it would be interesting to look at how India is approaching the region. I do not necessarily want to suggest that all of Mr Modi's acronyms should be celebrated, but his approach of security and growth for all in the region, as the core of his Indian ocean strategy, says it all, I think. It is about an approach that is co-operative and that should be beneficial for states in the region. There is a key strategy there, which is a counter-narrative to China's Belt and Road. I think there is a way in which India is imagining the Indian ocean that is, to my mind, trying to highlight some of the problems that China has in its own maritime governance. But I think we need to look at how India is envisaging the region and perhaps partner on those lines, rather than continue with our rhetoric from decades past.

Q173 **Chair:** Mr Mathai, do you wish to add anything?

Ranjan Mathai: Yes. I think the Indian ocean is now increasingly important to the entire globe. I think in what is the strategic dialogue between not just our Foreign Offices but between our Governments as a whole—the whole of Government—we need to talk about the Indian ocean with the United Kingdom. I say this fully conscious, as Professor Sullivan said, that we do not need a lot of power projection. We certainly do need strong international emphasis on the need to maintain a rules-based maritime order, of the kind that has made the peaceful use of the Indian ocean possible.

We are seeing that it was one thing to talk about the Belt and Road initiative when it looked like a series of developments across Eurasia, but now we see the entire region is getting dotted with ports being built by China. What these will mean in the future is not quite clear. We have one case in Sri Lanka, very close to us, where the debt burden caused by the development of this port has ended with the port now actually being handed over to the Chinese themselves. There are issues relating to the manner in which extra-Indian ocean powers have projected their power in the ocean in the past, but today there is a time for a very specific dialogue with the United Kingdom.

I would add that SAGAR, which Professor Sullivan de Estrada mentioned—security and growth for all in the region—has one addition, which is Sagarmala. That is the necklace in the SAGAR—the development of port capabilities. This is an area where I think the United Kingdom, France and India could do well. I am not talking about military ports, but the ability to create connectivity, which means a lot.

Q174 **Chair:** Is there a tension and a trade-off between the UK's relationship with China and its relationship with India, based on the kinds of concerns that you have just referred to?

Ranjan Mathai: Not really. We have been conscious that at some points in time the United Kingdom has certainly prioritised its relationship with



China, far more that it has with India. But, the relationship has not created the kind of tensions between us, because the United Kingdom is not involved in areas that are contentious between China and India. What we are hoping to achieve is dialogue on what it takes in an area like the Indian ocean to make a difference, to maintain the open architecture of the Indian ocean and to make sure that the countries of the Indian ocean do have choices, which are not limited to their dealings with China.

Dr Chaudhuri: I have just two very quick points. One is a slightly different view on capability. I think when Stephen Lovegrove made the statement about HMS Queen Elizabeth going out to the strait of Malacca, that statement was framed very much keeping India in mind. The idea was to make clear to India that Britain has capability in the Indian ocean and that this is not just rhetoric—we actually have kit out on the commons. That is really because the one area that could be developed between the UK and India, which already has standing, is on humanitarian disasters, on rescue and on relief operations, and on that there really is a lot of co-operation between the two sides.

On the China factor—and this is just me hazarding a guess having spoken to a group of people in India, and certainly not representative of the collective view—I think it is certainly not a point of friction. But I think from a Delhi standpoint, if you look at the other actors in the Indian ocean, Japan has no hesitation when it comes to China and the United States is too big to have any hesitations when it comes to China in the Indian ocean. The two countries that do are Australia and the United Kingdom. That is just part and parcel of what diplomacy is about—making sure that you don't do something with India, in the IOR, that might peeve China. But that is something that I would say the current Government is conscious of.

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: In a way, yes, there is a tension, but I think that it can be played in a particular way. I'm just thinking of Xi Jinping quoting a Chinese saying at the Belt and Road Forum in May 2017. He said: "Peaches and plums do not speak, but they are so attractive that a path is formed below the trees." The point there is that Chinese capital speaks for itself. That is obviously something that all players recognise at this point in history. At the same time, you can challenge that language by pointing to some of the normative concerns and problems with what some frame as China's debt-trap diplomacy, and you can underscore the importance of a rules-based international system and of upholding international maritime law. I think that that is where the UK can join in.

I don't think that there is necessarily a choice. I think that one can benefit from Chinese growth, but one can also seek to moderate and mediate Chinese power by espousing the same kinds of normative commitments that we have for decades. And I think that we can partner with India in doing so.

Q175 **Mr Seely:** It sounds like there is a problem with China's—I keep wanting to say "belt and braces", but what do they call it? Belt and—
[Interruption.] Belt and Road. There is a problem with China's Belt and



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Road. Do you find that it is trying to constrict India's strategic growth? You are being very careful in your words, but I see a nervousness from both of you—in fact, all three of you.

