



THE EU-INDIA PARTNERSHIP: The case for greater security convergence

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The European Union and India have developed a mature strategic partnership over the years, but the relationship now faces several challenges as Brussels begins to look inwards and New Delhi to the United States and also eastwards. This paper argues that despite and also because of such challenges, this is the right moment for greater security engagement between the EU and India. The economic track is being revived, as negotiations continue towards a free trade agreement. Cultural and scientific exchanges have also flourished in recent years. It is now time to move the partnership into greater dialogue, coordination and cooperation in the security sphere.

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The EU-India partnership: from strategy to security

This is a working paper based on initial reflections on the conference that was jointly organised by the Foundation for European Progressive Studies and Carnegie India in New Delhi, India, September 29th-30th 2016.

The European Union (EU) and India have developed a mature strategic partnership over the years, but the relationship between Brussels and New Delhi continues to face several hurdles and challenges. The strategic context for both sides does not help. The EU faces an unprecedented political crisis, with Brexit looming on the horizon, several of its economies struggling with stagnation, and refugee flows posing a massive humanitarian challenge.

India, on the other hand, has focused attentions on an unprecedented rapprochement with the United States and on connecting its economy with the rest of Asia under its “Look East” policy. Beyond such divergent priorities, the EU and India have been further separated by massive political turbulence and conflict in the greater Middle East, their common extended neighbourhood.

This paper argues that despite and also because of such challenges, this is the right moment to press for even greater engagement between Brussels and New Delhi. The cultural, scientific and civil society exchanges have flourished in recent years. The economic track is being revived, as negotiations continue for some form of free trade agreement. It is now time to move the partnership into greater dialogue, coordination and cooperation in the security sphere.

Not so strategic partners: the lagging security partnership

Since diplomatic relations between India and the European Economic Community were established in the early 1960s, there have been a number of advancements in the relationship between India and the EU. Over the past two decades this relationship has gradually evolved from having a near-exclusive development focus to increasingly emphasising economic engagement. On the economic front, the EU is today India’s largest trade partner: 14% of India’s imports and exports are with one of the EU’s 28 member states. On the educational side, about 4000 Indian students and scholars have received EU mobility grants since 2007, reflecting strong scientific and technological links.

Instrumental in this regard were the steps taken in the last ten years or so to institutionalise the bilateral relationship. At the Hague Summit in November 2004, India became one of the EU’s ‘Strategic Partners’ and a Joint Action Plan was signed in 2005 (later revised in 2008), aimed at defining common objectives and proposing a wide range of supporting activities in the areas of political, economic, sectorial and development cooperation.

Since then, both sides have initiated a number of policy consultations and dialogues that go beyond commerce and trade, with political and security matters being discussed at various levels, including regular summits. During the last EU-India Summit, on 30 March 2016 in Brussels, the EU and Indian leaders reconfirmed their commitment to give new momentum to the bilateral relationship by endorsing the EU-India Agenda for Action 2020 as a common roadmap to strengthen their strategic partnership. As stipulated in the official text “the agenda further builds on the shared objectives and outcomes of the Joint Action Plans of 2005 and 2008. It encompasses a wide range of areas for

cooperation such as foreign and security policy, trade and investment, economy, global issues as well as people to people contacts.”¹



EU-India leaders at the 13th EU-India Summit, March 30th 2016 - Source: European Council

Beyond economic and civil society links, this new momentum in EU-India relations will have to translate into a serious dialogue on various security regions and domains. This has traditionally been the most neglected pillar of their strategic partnership. Several factors explain such contrasting partnership commitments in the security, economic and educational fields. Most importantly, the EU itself remains severely limited in its role as a security actor and continues to rely on the military and intelligence assets of its individual member states.

Understandably, when it comes to hard security issues such as counter-terrorism, New Delhi has therefore preferred dealing with specific Member States, wilfully diverting its attention away from Brussels. This direct, bilateral *modus operandi*, mainly with countries such as the United Kingdom, Germany and France, has undermined India’s relationship with the EU. Reversely, partly due to its lack of policy coherence, Brussels has also always focused more on process rather than on substance, showing a level of negligence in the manner in which it approached New Delhi. For several years, Brussels’ political and security focus in South Asia thus concentrated on the softer issues of human rights, political stability, or media freedom.

