

Unveiling the Roadmap to India-France Defence Ties: A Vision Beyond Legacy

MADHURI SUKHIJA

Delhi University

In the prevailing volatile geopolitical scenario, the manufacturing of defence equipment and procurement are two crucial areas, at best challenges, for empowering India and also to chart out its path for defence cooperation, keeping in mind quality, cost, amicability and the heft that such a cooperation will provide. Russia has been a steadfast partner as far as the supply of arms is concerned. There is a massive intake of arms imports from Russia and it has a distinct edge not only from the sheer volume of sales but also the affordable cost.

However, keeping in mind, the need for security equilibrium as a result of tensions emanating from Russia's close relationship with China, a staunch adversary of India, a turbulent neighborhood, the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific, are factors that have necessitated the need to diversify arms imports and bolster defence cooperation with certain powers. Building on interoperability goes without saying.

Besides Russia and the US, with which India has significant defense cooperation, France occupies a pre-eminent position. It has emerged as a key strategic defense partner and by far the closest one for India. How do we situate the strategic relationship between India and France, particularly in the field of defense and security, be it air power, marine sector and land? How best to optimize compatibilities and competencies to further enhance the defence cooperation. How significant is the defense cooperation in the prevailing global scenario? The paper documents a comprehensive matrix for the evolving defense ties between India and France and the fact that they continue to thrive.

Keywords: Defence, Cooperation, India, France, Strengthening, Vision.

Given the current global scenario, India's growing foreign policy assertiveness and its expanding global footprint in the world, India's defence strategy has to be commensurate with its national interests. In the last decade or so, there has been a significant shift in India's foreign policy from multi balancing to multi alignment. BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa bloc), SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue comprising four countries: the United States, Australia, India, and Japan) and India's G20 Presidency, are just a few examples. Talking of Europe, the stability of Europe and its prosperity as well, is of immense importance to us. Europe is a major trade and investment partner, a source of technology and to top it all,

a liberal democracy. However, in the area of defence, it is France which is a key defence partner. France became the first foreign country invited by India to participate in the Republic Day celebration in 2016 (Embassy of India in Paris, 2018). The last couple of years have seen India make significant strides towards increasing defence cooperation with France. Ever Since President Macron assumed office in 2017, Prime Minister Modi visited France several times on the President's invitation.

Just last year, in July 2023, Prime Minister Modi was invited as Guest of Honour at the French National Day, during which both the leaders spelt out 'Horizon 2047'(Vision for India-France Strategic Partnership, which includes cooperation in defence, space, nuclear energy, climate change and people-to-people ties). To elaborate further, this was basically a roadmap focusing on an ambitious course for India-France bilateral relationship and moving towards 2047, the centenary year of India's independence and the golden jubilee of India-France ties. The Indian Prime Minister was bestowed with the highest civilian honour, 'Grand Cross' of the Legion of Honor by the French President, Emmanuel Macron. (Rao, 2024). (Manohar Parrikar IDSA) This visit was important as it marked the 25th anniversary of India- France strategic partnership. Carrying the legacy forward, Prime Minister Modi invited President Macron as the Chief Guest at India's 75th Republic Day, this year. (Roy, 2024)

France has emerged as India's close strategic partner and remains the second largest supplier of arms to India, Russia being the first. However, the prolonged Russia-Ukraine war has exhausted Russia of its military resources and equipment and robbed it of its military prowess. Components used in advanced Russian military equipment like computer chips and semiconductors have suffered a setback. Research trends indicate that the trend indicator values (SIPRI, Stockholm International Peace Research Institute Arms Transfers Database) of India's imports from non-Russian sources have been increasing in the last few years especially from America, Israel, South Korea and Europe.

EU member states have increased their naval presence in the Indo-Pacific and have worked together jointly with India on maritime security through efforts such as Operation Atalanta, a counter-piracy mission in the western Indian Ocean. (Laskar, 2023). The point that needs to be made right at the start is that, India does not have defence relations with Europe as such, it has them with individual European countries. (Sibal, 2012) Amongst the European states, France has an unparalleled edge and it has emerged as India's key defence partner. The core of its foreign policy has been national identity and strategic independence.