Ranjan Mathai: Actually, the belt is a road and the road is a belt.

Q176 **Mr Seely:** Yes. I'm more concerned about the port ones in relation to India.

Ranjan Mathai: India's primary objection was about the first one, because the Eurasian continental road network includes a segment called CPEC—the China-Pakistan economic corridor—which runs through territory that technically is Indian territory. The Chinese have blithely ignored our objections to it, although they react with profound anger if – in the territory on the Indian side they claim as theirs – they see any foreign presence. I think there is a problem we have with that; and the second is that is on the road that is a maritime road.

The second thing is the development of ports all around the shores of India—in Myanmar, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and, potentially, other places. As we have seen in Sri Lanka, the debt trap has ended up with the port actually being handed over to the Chinese. There is an assurance being given that it will be purely commercial, etc., but with the kind of growth and the assertiveness of Chinese diplomacy today, one can never be certain. That is the guiding spirit behind our concern and worry about this initiative.

Q177 **Mr Seely:** So what are you going to do about it?

Ranjan Mathai: Certainly we will work with those countries to ensure that these capabilities remain civilian capabilities. We will assist countries that need port development ourselves, and here is an area where I think our partners around the world can be very good collaborators in creating good connectivity for countries in the Indian ocean region. We have the Indian Ocean Rim Association, which is a group of countries that border the Indian ocean. We also have, through the Indian navy, created the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium, which does maritime co-operation, as Professor Sullivan de Estrada said, as well as humanitarian assistance, disaster relief and so on. But the development of port capabilities has not yet figured in either of these two constructs, so this is one area. And, as Dr Chaudhuri said, white shipping, the maintenance of records and keeping track of how shipping is carried out, anti-piracy—these are all areas where collaboration is increasingly possible.

Dr Chaudhuri: I have three quick points. The first is more singularly political to the UK: the CPEC is the kind of thing that gets a lot of Indians upset with the UK. There is an all-parliamentary party group on the CPEC—it would be great if that parliamentary group opened up to Indian officials to come and air their thoughts on the CPEC. The signalling is political, but these things matter—they resonate back in New Delhi. Secondly, you asked what you should do about BRI. I do not think it is a binary; you don't take on the Chinese. If I could guess, the Government seem to have taken the view that this is not a port race or an arms race—



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it is not that China builds a port and we build a port. It is about being strategic with the resources you have.

Thirdly, in a sense, India is part of the BRI, although very few people in the Indian Government say that openly. It gets loans from the AIIB, where it has an 8.7% stake. China has a 31% stake. India has been given \$1.2 billion to build roads and ports. It has a stake in the New Development Bank—the BRICS bank—which gives loans to India to build the Mumbai metro, for instance. That is exactly what India should do; it should take advantage of the BRI when it can, and absolutely disagree with CPEC on sovereignty issues.

Q178 **Mr Seely:** Sorry, CPEC is—

Dr Chaudhuri: The China-Pakistan economic corridor. We should be cautious about treating these as binary issues. My sense is that India will be part and parcel of the BRI in future, as long as it is open, rule-based and fair and the contracting is fair. At the moment, there is no transparency when it comes to BRI contracts. All contracts are online, but there is not one BRI contract that can be found online.

Q179 **Chair:** You have touched on Pakistan in the context of China. How do the tensions and unresolved issues between India and Pakistan affect the UK's relationship with India?

Ranjan Mathai: It has been a negative factor in the India-UK relationship, if I may put it very bluntly. India has not found as much understanding from the United Kingdom as it would have liked of its position vis-à-vis Pakistan. I will mention one example. Yesterday, we commemorated here in London and in other cities around the world the 10th anniversary of the attack on Mumbai. For us in India, the attack symbolised the wide-ranging hostility that we face from our western neighbour.

There is a sense in the Government that the United Kingdom has not been fully understanding of India's dilemma. I will add to that separately. It has been a negative factor in our relationship.

Dr Chaudhuri: On terrorism in Mumbai, very many people in India, including myself, find it hard to believe that the UK Government have not gone after people such as Hafiz Saeed, who is a mastermind LeT head, when other countries such as the United States have a \$10 million bounty. It does not matter whether that bounty works and he is captured, but it is very difficult to understand why the UK has been so cautious over an issue that, clearly, is one of pure terrorism. If it was the other way around, there would be a riot in the United Kingdom.

On the second part, I completely echo what Ambassador Mathai says. There has been negativity when it comes to this relationship. However, as someone who has never been in government and had to deal with these issues, I would like to think that we are past the Indo-Pakistan balance when it comes to the UK dealing with both countries. There are thorny, sharp issues, but the UK has an independent and fairly successful



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relationship today with India, and perhaps a less successful one with Pakistan, but for different reasons. That is a pretty good place to be.

