

INDO-FRENCH RELATIONS: HORIZON 2047 AND NEW AREAS OF COOPERATION

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ABSTRACT

Over the past 25 years, India and France, two countries with similar goals and ideals, have developed a solid and long-lasting partnership. They started a spectacular partnership in 1998, which included a convergence of ideas on world matters in addition to a strong bilateral relationship. This was the start of a strategic journey. The bilateral relationship's past is distinguished by a history of nuclear cooperation, a common goal of strategic autonomy, France's measured response to India's 1998 nuclear tests, and its unwavering support for the expansion of the UN Security Council. The strategic alliance that emerged after 1998 prioritizes space and defense agreements, but trade and investment must also be increased. Although there are differences in opinion on some global issues and negotiations on sensitive technologies move slowly, there is a bipartisan consensus in both countries about the importance of building a relationship that is regarded as truly significant, even though it is not at the top of their respective foreign policy agendas. This is in addition to the important role that individual leaders play in shaping policy. Notably, the India-France connection goes beyond economics to include collaboration in historically important fields like aerospace, defense, and space as well as nascent industries like smart cities and allied infrastructure. The study makes the case that ties between France and India are about to soar to even higher levels. The alliance between France, a significant European power, and India, the largest democracy in the world, has significant weight in international affairs and provides a forum for discussion of local and global issues. Both nations understand how critical it is to build on this collaboration going forward, seeing it as a model for upholding regional peace and opening doors for ground-breaking developments in a number of globally significant fields.

KEYWORDS: Spectacular Partnership, Ground-Breaking Developments, Allied Infrastructure.

Introduction

Over the years, the relationship between France and India has only grown stronger, truly flourishing in the last five years. It's like their friendship has deep roots, going all the way back to 1947 when they first decided to be diplomatic buddies. The sight of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at Paris's Bastille Day celebrations in 2023 wasn't just a festive outing; it was a powerful gesture of unity between the two nations. Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron had a good chat about everything from defense to space and green energy, showing how wide-ranging their partnership is. And in January 2024, when Macron made his appearance as the special guest at India's Republic Day, it was clear: this friendship is levelling up. In a world where alliances matter more than ever, their growing partnership is a beacon of strategic cooperation.

"To mark the 25th anniversary of the Indo-French partnership, both countries agree to adopt a roadmap to set the course for the bilateral relationship up to 2047, which will celebrate the centenary of India's independence, the centenary of the diplomatic relations between the two countries and 50 years of the strategic partnership." [1] "India and France intend to work together in the interest of international peace and stability and reaffirm their commitment to a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific and beyond". [2]

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France holds a distinctive position in India's tactical thinking. It is seen as a country that has stood by India through thick and thin — in 1998 when India went nuclear, its support to India on Jammu and Kashmir, its advocacy of India's claim to permanent membership of the UN Security Council, standing with India to counter Pakistan-sponsored terrorism or bolstering India's capabilities against China.[3]

Strategic Partnership

India and France's diplomatic relationship, characterized by regular high-level political exchanges, has significantly bolstered bilateral ties and expanded collaborative opportunities. This engagement commenced notably with Macron's visitation to India in March 2018, marking a pivotal moment with the signing of multiple agreements across defense, nuclear energy, and space cooperation. The relationship further deepened with the Indian leader Modi's sojourn to France during the Summit of G7 countries in August 2019, which underscored the strategic partnership between the two nations. The essence of this partnership lies in mutual trust and understanding, fostering increased cooperation on regional and global issues. The collaboration extends beyond traditional domains, venturing into defense, space, and civil nuclear areas, which are deemed the strategic partnership's principal pillars. Additionally, both countries are exploring new avenues for combined effort, including critical aspects of securing the Indo-Pacific maritime zone, digitalization, cybersecurity, counterterrorism, renewables, and sustainable development. The alignment of India and France on various regional and global issues showcases a high degree of convergence in their international strategies. The depth of this strategic relationship is demonstrated by France's unwavering support for India's permanent membership in the UN Security Council, its endorsement of India's admission to the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), and its sponsorship of India's application to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG). Furthermore, the benefits that both countries gain from this collaboration are exemplified by India's crucial role in facilitating France's membership in the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and France's support for India's observer position in the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC).