As a result, India has grown used to assigning a secondary role to the EU in its strategic thinking, while the EU has often focused on China and failed to consider India’s rising geopolitical importance.

¹ European Commission - Press release ‘EU-India Summit: A new momentum for the EU-India Strategic Partnership’, http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_IP-16-1142_en.htm, visited October 4th, 2016

Drivers of security convergence

Whether the point of reference is global, bilateral, or regional, India and the EU have struggled to find both a constructive, yet realistic, agenda and the mechanisms that can carry their security relationship forward. Yet, there is also growing recognition from both sides that the level and intensity of interaction is suboptimal, which was evident in the latest EU-India summit.

The Joint Statement issued in March this year devotes sixteen paragraphs to the issues of foreign policy, human rights and security cooperation, covering a wide range of sectors, and a resolve “to enhance security cooperation, building on and strengthening existing EU-India working groups on cyber, counter-terrorism, counter-piracy and non-proliferation and disarmament.”² This unprecedented focus on security issues is driven by two main factors.

First, the devastating turbulence and conflicts affecting the Middle East (or West Asia, in India’s official nomenclature) poses an immediate threat to both the EU and India. The stability of this region is of crucial importance to Brussels and India because their interests converge in this common extended common neighbourhood. Europe and India have been, and will continue to be the first to be affected by spiralling conflicts in the Gulf region and beyond, with important repercussions for Central Asia, and the Western Indian Ocean regions.

Second, the EU and India are also driven to greater security convergence by massive geopolitical shifts within the Eurasian political order in recent years. The United States is flirting with isolationism and retrenchment, withdrawing or shifting important assets that have supported the European security umbrella for much more than half a century. This forces European states to consider alternative security mechanisms and develop new partnerships that extend the narrow transatlantic axis eastwards, including to Asia.

China’s massive investments in Europe, and the formidable security implications of its ‘One Belt, One Road’ (OBOR) initiative linking the Pacific to the Atlantic, are also incentivising India to approach the EU in a new light. New Delhi’s unprecedented interest in the EU and in Europe, in general, furthermore reflects its larger policy of strategic diversification, cultivating new partnerships in order to rely less on either Washington or Beijing.

Dimensions of potential security cooperation

How can these drivers of security convergence translate into practical measures for cooperation?

1. Middle East/West Asia

India and the EU share security interests in their overlapping extended neighbourhood, which, in a wider sense, spans from Istanbul to Islamabad, and from Moscow to Mauritius. Whether on refugee flows, crisis mediation and mitigation and peacekeeping, the potential for a closer security dialogue is tremendous. Brussels and New Delhi have realised that their own domestic stability crucially hinges on the pacification of the Middle East/West Asia.

² European Commission ‘Joint Statement 13th EU-India Summit, Brussels, 30 March 2016’, http://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/meetings/international-summit/2016/03/20160330-joint-statement-eu-india_pdf/, visited October 4th, 2016



2. Cybersecurity

The EU has taken a lead role in developing new regulations and legal frameworks to ensure the security of the cyber domains even while also protecting the individual freedoms and rights of its citizens. This is an approach that is broadly in line with India's preferences to keep global commons such as the Internet free and governed by multilateral and cooperative, rather than unilateral and opt-out mechanisms such as the one pursued by China. The recent EU-India joint statement thus emphasises "that the Internet should remain open, secure and interoperable and should be governed through a multi-stakeholder approach".

3. Counter-terrorism

Both the EU and India have considerable expertise and assets in counter-terrorism, which offers a tremendous potential for collaboration. Brussels intelligence-sharing mechanisms may still be limited, but would benefit from a closer dialogue with its Indian counterparts, for example via the EU Intelligence and Situation Centre (EU INTCEN). The recent EU-India joint statement thus decided to "enhance exchanges on finance, justice and police and call for action against entities and States that sponsor or support terrorist groups."

