

# India-France Relations: The tale strategic partners

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**Abstract**—Since the battle between Russia and Ukraine, the globe has been in chaos, and the start of the Israel-Hamas conflict has made matters worse. Countries' interests are pursued more realistically during such tumultuous periods. The United States and its allies criticised India for indirectly financing Russian oil purchases. Later, the Khalistani referendum is being held in numerous Anglosphere countries (the Five Eyes Alliance), endangering India's sovereignty. The USA, UK, Australia, Canada, and New Zealand all permit such gatherings under the pretext of "free speech." With the exception of an event in 2021, there is a notable Sikh diaspora in France. This demonstrates how well India and France get along.

## I. INTRODUCTION

India and France have long had cordial and close ties, and they have a strong and long-lasting Strategic Partnership (SP) that encompasses all facets of bilateral cooperation with a strategic component. India's first-ever Strategic Partnership, which was established on January 26, 1998, reflected the two nations' fundamental goal of strengthening their respective strategic independence through solid and improved bilateral collaboration. (eioparis.gov.in, n.d.) The three main pillars of this strategic cooperation—space, civil nuclear matters, and defence and security—now include a significant Indo-Pacific component. Maritime security, digitalisation, cyber security, advanced computing, counterterrorism, climate change, renewable and sustainable growth and development, and more have all been added to the cooperation in recent years. In terms of India-France relations, 2023 is a remarkable year with important turning points. (eioparis.gov.in, n.d.) The India-France Strategic Partnership celebrated its 25th anniversary. Among other things, the PM adopted a roadmap called "Horizon 2047" during his official visit to France as the Guest of Honour on July 13–14, charting the route for the next 25 years, which will coincide with the centennials of India's independence and the two

nations' diplomatic ties. A year since the event, the relations are still intact. (mea.gov.in, 2023)

## II. THE TALE OF CO-OPERATION

### A. Geo-Strategic

Recent years have seen a significant shift in US foreign policy, which has helped create an abrupt power vacuum in some of the world's most vulnerable regions. Examples like the departure of troops from Afghanistan, the above-mentioned pullout from the JCPOA, or even the policy paralysis the US is experiencing with its troop deployment in northern Syria have shocked the world. Many countries, like France and India, advocate for a more multipolar world rather than a new bipolar scenario involving the US and China as a result of these current situations and the growth of Chinese power globally. Given that both nations are important players on the global scene, India and France's quest for a multi polar world.

Similar to their predecessors, Modi and Macron have maintained a distance from bloc competition akin to that of the Cold War while cultivating close ties with major nations without being unduly reliant on any one of them. Compared to 70 years ago, both nations are now more integrated into collective defence or security frameworks; however, Modi's India is still officially hostile to joining a military alliance, and Macron frequently criticises NATO in a highly Gaullist way. (csis, n.d.)

Additionally, Modi and Macron both want to be "balance shapers," not followers. They support a multipolar international system, similar to that of Nehru and de Gaulle, which prevents any one state from dominating and gives Paris and New Delhi the chance to play a significant part in determining the course of world events. France and India both aim to create new, adaptable alliances to help them realise their goals and lessen their reliance on superpowers. (csis, 2024)

The two nations' connections with the US are complicated and frequently misinterpreted. Although they are conscious of their dependency on the US for their security and defence, they both hope to become somewhat independent from Washington policies. Therefore, proponents of strengthened transatlantic and Indo-Pacific ties frequently view critics of U.S. policies in Paris and Delhi as unappreciative. However, the latter overlook the United States' vested interest in having strong and independent allies in strategic areas, even at the expense of difficult diplomatic engagement and coordination. (csis, 2024)

The flourishing Franco-Indian relations have been usefully framed by the Indo-Pacific notion. Due to its military bases in the northern Indian Ocean, Djibouti, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), as well as its overseas territories in the southern Indian Ocean, France has a more direct stake in the stability of the Indian Ocean than the other Quad countries. The Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region, which was established in 2018, is the result of this successful bilateral collaboration. Dissonance can also result from respect for strategic autonomy, as seen in France's and India's stances on the conflict in Ukraine. France has persisted in providing Ukraine with military, financial, humanitarian, and political help. (csis, 2024)

India, an energy-poor developing nation, resisted pressure to cease buying inexpensive oil from its long-time ally, Russia, despite its quickly expanding relations with the US and Europe. Prime Minister Modi has frequently called for a peaceful settlement to the situation, even from the floor of the US Congress, and informed President Putin that the modern period is not one of violence in disguised attempts to criticise Russia. (csis, 2024) .In addition to engaging in strategic rivalry, the two nations aim to redefine multilateralism and establish themselves as leaders among the "middle powers." (csis, 2024)

The co-operation between the two countries is also seen in Africa where they are united against an assertive china. Since June 2017, France and India have been discussing Africa. December 2018 saw the release of the second edition. This year might see the third edition. In order to find a developmental agreement that considers African preferences, the conversation aims to create cooperative synergies between France and India. (Singh, 2021). The majority of the African Union's membership consists of twenty-

nine French-speaking African nations. French is spoken by around 100 million people throughout Africa. Although not always without issues, France's involvement with its former colonies is increasingly intense. France and India can work together to increase their influence on African development.