France and India have vowed to cooperate in the UN's passage of the Comprehensive Convention on International Terrorism (CCIT) and have repeatedly denounced terrorism. France firmly backed India after the Pulwama assault in February 2019 and designated Hafiz Saeed, a "global terrorist" living in Pakistan, as such. France supported India's requests to block attempts by Pakistan to enlist Indian citizens under the UNSC 1267 sanctions Committee. India and France coordinate their exchanges as part of the Joint Working Group (JWG) on Counter terrorism.[3]

Economic Cooperation

The economic relationship between India and France has been blossoming, showing a robust growth trajectory in the recent past. By 2020, their bilateral trade hit a new high, reaching around 11 billion euros, showcasing France as one of India's key trading allies within the European Union. Their economic camaraderie spans across vital sectors like defense, aerospace, renewable energy, smart cities, and infrastructure development. French enterprises have not just been onlookers but active participants in India's growth story, contributing to flagship initiatives undertaken by the present Indian government. Moreover, the French Development Agency has played a significant role, backing sustainable development projects across India with financial support. Diving into the numbers, the trade dynamics between these two nations have remained quite resilient, with figures hovering between 11 to 13 billion euros over the last five years, culminating in FY 2022-23. This period saw trade volumes surpassing the 13-billion-euro mark for the first time, evidencing a significant uptick in India's exports which soared beyond 7 billion euros. A closer look at the export trajectory from India to France reveals a compelling growth story, with exports escalating from 5.23 billion euros in 2018-19 to 7.61 billion euros in 2022-23. This remarkable growth, averaging 45.5% over the period, albeit with some fluctuations due to the COVID-19 pandemic, underscores the dynamic nature of this bilateral trade relationship. "France's investment footprint in India is equally impressive, ranking as the 11th largest foreign investor with cumulative investments amounting to USD 10.49 billion from April 2000 to December 2022, further solidifying the economic bonds between these two nations." [4] "India's imports from France, on other hand have decreased in the last 5 years from \$6.66 bn. in 2018-19 to \$5.77 bn. in 2022-23, thereby reversing the trade balance in the favour of India." [5]

In a landmark visit by French President Emmanuel Macron to India in February 2023, the two countries inked several impactful agreements. These deals spanned a wide array of sectors, including cutting-edge technology, finance, renewable energy, and initiatives for sustainable growth, setting the

stage for deeper cooperation and broader avenues for trade and investment. France not only showed enthusiasm for India's indigenous initiatives like Make in India (Mil), Digital India (DI) and *Atmanirbhar Bharat* but also pledged its support, signalling a leap towards enhanced economic ties. This move marked a significant stride in fostering a robust partnership, nurturing mutual interests, and paving the way for future collaborations. During the twoday state visit of Macron to India in January 2024, a number of key announcements were made like to "declare 2026 as the India France Year of Innovation, operationalization of UPI at the Eiffel Tower, the establishment of India's Consulate in Marseille and French Bureau de France in Hyderabad".[5]

Defense and Security Cooperation

The partnership between India and France in defense and security is nothing short of a powerful alliance. Picture two old friends, each bringing their strengths to the table, to protect and empower each other. When India signed the deal to acquire 36 Rafale fighter jets from France in September 2016, it wasn't just about adding aircraft to its fleet. It was about deepening a trust that spanned decades, a move that significantly amped up India's defense capabilities. These two nations haven't just stopped at equipment deals. They've taken to the high seas together, with joint naval exercises in the Indian Ocean that have boosted their maritime security cooperation to new levels. Through these exercises, they've honed their skills in maritime security and counter-piracy operations, showcasing a seamless blend of strategy and strength. But their partnership is multifaceted, extending into intelligence sharing and counter-terrorism efforts. They've stood shoulder to shoulder, sharing crucial intelligence, and jointly tackling the menace of terrorism. The year 2022-23 marked a peak in their collaboration, with the completion of the Rafale jet deliveries and continued joint military exercises, underscoring their commitment to each other's security. The essence of this Indo-French partnership transcends mere military cooperation; it's a shared vision for stability in the Indo-Pacific region. Both nations advocate for an "inclusive" approach, aiming to maintain a balance of power amidst the rising tensions between global superpowers. They are united in their desire for autonomy, seeking to navigate the complexities of the Indo-Pacific without overly relying on other nations while addressing the challenges posed by assertive powers. It's a partnership that not only strengthens their defense capabilities but also contributes to a balanced and secure Indo-Pacific region, showcasing their commitment to a peaceful and stable global order.

"France's involvement in the Indo-Pacific arises out of necessity to preserve a close relationship with the United States, while also acknowledging and acting upon threats presented by Beijing".[6]

In terms of Trilateral Cooperation, both countries are committed to revitalizing their trilateral cooperation with Australia, UAE and exploring new trilateral partnerships in the region.

Space and Nuclear Energy Cooperation

India and France's collaboration in space and nuclear energy highlights a partnership that's literally out of this world! Together, ISRO and CNES are pushing the boundaries of space exploration, launching satellites and embarking on missions like Trishna, aimed at keeping an eye on climate change and water resources from the skies. On the ground, the energy story is just as compelling. French powerhouses like EDF and AREVA are key players in India's nuclear energy scene, helping to build nuclear power plants. It's a dynamic alliance, blending the high-tech realms of space with the critical quest for sustainable energy on Earth.

An ambitious and unprecedented Defense Space Agreement between France and India might lead to the launch of military satellites with both offensive and defensive capabilities.

