

Beyond Trudeau: Connected Politics of India and the Anglosphere

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Summary

As New Delhi and Ottawa struggle to defuse the current tensions in bilateral relations over the assassination of a Khalistani militant, Hardeep Singh Nijjar, in Canada in June 2023, the crisis underlines the deepening interpenetration of domestic politics of India and the Anglosphere. India and its Anglo-Saxon partners must agree on broad guidelines against unacceptable intervention in each other's internal affairs.

Two and a half years ago, the British High Commissioner to India, Alex Ellis, declared that [“your politics is our politics”](#). He spoke amidst official New Delhi's concerns about a House of Commons debate on the farmers' agitation in Delhi. “Things that happen in India have ripples in the United Kingdom [UK] probably because you do have such a big diaspora community in the UK, so these things get debated. This is something we look at, but it is for India to resolve”, Ellis told the press in New Delhi in March 2021.

Canada, however, has been less sensitive to the emerging dynamics of connected domestic politics. Unlike the British Tories, who have invested much political capital in improving ties with India, liberals in Canada, under the leadership of Justin Trudeau, have gone the other way by allowing a permissive environment for Khalistani extremism in the pursuit of domestic political gains.

On 18 September 2023, [Trudeau told the Canadian Parliament](#) that Canadian security agencies had been “actively pursuing credible allegations of a potential link between agents of the government of India and the killing of a Canadian citizen, Hardeep Singh Nijjar”. India has [rejected these charges](#) as “absurd” and pointed to the long-standing Canadian refusal to acknowledge, let alone act upon, the criminal and violent extremism of the Khalistanis.

The escalating crisis has not remained bilateral between Delhi and Ottawa. There have been [reports of the United States \(US\) sharing intelligence](#) on the killing of Nijjar with Ottawa. The Joe Biden administration publicly and repeatedly urged India to cooperate with Canada in the investigation of the killing. It also insisted that the exercise of extra-territorial jurisdiction is unacceptable.

The issue figured prominently in Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar's engagements with the senior US leadership in Washington, including Secretary of State Antony Blinken and National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan in late September 2023. At the end of his visit to Washington, [Jaishankar reaffirmed](#) that assassination on foreign soil is not India's policy and that Delhi is prepared to cooperate in the investigation if Ottawa provides credible and

relevant intelligence. He also insisted that Ottawa must end the impunity that Khalistani militants currently enjoy in Canada.

The crisis in India-Canada relations has drawn attention to [renewed Khalistan militancy](#) in the Anglosphere or the English-speaking world. More deeply, it has shined a light on the connected domestic politics of India on the one hand and those of the Anglosphere – mainly, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the US – on the other.

Although India won its independence in 1947, the imperial connection did not vanish; in fact, it became more complicated. The Anglo-American tilt to Pakistan on the Kashmir question, the military support to Rawalpindi and the intervention on behalf of Pakistan in the 1971 war to liberate Bangladesh ensured that Indian suspicion of the Anglosphere's geopolitical motivations was entrenched. India's deepening ties with Soviet Russia added to the toxic mixture of bilateral relations.

The last few years have seen some progress in addressing the lingering divergences. The 21st century has seen the [dehypenation](#) of the Anglo-Saxon engagement with India and Pakistan. As India's economic weight has risen and Delhi has become the lynchpin of the US' Indo-Pacific strategy, India's geopolitical salience in Washington has rapidly risen and overshadowed that of Islamabad.

Second, the last two decades have also seen the US and the Anglosphere temper their long-standing interest in [mediating the Kashmir dispute](#) between India and Pakistan and leaving it for the two sides to address it. This has allowed the building of greater mutual trust between India and the Anglosphere.

The security establishments of the Anglosphere took a [relaxed view](#) of the Khalistani militant groups because they did not target these countries but focused exclusively on India. Whether the current crisis will compel them to take a fresh look at the Khalistani movement in their countries remains to be seen.

The current tensions between India and Canada have drawn attention to a deeper problem – the growing linkages between the domestic politics of India and the Anglosphere. These linkages are likely to get tighter as the size and impact of the Indian diaspora grows rapidly in the Anglosphere. The Indian-origin population, both citizens and residents in the US, is approaching the [five million](#) mark. In Canada, the Indian diaspora is about [1.5 million](#). In the UK, it is about [1.9 million](#); in Australia, it is about [800,000](#); and in New Zealand, it is [260,000](#). It is reasonable to expect that the size of these populations will continue to grow amidst the Anglosphere's demographic decline and their growing need for imported labour.

The expanding diaspora has been celebrated as a 'living bridge' between India and the Anglosphere. However, the living bridge brings its own problems. The sizeable concentrations of the diaspora groups and their growing voting power have increased their value in the electoral politics of the Anglosphere. India's political groups have also activated the diaspora for different agendas.

Trudeau will not be the last political leader tempted to be drawn into these troubled waters. Khalistanis will not be the last Indian dissident group to mobilise Anglo-Saxon political support against India. This demands that the security and foreign policy establishments in India and the Anglosphere sit down to discuss the dangers stemming from the connected politics of the diaspora.

There is a clear need to develop guard rails against issues like Khalistan destabilising the growing strategic partnership between India and the English-speaking world. Equally important is the institutionalised consultations between the intelligence agencies of India and those of the [Five Eyes](#) to draw up guidelines on avoiding intervention in the internal affairs of India and the Anglosphere.

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