The paper aims to highlight the evolving relationship between India and France in the trilateral domains of air, marine and land and the reason why the Indo-pacific is emerging as a strategic area of concern. France appreciates India's need for pursuing 'Make in India Initiative' and its defence policy decisions align with India's interests. The Economic angle is an important part of the relationship and India provides just that, a vast defence market for France, in terms of sale of equipment. The relationship between both is growing from strength to strength. How best to optimize the strengths and the deep seated trust and commonalities that France and India share, to further enhance the defence cooperation, is an important objective

of this paper.

A far as data and methods are concerned, the research work in question has relied on various qualitative data to find out the prime objective of unveiling the road map to India-France defence ties. Primary and secondary data has been collected from various think tanks, embassies-published reports, ministries published reports, arms transfer data base, online policy platforms, as well as newspaper editorial articles, published journal articles and books. Besides, this research work also takes into account military-related documents, defence dialogues between governments and online media discussions reflecting upon the partnership between India and France

Tracing the trajectory of India's defence ties with France

The path to strategic relations between India and France had its origin in the Cold War itself. Unlike the United States, France pivoted towards India during the 1971 Indo-Pakistan War over Bangladesh. (Pollock, 2020) France and India have come a long way and their interests converge in diverse domains of defense - blue economy, space, nuclear, maritime security and military exercises, through a strong institutional mechanism. France has been an important defence partner, be it delivery of Rafale fighter jets and the manufacturing of Scorpene Class submarines. Both have jointly launched the International solar alliance. In space cooperation, France has helped India to enhance its space capability to launch satellites. Unlike other countries, France does not adopt a rigid stance with arms exports regulations. Besides, both share common interests in the Indo-Pacific. (Sachdeva, 2024). Sharing common interests with France gives India the reason for interoperability in the Indian ocean and to expand its footprint in the Indian ocean as well.

Defence statistics figures point out that India was the world's largest buyer of arms in 2018-22 and this trend has continued since 2008. (Wezeman & Wezeman, 2023)

In 2021, India's military spending amounted to \$76.6 billion. Escalating border disputes with China and India, coupled with a series of geo-political factors, have been a major contributing factor. (The Indian Express, 2022) During the first few years of the Indian Republic, France was among India's first defence partners for both army and air force.

In the 1950's India acquired defence equipment from France not only Toofan/Ouragan and Mystere aircraft, but also air to surface and anti-tank missiles. (Sibal, 2012) In the sixties and seventies, India went in for licensed production of French Alouette helicopters and Lama helicopters for high-altitude operations. The eighties (1982) saw India sign a military agreement to procure 40 Mirage aircraft from France. (Sibal, 2012).

The 'Strategic Partnership' between the two commenced in 1998. India has established more than 35 strategic partnerships. France was the first country with which India signed a strategic partnership in January 1998. (Sachdeva, 2024).

This was followed by India conducting the Pokhran II nuclear tests(1998) which prompted the US to impose sanctions against India. When India was declared a nuclear *pariah*, it was France that supported India and refrained from imposing any sanctions. French President Jacques Chirac wanted to rectify India's exclusion

from the international nuclear order and this found favour with the Indian government. (Ministry of External Affairs, 1998). In 2008, following the NSG(The Nuclear Suppliers Group) waiver, India was allowed to resume civilian nuclear commerce and France was the first country to sign a civil nuclear pact with India. (SARKAR, 2015). 2015 was a historic year, as it saw the launching of the International Solar Alliance comprising a membership of 121 countries. The credit for this initiative goes to France and India. India's procurement of 36 Rafale fighter jets from France(September 2016) and the manufacture of 6 scorpene class submarines in collaboration with France, has further deepened the defence partnership between both the powers. (Malhotra, 2023)

India - France and some noteworthy initiatives.