4. Maritime security

Beyond the continental shelf, the EU and India must also extend their security cooperation to the naval domains. The Indian Ocean has in recent years rapidly transformed into an extended neighbourhood for both Brussels and New Delhi. The flow of migrants, the threat of piracy, and international criminal and terror networks warrant a greater engagement on the maritime security front. The EU's rising interest in the security and development of a liberal multilateral order offers extraordinary prospects for collaboration with India, which has been the greatest guarantor and net security provider of a stable and free Indian Ocean. New Delhi's commitment was most recently attested by its submitting its maritime boundary dispute with Bangladesh to a UN arbitration tribunal, and then abide by its unfavourable decision under the United Nations Convention on Law of Sea (UNCLOS). This sets a benchmark for other regions and states, especially in the South China Sea.

5. Nuclear non-proliferation

For decades, the EU has taken a lead role in advocating for a stronger nuclear non-proliferation order. India's long track record in behaving as a responsible nuclear power, despite not being part of its key regimes, underlines the importance of revising this order. In 2008, the EU implicitly supported the exceptional clauses that allowed India to circumvent these regimes with the assistance of the United States. India is now committed to join several of these regimes, in particular the Nuclear Suppliers Group, and also the Wassenaar Arrangement. Brussels can play a crucial role to facilitate this revision and expansion of the nuclear order, which will bolster non-proliferation efforts and incentivise other nuclear states to follow the Indian model – whether it is Iran or Pakistan.

6. Strategic connectivity: Eurasia beyond China's OBOR

China's monumental investments in the OBOR initiative promises to redraw the infrastructure and connectivity map in the Eurasian landmass by linking Shanghai to Lisbon. Brussels is keen to engage Beijing, as this will reduce dependence on maritime trade and accelerate land-based trade between the European common market and China. These developments are naturally seen with concern by

India, which has tried to develop its own linkages to Russia and Eastern Europe via investments in Iran's Chabahar port and a link to the North-South Corridor. Brussels will have to realise that OBOR has important strategic implications and possible security costs, which are also seen in the rising political leverage Beijing is extracting from its massive foreign direct investment across Europe. The EU's commitment to open markets and a liberal economic order thus warrants a parallel connectivity track to South and Southeast Asia via India.

7. Promoting liberal security: facilitating democratic transitions

The EU and India are the world's two largest democratic polities. More than 800 million voters are registered to participate in India's elections, the largest such exercise in the free world. The EU represents one of the modern world's boldest experiments in regional integration through liberal politics and economics. The European and Indian experiences offer a tremendous potential to an unprecedented number of states that are witnessing uncertain democratic transitions across South Asia, from Afghanistan to Myanmar. Such democratic assistance, in particular on electoral, parliamentary and legal sectors, should not be seen as a mere moral luxury or prerogative. The EU and India's own security will benefit from stable democratisation processes in their respective neighbourhoods, and this should therefore lead Brussels and New Delhi to devise common democracy assistance projects.

Conclusion

After a decade of their Strategic Partnership, and against a backdrop of a new geopolitical great game underway in Asia, the EU and India will benefit from a reassessment of where their interests can converge.

This paper argued that despite several challenges, this is the right moment to press for even greater engagement between Brussels and New Delhi, based on two divers of convergence: first, their shared interests in the stability of their overlapping extended neighbourhoods in the Middle East/West Asia, an area that in a wider sense spans from Istanbul to Islamabad and from Moscow to Mauritius; and second, massive geopolitical changes across Eurasia, based on a resurgent Russia, a rising China and a retrenched United States, which warrants a stronger link between Brussels and New Delhi.

This structural convergence opens space for greater EU-India security cooperation in seven specific areas: 1. The stability of Middle East/West Asia; 2. Cybersecurity; 3. Counter-terrorism; 4. Maritime security in the Indian Ocean; 5. Nuclear non-proliferation; 6. Alternative strategic connectivity networks; and 7. Promoting liberal democracy security through political assistance.

Exploring these zones of convergence and crafting common Indo-European foreign and security policies will certainly be challenging. But Brussels and New Delhi will not be able to assume a more influential role in shaping their respective regional environments and the Eurasian order unless they also anchor their strategic partnership in robust security dialogue, coordination and cooperation.