The one place where it will be structurally very difficult for the UK to get away from the Indo-Pakistan balance is the diaspora. A large part of the Pakistani diaspora is from Mirpur on the other side of the line of control. There are constituency pressures—you know this better than I, Chairman—and there is a buzz in Parliament. In 2016, you had a Kashmir debate in Parliament, for instance. Those are impression issues that will play out in Delhi. Having said that, I do not think that they will affect or shape the real-world politics of India and the UK today.

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: It is an extremely complex dynamic. I do not think there is any particular right way of doing it, so I do not have anything to add.

Chair: Thank you. We now turn to issues of global governance.

Q180 **Tom Tugendhat:** Briefly, as we are keeping you very late, how far is India committed to the international rules-based system as it currently exists, and how far do its aims for global governance align with those of the UK? Perhaps you could kick us off, Professor.

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: We need to think in historical terms. Like most non-western states—that is not the most useful term to use, but we perhaps need to use it in this instance—India has subscribed to a pared-back version of the liberal order that focuses on reciprocal recognition of sovereignty and the principle of non-intervention, rather than a thicker understanding of the liberal order that extends to placing the individual as a subject of international law, which ultimately means seeking to uphold human rights and engaging in interventionist practice in order to do so.

The more fluid understanding of sovereignty and non-interference that has arisen from the 1990s onwards, with the humanitarian decade, is not something that India has subscribed to. Neither has China or Russia. We might have quite a western bias when we think about the liberal order, but India absolutely subscribes to and upholds the basic institutions.

The global institutions that were set up in 1945 certainly do not reflect the current realities of power distribution in the international system. I think India feels that keenly. There is a sense that the developed western states are stubbornly clinging on to their positions of privilege and there needs to be some shifting and accommodating of rising powers, including India. That is important because if rising powers do not feel accommodated in conversations at global high tables they will seek alternatives, whether unilateral ones such as BRICS or alternative institutions such as the AIIB. I think that India is committed, but it hopes for and anticipates reform.

Q181 **Tom Tugendhat:** Ambassador Mathai, you know our position is to support.



Ranjan Mathai: I would agree in part. I think India has been fully committed to a multilateral, rules-based world order. We expect that the order itself will take note of the changes that have occurred since 1945, and we would like to see some major institutional changes being brought into that order. However, we do subscribe to the rules-based world order. We have accepted the rules of the game, and we continue to subscribe to them.

We are strong supporters of multilateralism, because we feel that this is the only way to moderate competition, which is inevitable in the world around us. We would hope that Britain remains as committed to multilateralism, despite its current bout of exiting from a multilateral framework within Europe. On a global scale, certainly we would be partners in upholding the kind of order that we have found beneficial for our growth and development in the past, and which we have found beneficial in moderating international competition.

Dr Chaudhuri: Think of the rules-based order as a dinner table with place cards. For a long time, India tried to get a place card, but today India does many dinner parties on the same night. I would say that that is how India approaches the international rules-based order. You have the Bretton Woods system—India is well represented in that, in the IMF and so on—but equally, you have economic opportunities in the AIIB.

The UK plays an absolutely central role and it has been a steadfast partner in supporting India's permanent membership at the UN and in the Nuclear Suppliers Group, which sounds great—it is good rhetoric, and it is very important that the UK does support it—but perhaps India is looking for a greater amount of lobbying on the part of the UK when it comes to the NSG. The NSG is going to be a fist fight; it is coercive diplomacy. There will be nothing nice about getting European partners to accept India as a fully-fledged member. If you are looking at one breakthrough international regime structure where the UK can play an important role today, it is the NSG—

Q182 **Mr Seely:** The NSG?

Dr Chaudhuri: The Nuclear Suppliers Group, which is based in Vienna. As a recommendation, if you are thinking, "What is the one area that the UK can capture, which benefits countries like India but also other powers in the world?" perhaps the Indian ocean is one. On 12 November, Macron held a peace conference in Paris, as you know, where he unveiled what is called a rules-based order in the cyber domain. France now own that piece of paper, and they are trying to get consensus around it. I see no reason why the UK and France cannot work together on the Indian ocean. It is a good post-Brexit, Europe-ally thing to do as well. With that alliance, you will get a lot of cachet from countries like India for signing up to working on something with a country that has genuine long-term interests in the Indian ocean. The UK has a key role as a negotiator in the process.

Ranjan Mathai: I agree with what Rudra has said on that last point, but this must be accompanied by what you call a strategic dialogue. There has



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to be a way of explaining what you are trying to do in the Indian ocean, not only with the Government but in what is called the think-tank circuit, and track 1.5 and track 2 diplomacy, and so on. That is an area where, between India and Britain, we have not done enough. We have not developed enough of these channels outside immediate officialdom to convey the messages that sometimes officials cannot.