Logistics Agreement: 2018 (Joint Exercises)

The holding of regular joint exercises between their navies (Varuna), armies (Shakti), air force (Garuda), and special forces (Shakti), have become a regular feature. In 2018, the armed forces of both India and France entered into a reciprocal logistics support agreement, which grants permission to them to access each other's military bases for refueling and replenishment during joint exercises and joint training. (The Statesman, 2018)

Defence Dialogue & Maritime Dialogue: 2019

The annual defence dialogue at the ministerial level was held in 2019, which would provide strategic guidance to India- France defence cooperation. In January of the same year, both the countries launched a bilateral maritime security dialogue incorporating issues such as freedom of navigation, maritime domain awareness, anti-piracy operations, and capacity building. (Pandey, 2019)

Cybersecurity Working Group: 2019

In the field of cybersecurity, a joint working group was established to enhance cooperation on cyber resilience, cybercrime prevention, digital governance and data protection. Besides, space and nuclear energy are also important areas where France and India collaborate. Scorpene submarines, the Rafale jets, and the ISRO-CNES satellite constellation are flagship projects, where India has found a trustworthy partner in France. Indigenizing defence production is an important agenda for the Indian Government. France has emerged as a reliable partner towards fulfilling India's 'Make in India' initiative.

Important dimensions to the Defence Dynamics between India and France

1. Indo-Pacific. Security of the Indian Ocean region.
2. Strategic Autonomy
3. Horizon 2047 (Framework Document of India- France cooperation till 2047)

Indo-Pacific. Security of the Indian Ocean region. In 2007, Australia, India, Japan, and the United States introduced the Indo-Pacific concept (Choong, 2019). The then US President, Barack Obama pronounced his plans towards the "Indo-

Pacific” region and spelt out his policy towards strategically connecting the Pacific and Indian Oceans as a new concept of an “Indo-Pacific” region instead of the Asia-Pacific region (Scott, 2018). The Indo-Pacific region is a crucial one for very many reasons. From the point of view of geoeconomics and geopolitics contestation, this region has very many stakeholders. As far as global GDP is concerned, it accounts for sixty percent of the GDP and the world’s three major economies are involved in the Indo-Pacific region, i.e., the USA, Japan and China. Safe Sea Lines of Communication (SLOC) in the IPR are important to carry out economic and trade activities and establish a rule based order. (Bharti & Singh, 2023).

An important question that arises is why the (IPR) Indo-Pacific region is important **for** both India and France? Monetary benefits apart, for France getting together with India on security issues and stability in the Indo-Pacific region, is crucial. India and France being resident powers in this region have important stakes. Both view the Indo-Pacific region as a free, open, inclusive area which was articulated in a strategy document released in 2021. France was the first European country to put forth its Indo-Pacific strategy in 2018. (Iyer, 2023)

France maintains territories in both the Indian Ocean (the islands of Mayotte and Réunion, the Scattered Islands, and the French Southern and Antarctic Territories) and the Pacific Ocean (New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna and French Polynesia Island). It has a significant military presence totaling up to 8,000 personnel in the region as 1.5 million citizens are living in these territories and more than 90% of its large exclusive economic zone (9 million square kilometers) are located in the two oceans. India occupies a central position in the Indo-Pacific, given its coastline of 7,500 kms, 1380 islands and two million sq. km of Exclusive Economic Zone. It plays a pivotal role for the peace, security and prosperity of the region. (Pajon, 2023). A major portion of the world’s trade routes pass through this region and China’s aggressive postures have been frustrating. Protecting the country’s sovereign interests and establishing stability in the Indo-Pacific coupled are significant components of France’s policy-making. To carry out development projects in the region, India and France have launched an Indo-Pacific Trilateral Development Cooperation Fund in 2022. (Malhotra, 2023)

France and India also have common interests, with regard to the emerging challenges in the Indian ocean region be it maritime traffic security challenged by threats of terrorism and piracy, especially in the Horn of Africa. Besides, freedom of navigation and overflight, trafficking (including in weapons of mass destruction), dealing with climate change and its repercussions on security, and above all respect for international law by all States, are shared concerns. France, a State of the Indian Ocean rim, is an important player in this region.