Their collaboration can reduce the expenses of business operations and development initiatives, offering competitive alternatives to China's increasing meddling. This can consider the two spouses' more liberal, democratic, and pluralistic qualities. Given that France addresses healthcare, education, professional training, and climate change, it is possible to align development agendas. These industries are given priority in India's extensive collaboration. (Singh, 2021). Though with recent military coups in erstwhile French colony reflect upon diminishing French control and hence the co-operation therein may not yield fruitful results. (Nantulya, n.d.)

France and India have both done a good job of maintaining their maritime alliance, particularly through naval interactions. India just finished the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium Maritime Exercise (IMEX-22), which was held in the Arabian Sea in the Indian state of Goa. Fifteen of the twenty-five-member countries of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) participated in the exercise. Notably, the French and Indian naval chiefs watched the drills. This must be viewed in the context of France's increasing interest in the Indian Ocean multilateral platforms. (Halder, 2022)

#### B. Security and Défense Co-operation

Given that defence has historically been the partnership's strongest pillar, it is not surprising that defence accords took central stage. France is Russia's second-largest arms supplier to India, and since Russia's military stockpile is being reduced as a result of the conflict in Ukraine, this cooperation is only expected to grow. (Malhotra, orfonline.org, 2023).

India and France have a solid defence alliance that is becoming more and more "Atmanirbharata." The High Committee on Defence Cooperation (at the secretary level) and the Annual Defence Dialogue (at the defence minister level) assess the two sides' defence cooperation. (eioparis.gov.in, n.d.)

India's "Make in India" campaign, which seeks to indigenise defence industry, has made France a crucial ally. Beyond arms sales, the two nations regularly

engage in institutional exchanges and joint military drills as part of their security cooperation. These profitable agreements are fantastic business for France, but it's also important to agree with India on security matters like Indo-Pacific stability. A significant portion of global trade travels through this region, where both nations are resident powers, and China's assertive tactics are concerning. (Malhotra, orfonline.org, 2023)

Both nations have sought to expand and deepen their collaboration as the intricacies of the global geopolitical order have become apparent. One of the first nations India inked a civil nuclear agreement with was France. Following the 1998 nuclear tests, Paris was also instrumental in reducing India's isolation inside the non-proliferation framework. In an indication of growing collaboration, France backs India's application to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group and for permanent membership in the UN Security Council. Climate change is a significant issue for both, and India has backed France in the Paris Agreement, demonstrating its strong commitment to reducing the effects of climate change. As part of their collaborative efforts to combat climate change, Paris and New Delhi launched International Solar Alliance 2015 (DUTTA, 2023)

Both nations have expressed their shared aim for an open, equitable, and free Indo-Pacific, which has further accelerated maritime security. Given that both nations have a comprehensive Indo-Pacific strategy that aims to address maritime security, regional cooperation, and climate change adaptation, India and France decided in September 2022 to establish an Indo-Pacific Trilateral Development Cooperation Fund to support innovative and sustainable solutions for nations in the region. To guarantee maritime domain awareness and security from Africa's east coast to the far Pacific, the two allies have joined forces with the United Arab Emirates to form a trilateral alliance. (DUTTA, 2023)

France and India have decided to collaborate on the development of defence equipment, such as submarines and helicopters, for the Indian military as well as for friendly nations. The administration stated in a statement that the agreement was made when French President Emmanuel Macron visited India, met with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and went to a state banquet held by President Draupadi Murmu. The leaders praised the establishment of maintenance,

repair, and overhaul services for leading-edge aviation propulsion (LEAP) engines in India by Safran (SAF.PA), a French company, as well as the addition of these services for Rafale engines and a cooperation with helicopters (Kumar, 2024)

During the COVID-19 pandemic in September 2020, a trilateral system involving France, Australia, and India was established. The trilateral arrangement was formally introduced in the India-France context during this conference of the three nations' foreign secretaries. A longer political rapprochement between the three nations, which developed concurrently with the Indo-Pacific diffusion in their strategic vocabulary, is also established by the summit. In this regard, Emmanuel Macron's May 2018 speech at Garden Island, Australia, revealed France's presidential-level understanding of the Indo-Pacific and included a call for a Paris-Delhi-Canberra Axis, which was deemed "absolutely key to frame the region and frame our common interests." (Malhotra, orfonline.org, 2023), though nothing significant was seen out of this trilateral.

### C. Strategic Autonomy

Despite sanctions from the US and other countries, France was the first Western nation to speak with India when it became a nuclear weapons state in 1998. France has historically maintained an independent stance towards India. India and France inked their first-ever Strategic Partnership that same year. This unique connection has persisted to the present day, dating back to a time when India's relations with the rest of the Western world were not very good. Potential causes of contention, such as divergent views on the Russia-Ukraine crisis, have been eliminated by the two nations' affinity and France's recognition of India's right and necessity to make its own decisions. (Malhotra, orfonline.org, 2023).