Tom Tugendhat: It is quite striking to me, I have to say, that the formal contacts between our Governments are very good, as you would expect, and the Indian understanding of the UK system from visits here is very good, but the British understanding of Indian systems is almost non-existent.

Q183 **Chair:** Dr Chaudhuri, you referred to the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Does that also involve some kind of modification or change of approach to the nuclear non-proliferation treaty with regard to India?

Dr Chaudhuri: No. Between 2005 and 2008, the United States did that part for the UK and India. Essentially, the IEA provides India with what is called an additional protocol. To put it in perspective, when I say that India has a waiver, today it is the only country in the world that continues to have the capability to build fissile material, to have a strategic military weapons programme and, at the same time, to trade in civil nuclear goods. That is primarily because it has, factually, an impeccable non-proliferation record.

The next step for the NSG would essentially be to get the 45 member states of the NSG—here Sweden is as important as the UK, because the body votes on the basis of unanimity—to vote in favour of India's entry. The key problem is China, which is also a member of the NSG and which will want all sorts of conditions built out, possibly for grandfathering Pakistan's entry into the NSG. From a non-proliferation perspective, that would be very difficult, given Pakistan's very dubious record on non-proliferation.

Professor Sullivan de Estrada: I respectfully disagree that the UK can do much on the lobbying front. Perhaps it can with certain powers in Europe, but China will not accept India's entry into the Nuclear Suppliers Group in the near term because that would effectively be legitimising a nuclear power that has not signed the NPT and, in Chinese eyes, has not played by the rules. China will not want to recognise India as a fully legitimate nuclear state by granting it access to the Nuclear Suppliers Group. No matter what the UK does, that will not happen.

I absolutely agree with Rudra that India has gained widespread international recognition as a responsible nuclear power, and rightly so, because even though it is a non-signatory to the NPT, it conforms almost entirely to it and to many other non-proliferation benchmarks. It is not necessarily about formal membership or signature, but about behavioural standards. India has a great track record, but I think China is the big obstacle.



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Ranjan Mathai: When the NSG was set up, China's position was also somewhat ambivalent on the NPT.

Q184 **Tom Tugendhat:** You have already commented on India's co-operation with multinational development banks, its importance and its role. May I ask a final question about India's international co-operation? India now makes up more than half of the Commonwealth; the reality is that the Commonwealth is an Indian institution, if it is anything. Do you see India as having any interest in the Commonwealth, or do you see Prime Minister Modi's arrival at the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting as only a photo opportunity at Buckingham Palace, if you will excuse the expression? Is there any more to it than that?

Ranjan Mathai: I think Prime Minister Modi's participation in the Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting is significant. It demonstrates that there is interest in taking a fresh look at the Commonwealth and what it can do for an India that is expanding its global interests. It is seen as a potentially useful trade bloc; it is not a trade bloc, but it is a future trading arrangement. If it can fit into this multilateral system of the world, why not? It could be a useful grouping; it does not have China in it, and it does not have certain other countries that tend to loom large.

It is an area of very great interest to see whether something could be done on trade. It is, after all, a very curiously representative body, with every stage of economic development represented in the 53-member grouping. It is also very much a maritime grouping. It is a series of countries connected by the sea, with an interest in what is called the blue economy. This is one of Mr Modi's great interests: what can we do to develop the blue economy more?

I think there is potential for developing the institution if the grouping and some of the institutional structures of the Commonwealth are a little diversified. Here, I am afraid, Indian officialdom has not really picked up the ball and run with it as much as it might have. It was proposed that you could have the trade and investment facilitation grouping within the Commonwealth, headquartered in Delhi and have other institutions of the Commonwealth not centred in the secretariat, but spread out across the Commonwealth. I think it would be interesting. There is talk of what is called the Anglosphere. At a cultural level, this is one area in which Indians feel quite at ease—their relationships are eased by the common language. There is therefore a lot of interest now in seeing whether the Commonwealth can be revived as a new body. India would certainly play a very much bigger role in it, but so would some of the other countries of the Commonwealth.

Q185 **Chair:** The Committee did an inquiry on the Commonwealth 20 years ago. When we went to India, we found almost no interest in the Commonwealth at all. That is quite a significant change, isn't it?

Ranjan Mathai: I think there has been a change. We had an Indian Secretary-General of the Commonwealth for eight years not so long ago,



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which shows that the Government decided that the candidacy was of interest and put up a candidate. As I say, in the complicated world we are living in, with so much changing, it could be a factor in stabilising some of your relationships through the mechanism of the easy, friendly relationships of the Commonwealth. I do not think that 20 years ago everybody in Delhi was convinced that the UK was very profoundly interested in the Commonwealth either, so perhaps that has been a bit of a change here too.

Chair: May I thank all three of you for coming here and giving us a very interesting session? We are very grateful.