Strategic Autonomy vis-à-vis France: France has consistently viewed India through the lens of strategic autonomy. For both France and India ‘strategic autonomy’ (‘free thinking on global issues’) is a concept that forms an important component of their foreign Policy. To put it simply, it is the ability of a state to pursue its national interests and shape its foreign policy without being hampered by other states. France certainly does not support isolation or unilateralism. However, it is forthright about having control over its decisions and actions with regard to defence and security. Many instances prove that

France does not cave in under pressure and disagreements. This was evident after the nuclear tests were conducted by India in 1998, and the US sanctions that were imposed on India. France acted otherwise and signed its first ever Strategic Partnership with India in the same year (Ministry of External Affairs, 1998). In the context of Defence acquisitions- the French Ambassador to India alluded to France not being constrained by the US ITAR (International Traffic in Arms Regulations), as is the case with many other western countries. (Ministry of External Affairs, 1998). The bond has stood the test of time and France recognizes India's right and need to exercise its own choices. Back in fifties and sixties, the French struggle for greater say in the NATO vis a vis US and UK is well known. France has exercised control over its own nuclear assets, despite being part of the NATO. Two instances, deserve mention, France withdrew its Ambassador from the US and Australia, post AUKUS (A trilateral security partnership for the Indo-Pacific, between Australia, the UK and the US formed in 2021). (Willsher, 2021) Besides, in April 2023, during the visit of President Macron to China, he made it amply clear that France would not get influenced in any way with the US – China conflict over Taiwan, and it would not toe the US line.

Strategic Autonomy vis-à-vis India: India's, self-assured and independent foreign policy is reflected in the way it straddles across alignments, regional coalitions, SCO and the BRICS on the one side and the G-20 and the Quad on the other. In the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, India has effectively demonstrated its strategic autonomy by not openly criticizing Russia. On several occasions, India's decision to abstain from voting at the UN Security Council against Russia's war on Ukraine, stems from the need to safeguard its own national economic and security interests. India continues to buy large quantities of oil from Russia to fulfill its domestic needs. At the same time it becomes imperative to mention that in the context of the Russia-Ukraine war, Prime Minister Modi, when talking to the global media, did not shy away from conveying to the Russian President, Vladimir Putin, that the current era, is not an era of war. (Sajjanhar, 2023). India's approach is one of a balancing strategy in West Asia, as well. In the recent Arab-Israel conflict, while India has been critical of the terrorist attack on Israel that took place on the 7th of October 2023, it supports a two-state solution to resolve Israel-Palestine conflict. (Jaishankar, 2024). These, however are just few of the instances.

Horizon 2047: Simply put Horizon 2047 is an overarching statement guiding India- France relations towards 2047. This was the title of the Joint Statement issued at the end of Prime Minister Modi's visit to France in July 2023 and it has significant aspects relating to defence and security. (Ministry of External Affairs. Government of India, 2023)

Horizon 2047 has three significant parts related to 'Partnership for security and sovereignty', 'Partnership for the planet' and 'Partnership for the people.'

Partnership for Security and Sovereignty: India and France have exemplary defense and security cooperation to achieve the long term goal of peace and prosperity. Enhancing strategic partnerships has become compelling today and formation of alliances is a natural corollary to ward off external threats. Alliance theory is understood as the formal association of two or more countries for the

utilization of the military to keep threats at bay and address global challenges. (Snyder, 2007; Wilkins, 2019, p. 13) Partnership for security and sovereignty entails the building upon not only defence industrial cooperation but also sovereign defence capability together and supporting India's efforts at achieving self sufficiency and 'self-reliance. France has contributed immensely in the military modernization of India and supplied it with the state of the art infrastructure. (Sinha, 2023).

In the aeronautical domain, contract has been concluded between Safran Helicopter Engines and HAL(Hindustan Aeronautics Limited) for transfer of technology for forging and castings of Shakti engines in India. (Siddiqui, 2023)Ensuring security and safeguarding economic interests in the Indo-Pacific Partnership with France helps to expand India's foot print in the Indian Ocean and secure our interests – Reunion Islands, French territories of Caledonia(East of Australia) and French Polynesia(NE of New Zealand),the base at Djibouti and presence in UAE. (Pajon, 2023)Establishing Indo-Pacific Triangular Development cooperation (IPTDC) fund to support innovations and start-ups from third countries. Of course, the stated emphasis has been on climate and Sustainable Development Goals (SDG's). (Malhotra, 2023)Cooperation in Space - an important component of Strategic Partnership. India- France partnership in Space programme goes back to 1964 and it is being further deepened to implement the 2018 Joint Vision for Space. A strategic space dialogue was initiated in Paris on 26th of June, 2023. (Business Standard, 2023)