India and France, two powerful democracies in the globe, agree on a number of global issues, such as respect for the rule of law, strategic autonomy, and a multipolar world order. The way states engage with one another will determine the outcome of the ongoing "great game" in the current Indo-Pacific moment, which has many players and aspects. The Indo-Pacific's strategic narrative is now defined by China's constantly growing diplomatic, military, and economic involvement in the region. Although China is at the core of the region's geopolitical concerns, the

region is multipolar overall. Regional powers like France and India appear to have taken notice of the need to preserve regional security and stability, as seen by their similar approaches to intellectual property rights. (Mansi, 2022)

Recently when jet engine deal of India with USA came to a standstill, it is then France who came to help India. With the Emmanuel Macron administration prepared to discuss and support the construction of nuclear attack submarines and offer India a 100% technology transfer for 110 kilo-Newton thrust aircraft engines and fully functional underwater drones, the strategic defence partnership between France and India is poised to advance significantly. (Hindustan Times, n.d.)

In 2024 Macron was invited as chief guest to republic day in India, when US president had busy days working when invited to India. The symbolism of this event holds high importance. It shows that if asked France is ready to help and standby India in times of need. The 25th anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership was also celebrated during the visit. The visit was a huge success if one were to quickly scan the documents that were signed by both parties. The two released a variety of documents, such as the India-France Indo-Pacific Roadmap, a list of results, and Horizon 2047: 25th Anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership, Towards a Century of India-France Relations. (Rajgopalan, 2024) . In order to further bilateral collaboration over the next 25 years, which will commemorate the 100th anniversary of India's independence and the 50th anniversary of the strategic alliance between France and India, the two countries unveiled a roadmap called "Horizon 2047." The relationship will only get stronger as a result of this futuristic vision. (Malhotra, orfonline.org, 2023). A significant obstacle is their divergent views on strategic autonomy, but this can be resolved by emphasising a common dedication to a rules-based system. (Gill, 2024)

#### D. Energy and nuclear co-operation

India and France have also been collaborating on energy-related matters. The nations aim to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050 and 2070, respectively, but no later than that. Modi was among the first G20 nations to satisfy India's commitments under the Paris Agreement, and the country is currently collaborating with France to address the global climate change

concerns. also consider solar energy and hydropower as areas for collaboration and expansion, and they also fervently support nuclear energy as a sustainable substitute for fossil fuels. (Moyer, 2023) In India, the French corporation Engie is significantly involved in renewable energy projects, primarily solar ones. In western India's Jaitapur, Macron and Modi pledged increased collaboration on a nuclear power plant. Starting in 2018, the alliance will focus on small and advanced modular reactors, provide stax training, and encourage careers in the nuclear energy industry through exchanges and internships. The Jaitapur plant is expected to be the most potent in the world, able to supply 70 million Indian households with energy. (Moyer, 2023)

#### E. Space co-operation

For more than 50 years, India and France have had a long history of space cooperation between ISRO and the French space agency, the "Centre National d'Etudes Spatiales" (CNES). France continues to be a significant supplier of equipment and parts for the Indian space program. An agreement for cooperation in the combined Earth observation project TRISHNA, Maritime Domain Awareness (Short-Term plan), and Space Situational Awareness was reached by ISRO and CNES, along with a joint declaration for cooperation in future launch vehicle technologies. Arianespace, France has been the primary supplier of launch services for Indian geo-stationary satellites, even though ISRO's Polar Satellite Launch Vehicle (PSLV) has launched French satellites on a commercial basis. A Letter of Intent (LoI) for cooperation in commercial launch services was signed by Arianespace and NSIL. (eoiparis.gov.in, n.d.)

#### F. Counter terrorism

India and France have an excellent working relationship when it comes to combating terrorism in all of its manifestations, including through the UN. The next meeting of the Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism is planned for January 2024 in New Delhi, with the 15th meeting taking place in Paris on November 16, 2021. (eoiparis.gov.in, n.d.)

#### G. Culture and Tourism Cooperation

In Paris and other major French cities, the Embassy hosted cultural events and activities all year-round including performers from France and India. The year's high point was the Festival of India, "Namaste

France 2023," which took place at La Seine Musicale in Paris from July 6–9, 2023, and was organised by the Embassy of India in Paris with assistance from the Ministry of Culture, Government of India. In the presence of Mr. Piyush Goyal, Minister of Commerce & Industry, and his French counterpart, Mr. Olivier Becht, a Gala Dinner was held on April 11, 2023, for an invited audience of more than 600 people as part of the festival. 25 French lawmakers, more than 40 CEOs from France and India, 40 ambassadors, museum presidents, think tank heads, scholars, pundits, media representatives, and community leaders were among those invited. Additionally, India's diversity in performing arts and cuisine was showcased at the event. (eioparis.gov.in, n.d.)

### III. WAYFORWARD

India and France's cooperation possibilities for co-operation are great in upcoming years. To maintain the Indo-Pacific region open, secure, and inclusive, both nations should keep working together. Additionally, both nations ought to search for fresh opportunities for collaboration in regions such as Africa, Central Asia, and West Asia. The two countries should collaborate with like-minded states because they would be in a strong position to preserve multipolarity, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region, if they continued to work together.

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