

Prime Minister Cameron's India tour highlights UK's weakening global position

Julie Hyland**22 February 2013**

David Cameron assembled the largest overseas trade delegation ever to accompany a British prime minister for his three-day visit to India.

Some 100 companies, four ministers and nine Members of Parliament—many with Indian heritage—were on board. They included defence firms Rolls-Royce, Serco, BAE, EADS and Thales, banks including HSBC, Lloyd's and the London Stock Exchange, and representatives from a large number of universities.

The entourage was part of Cameron's pitch to boost trade with India. Citing a "shared language, culture, ties", including the 1.5 million Indian "diaspora in Britain," Cameron said he was determined to forge a "special relationship" with India, which is set to be "one of the leading nations in this century."

While the "the sky is the limit", the prime minister acknowledged that "there is no thinking that this partnership is ours for the taking."

This was the background to Cameron's sympathetic noises regarding the infamous massacre on April 13, 1919 of unarmed civilians—mainly Sikhs—at Jallianwala Bagh, Amritsar. Tens of thousands had gathered for Baisakhi, a major religious festival in the Punjab. Brigadier-General Reginald Dyer gave orders to seal the exits and 50 British Indian Army soldiers opened fire on the crowd, until they ran out of ammunition. The British claimed that 379 were killed but Indian figures place the number at more than 1,000.

The massacre occurred at a time of growing social and political unrest against British colonialism in India. It sparked mass protests in the Punjab, large areas of which were placed under martial law. Finally, in an attempt to silence the unrest, the British authorities convened an inquiry, which relieved Dyer of his command and retired him.

Signing the book of condolences at the massacre site, Cameron reiterated the statement of Winston Churchill in

1920 that the killings were "monstrous"—a remark intended to portray the mass slaughter as an aberration in British imperialism's otherwise supposedly benevolent rule. He stopped short of apologising for the massacre, however, pathetically arguing that it would be wrong to do so for something that happened 40 years before he was born.

The bloody legacy of colonial rule is not the only problem facing Britain in trying to establish a stronger trade foothold in India. Cameron made his first trip there in July 2010, soon after coming into office, as part of a drive to double trade by 2015. Since then only limited advances have been made, with the UK lagging behind European countries.

In 2010 Cameron had lobbied hard for the part-UK consortium behind the Eurofighter jet to win the \$12 billion contract to supply India with 126 planes. Instead, India selected its French rival, the Rafale jets. Efforts to finalise the deal was one reason for French President Francoise Hollande's visit to Delhi only just ahead of Cameron. Once the deal is finalised, it will mean France has overtaken Britain in trade with India.

FRANCE 24 described as a "welcome stroke of serendipity for Paris" the fact that Hollande's visit came just following French imperialism's intervention into the West African state of Mali. International affairs correspondent Leela Jacinto reported, "The mission in Mali allowed them [France] to showcase the Rafale fighter jets."

In contrast, Cameron landed just as India announced it was suspending a £483 million deal for 12 Agusta Westland luxury AW101 helicopters, manufactured in the UK, that had also been agreed on his last visit. Italian police have arrested Giuseppe Orsi, chief executive of Agusta Westland's parent company, Finmeccanica, over allegations that bribes were paid to Indian government officials to cement the deal.

Speaking at a press conference, India's Prime Minister Manmohan Singh publicly pressed Cameron for assurances that Britain would help in the corruption investigation.

Cameron was also on the back foot over UK efforts to attract Indian students to British universities. With the British media running a filthy racist campaign against the number of overseas students entering the UK, numbers have begun to fall away, alarming universities as to a loss of revenues.

Treading the line between his right-wing backers and trade needs, Cameron pledged that there was "no limit on the number of Indian students that can study in British universities, so long as they have a place and an English-language qualification."

That left Cameron fishing for access to India's purported \$1 trillion infrastructure project, which includes plans to develop a 600-mile "economic corridor" between the hi-tech centres of Mumbai and Bangalore. Scheduled over the next five years, the development could generate investment projects worth up to \$25 billion. All Cameron could offer was a paltry £1 million to help fund a "feasibility study" into the development and even then, only if it were matched by Indian money.

What was left as evidence of the "burgeoning partnership" was a proposed joint cyber taskforce. The venture has been trailed as part of efforts to secure the personal information of millions of Britons stored on Indian servers against "cyber attacks by terrorists, criminals and hostile states". The agreement is recognised to be directed against China.

India is playing a pivotal role in US-led efforts to encircle China. Its rising military expenditure—competed for by Britain, France and others—is part of this policy. The recent interventions by the European imperialist powers into Africa—in Libya and Mali—are similarly driven by efforts to secure their own geostrategic interests against growing Chinese influence in the continent.

The joint taskforce initiative came as the US cyber security firm Mandiant claimed to have evidence that the Chinese government was involved in hacking US corporations and government agencies. The report was rejected by China, but the Obama administration is reportedly preparing "retaliation".

The potential consequences of such manoeuvres are explosive, not least as regards already tense relations between India and Pakistan. On Monday it was announced that the Pakistani government had awarded a multi-billion-dollar contract for the development and

operation of Gwadar Port to China. In 2007, the contract had been awarded to the Port of Singapore Authority, in face of US opposition to the contract going to China. The PSA reportedly abandoned it, citing Pakistan's failure to meet its obligations.

President Asif Ali Zardari said the deal—which has been bitterly attacked by India—would give a new impetus to Pakistan-China relations and that "Because of the proximity of the Gulf countries to Gwadar, oil flow from the region to China will be facilitated."

While publicly Cameron declined to name the "hostile states" targeted by the cyber force agreement, British intelligence have repeatedly hit out at Beijing for cyber-espionage. However, just prior to Cameron's India trip the *Sunday Times* claimed that the cabinet was split over its response to China.

Since Cameron's high profile and deliberately provocative meeting with the Dalai Lama in May, there has been a virtual break-off in relations between the UK and China. In contrast, German trade with China has increased significantly, while, following his India visit, Hollande announced a new round of cooperation between Paris and Beijing.

According to the *Times*, Cameron and Chancellor George Osborne are keen to downplay UK-China tensions in a bid to get a share of Chinese sovereign wealth funds, with Foreign Secretary William Hague and Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg opposed.

The newspaper's assertion brought an angry response from China's *Global Times*. In an editorial denouncing Britain's "reckless moves against China's interests", it warned, "China has more leverage than Britain has in their bilateral relations. China cultivating more contacts with separatists in Northern Ireland and Scotland would make London quite uncomfortable. China's GDP is close to that of Germany's, France's and Britain's combined. If Britain and China start competing over who can be tougher against the other, can Britain be the winner?"



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