A constellation of eight to ten satellites for maritime surveillance in the Indian Ocean is in the pipeline. In a positive move to monitor and mitigate climate change, the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) is collaborating with the French Space Agency 'CNES' on a new satellite mission called 'Trishna', the launch for which is expected in 2025 (India Today Science Desk, 2024)

Highlights of Prime Minister Modi's visit to France in July, 2023.

The Indian government confirmed it's plans to develop seven squadrons of the AMCA (Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft). France's involvement is notable as it has offered a 100% ToT (Transfer of Technology) for the AMCA engines. (Rao, 2024). (Manohar Parrikar IDSA) In 2023, India entered negotiations with France for the purchase of 26 Rafale Marine jets from Dassault Aviation (France), for deployment on its aircraft carrier, INS Vikrant. (Defence Security Asia, 2024)DRDO (India's Defense Research and Development Organization) entered into an important agreement with France's Naval Group to enhance the capabilities of the Kalvari Class submarines, which are semblances of the French Scorpene class submarines constructed in India under the P75- Kalvari program. (Rao, 2024). (Manohar Parrikar IDSA). Besides, the Ministry of Defence has placed the order for three additional Kalvari class Scorpene submarines, to be built at Mumbai's Mazagon Dockyards, as a follow up of the P 75 programme. (The Economic Times, 2023)Indo-French military cooperation is also being extended into the domain of strategic shipbuilding. & submarines. In partnership with French shipbuilder Naval Group, the defence electronics giant Thales is competing to supply the Indian Navy with underwater systems. This would arm India's six Scorpene-class submarines. Setting up of MRO(Manufacture, Repair,

Overhaul) facilities by Safran (Safran is a French multinational aerospace and defence corporation that designs, develops and manufactures aircraft engines, helicopter engine and, spacecraft propulsion systems) for their Leap engines, being used in India. India's Tata Group and France's Airbus have signed an agreement to manufacture civilian helicopters together. (Times of India, 2023) Safran aerospace would provide complete Transfer of technology for 'SHAKTI IHI' Engines to Hindustan Aeronautics limited (HAL). This development aligns with India's vision of self-reliance in defence manufacturing and reducing its dependence on foreign suppliers. The shakti engines have already been deployed in 300 Indian helicopters. (Times of India, 2023)

Future Perspectives & Challenges

India and France have a lot of commonalities but at the end of the day France is a part of the western Fraternity. It can take an autonomous stand on some issues but it cannot completely go on a path of its own. It has to manage its relationship with India within the framework of its existing partnership with the west and Europe, be it security partnerships or economic partnerships. Synchronizing quality with affordable cost is a daunting challenge. At the same time, reliability, technological expertise and the strategic heft that France provides is an important factor to consider. India's maritime security challenges are grave. India and France could do with greater collaboration in enhancing maritime surveillance capabilities, aligning their infrastructure, connectivity and development projects together. In the given volatile international situation, it may be better for France to recalibrate its Indo-Pacific posture and graduate from being a balancing power towards a pragmatic and constructive stakeholder. How France is going to position itself between the two powers while engaging with other regional countries is difficult to say. Equally challenging is working towards a stable Indo-Pacific and thereby focusing on promoting multipolarity and cooperation in the maritime domain. France is a part of the EU and its views on Russia- Ukraine war and China can differ from India and may impact India-France ties. Further, on international political issues, Indian and French perceptions also differ. For example, France has been an avid supporter of Ukraine and imposed sanctions on Russia after its invasion of Ukraine. India's historical dependence on Russia for its defence needs and the fact that it has maintained a neutral stance on Russia's actions in Crimea and Ukraine cannot be overlooked. At the same time, it would not be incorrect to say that the US and Europe have somewhat softened their stand to our divergent perspectives on Ukraine. In case of any threat from a belligerent China, France will certainly not enter into a strategic partnership with India. It does not have the global strategic heft or the military prowess to expand India's capability in the context of China, or to balance out China. On the economic front, France shares major commercial relationship with China. China is a negotiating partner and an economic competitor and France has to wisely balance interests with India and China. France has to keep in mind, its commercial interests with China. During Macron's visit, Airbus signed a purchase agreement for 160 commercial aircraft with a Chinese partner. "The deals show our confidence in China's investment environment, as China's aviation industry is very efficient, reliable and competitive," said Airbus CEO Guillaume Faury. (Huaxia, 2023). Since 2021, the

French approach to 'strategic autonomy' does not come easy as there are significant challenges. For one, the formation of the AUKUS (defense pact between Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States), the ever increasing aggressive postures by China accompanied by the Sino-U.S. rivalry, and the repercussions of the war in Ukraine have proved to be challenging.

(Pajon, 2023)

Important Questions to ponder

Can France be an alternative source of defence acquisition and arms procurement to Russia or to the US?

As far as defense procurement is concerned, Russia tops the list, accounting for 45 percent of total Indian arms imports, followed by France (29 percent) and the United States (11 percent). (Wezeman & Wezeman, 2023). However, it becomes imperative to mention that Russian Arms exports have reduced from about 25-26% in 2010-11 to 16% in 2018-22, while the French exports have increased from about 7.1 percent in 2013-2017 to 11-12% in 2018-22. (Boffey, 2023). By the end of 2022, Russia had 84 pending deliveries of combat aircraft and helicopters. The invasion has put limitations on its arms exports. For Russia, prioritizing production of arms for its own military, rather than exports, goes without saying.

According to the statistics mentioned in SIPRI Report 2018-22, published in March 2023, France's order book has much higher orders than Russia and is in a better position (Boffey, 2023). France has 210 combat aircraft orders, as against 84 pending orders with Russia, 21 warships as against 5 on order with Russia, 552 Armoured vehicles other than tanks, as against 55 orders with Russia, 76 Artillery guns as against NIL on order with Russia. Russia however has about 555 tanks on order book with none from France. France is a viable alternative option, but both France and Russia have their own specifics and significance and considering one as a substitute for another would not be fair. They complement each other. Inter say weightage of compliment varies from situation to situation and field to field. In aircraft, submarines, the French maybe better but in tanks and land warfare, nuclear warfare, Russians maybe better. Defence cooperation depends on trust and reliability. While most western countries toe the US line in imposing sanctions or denying trade, France is different and can be expected to act independently. The aspect of arms availability and the strategic benefits accruing there of, would need to be optimally balanced.

How is India important for France?

Other than defense and space, large areas of cooperation have developed in the predominant sector of investment and trade by France and India (Racine, 2016a).. Investments from France have increased rapidly since 2000 in India and many factories have been established pertaining to railways, agribusiness, defense, space, and other projects (Embassy of India in France & Principality of Monaco, 2022).

France has a major interest in the Indian defence market. Aircrafts, submarines miniature nuclear reactors, cooperation in space and more. India provides a vast defence market for France, in terms of sale of equipment. India's

need for advanced strategic technology also makes it rather an attractive prospect for France. Safran is looking in a big way in cooperating in engine technology and the Airbus of France is looking at building a helicopter with Tata Advanced system. A large number of helicopters have French origin engines. Rachita and Chetak helicopters are important examples.

(Singh, 2022). Even the Leap engines(France) can undertake repair in India as MRO facilities have been provided in India.

Major defence purchases are in the pipeline. India has already purchased 36 Rafales from France. Now of course ,26 marine version of the Rafales for the Indian craft carrier, 3 more submarines and miniature nuclear reactors, will add up to our defence purchases from France. (Roy, 2023). Huge market and significant monetary benefits that India provides have prompted significant development projects on the part of France. More purchases by India will lead to greater collaboration

France sees India as an important partner in the Indo-Pacific for maintaining security and stability in the Indian region. India and France being resident powers in this region have important stakes. For France to maintain its exclusive economic zone EEZ (90 percent) is important. Besides, maintaining the security of the sea lanes of communication and also warding off China's assertive actions, matter to both.

The French pride themselves for strategic autonomy by having multilateral partnerships with countries like India and Australia They would not like to play second fiddle to the Americans. They maintain their own relationships and consider India as their interface with the Global South.

Can we see France becoming a member of the expanded Quad in near future ?

National Interests surpass all else. The chances of France joining the Quad or initiation of an India- US – France trilateral are quite bleak. France would want its relationship with India, to stand on its own rationale rather than be considered an extension of India-US relationship. One cannot help but mention that in 2018, India and France came together in adopting a 'Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region'. (Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2018) This relationship can thrive on an independent but parallel track, to the India-US defence and security relationship.

Key Takeaways from French President Macrons visit as the Chief Guest for India's Republic Day Parade

A comprehensive joint statement complimented with nine agreements marked the visit. (Ministry of External Affairs (MEA). Optimizing compatibilities and competencies to strengthen the defence cooperation further featured in the adoption of a defence industrial roadmap. Future collaboration in co-designing, co-development and co-production of military hardware. Both India and France agreed to work on a range of bilateral, regional and institutional initiatives, especially in the Indian Ocean Region and building on the joint surveillance missions carried out from the French island territory of La Reunion in 2020 and 2022. (Ministry of External Affairs, 2024) Using India as a base for the manufacture and export of defense equipment for friendly countries in the

region. Building defence supply chains between India and France to not only meet their own needs, but also be a useful contributor in the security partnership of other countries. France would also support India in developing fighter aircraft engines, nuclear attack submarines and underwater drones, all locally made. (Gupta, 2024) Both sides signed an agreement on space partnership as well as an MOU on coordinating satellite launches. (Haider, 2024)

Conclusion

India- France Defence Ties: Vision Beyond Legacy

At a meeting in September 2022, Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and Minister for Europe and Foreign Affairs of France, Catherine Colonna had jointly reaffirmed that they valued the Indo-French strategic cooperation and would optimize it to deal with global challenges. India's External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had further pointed out 'As far as our relations with France are concerned, you are all aware that this is a strategic partnership. But perhaps even that term does not entirely capture how close and strong our ties have become in recent years' (Business Standard, 2022).

France has been an all weather friend, persistent in backing India's demand for permanent membership in the UN Security Council. As a member of P-5, France's support is strategically significant for us. Both countries stand in favour of strengthening multilateral institutions by making them more representative and accountable. On organisations like the Financial Action Task Force (FATF), both countries share the same views. Counter-terrorism cooperation has been an important agenda for India and France. France has been supportive of India's approach towards counter terrorism in Kashmir and supports the fact that the abrogation of Article 370 was India's internal affair. The joint statement issued during Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Paris in 2023, in fact, highlighted the "shared values, belief in sovereignty and strategic autonomy, an unwavering commitment to the U.N. Charter, an abiding faith in multilateralism, and a common quest for a stable multipolar world." (Rajagopalan, 2023) Rafale deal apart, France has given a new dimension to defence cooperation with India by offering to provide India with the know-how to make nuclear submarines, with a 'Make in India' element.

On the sidelines of the 50th G7 summit held from the 13th to the 15th of June 2024, in the city of Fasano in Apulia, Italy, the leaders reviewed bilateral relations, focusing on the 'Horizon 2047' (Bigg, 2024). Enhancing cooperation in the field of defence, nuclear, space and artificial intelligence (AI) featured prominently. The two nations are jointly developing a combat aircraft engine under the "Horizon 2047" roadmap, a project implemented by France's Safran and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). Both the leaders renewed their faith and trust in their strategic partnership that has brought the two nations closer. India has found a natural ally in France. Its position as a middle power with significant defence prowess, technological expertise and geographical and geopolitical clout in the Indian Ocean, is of immense significance. Fortunately, for India, France has just the right mix, be it its commitment to liberal democracy, strategic autonomy, a resident power in

the Indian ocean, respect for International Law, a transition towards a multipolar order, valuing multilateral groupings and institutions and thus fits perfectly as India's preeminent defense partner.

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