"The Letter of Intent (LoI) on the Defence Space Partnership signed between the two countries opens the door for the two allies to partner in the area of space defence and to together build defence capacities and operational capabilities for better global situational awareness, protection of communication and surveillance satellites, and making the battlefield more transparent in air, land and sea" [7] and an MoU between ISRO's New Space India Limited (NSIL) and Arianespace of France for satellite launch missions.

Technology and Innovation

During 2022-23, the technological partnership between India and France saw significant growth, focusing on the forefront of digital transformation. Both nations highlighted the importance of new technologies, emphasizing collaborations in artificial intelligence, cyber security, space exploration, and digital policy. In a pivotal move, France's INRIA and India's NIAS joined forces through a MoU in June

2022, aiming to propel AI research and development by pooling their expertise. This collaboration led to strategic initiatives like the India-France Roadmap on Cyber Security and Digital Technologies, a direct result of the 2019 France visit by PM Modi. Additionally, a landmark event in July 2023 saw the launch of the Unified Payments Interface (UPI) from the iconic Eiffel Tower, enhancing digital payment options for Indian travellers and non-resident Indians, symbolizing the deepening digital cooperation between the two countries.

Further, discussions are ongoing between MeitY, CDAC, Atos and Directeur General du Tresor, French Ministry of Economy to develop exascale computing capacity in India. "Eviden, the Atos business leading in advanced computing announced in June 2023, being awarded a \$100M contract on behalf of the India Ministry of Earth Sciences, to build two new supercomputers dedicated to weather modelling and climate research for IIT-Madras and National Centre for Medium Range Weather Forecast (NCMRWF)".[8]

Cultural and Educational Exchanges

The bond between India and France goes beyond just political or economic ties; it's deeply rooted in cultural and educational connections that bring people closer. The Alliance Française plays a key role in India, spreading the French language and culture through its numerous centers. Indian students, on their part, often head to France for higher studies, thanks to scholarships and exchange programs that open doors to new opportunities. To celebrate and understand each other's rich heritage, both countries organize cultural festivals, exhibitions, and film screenings. Paris is eagerly waiting for the Swami Vivekananda Cultural Centre to reopen after renovations, promising a hub for Indian culture in the heart of France. At the Cannes Film Festival, India showcases its cinematic brilliance through an India pavilion, drawing international attention to its films. In 2022, India shone as the Country of Honour at Cannes, highlighting its cinematic legacy. Throughout 2022-23, cultural and people-to-people exchanges were pivotal in cementing the relations between the two. Both nations value cultural diplomacy as a powerful tool to build mutual understanding and strengthen their long-standing relationship.

In a major effort to enhance academic ties between the two nations, President Emmanuel Macron said that "France is targeting to welcome 30,000 Indian students to its universities by 2030 and that he is "determined to make it happen."[9]

Climate Change and Sustainable Development

In 2022, India and France reignited their pledge to the Paris Agreement, showcasing a united front in the battle against climate change. India's strides in renewable energy combined with France's prowess in clean technologies have paved the way for meaningful collaboration aimed at a greener future. Macron's February 2023 visit was a significant leap forward, with the launch of the International Solar Alliance's Technology Innovation and Capacity Building Program. This initiative aimed at harnessing solar energy in developing nations, drawing upon India's rich solar energy experience and France's technological acumen. Prime Minister Modi's subsequent visit to France echoed these sentiments, emphasizing critical issues of change in climate and sustainable development as global imperatives. The momentum of these engagements culminated in President Macron's 2024 state visit to India, marking a landmark commitment by both nations to jointly tackle climate change and promote clean energy. This partnership, symbolized by a series of agreements in solar energy, green hydrogen, and nuclear energy, signals a decisive move towards actionable sustainability measures. The collaborative spirit of India and France within the International Solar Alliance underscores the significance of international cooperation in enhancing solar energy globally. This was further highlighted during COP27, with the announcement of the ISA's SolarX Grand Challenge. Targeting Africa, this initiative seeks to foster innovation in solar energy, inviting over 100 African startups to participate. About 20 top startups will receive financial and technical support, showcasing the challenge's commitment to renewable energy solutions. Furthermore, India and France have embarked on joint initiatives to mobilize resources for solar projects in developing areas, particularly Africa. The declaration of the STAR-C program's solar academy in Senegal stands as a testament to their enduring alliance under the ISA framework. This venture reflects their shared dedication to empowering nations with the skills and knowledge to exploit solar energy, driving sustainable development on a global scale. This ongoing partnership between India and France is not just about agreements and launches; it's a testament to their collective resolve to lead the way in global sustainability efforts. By combining their strengths, these two nations are setting a precedent for how collaboration can lead to tangible environmental actions, from advancing solar energy initiatives to exploring new frontiers in nuclear power.

India and France are also prepared to work together on green hydrogen, which will accelerate their renewable energy transitions and help them meet their carbon neutrality goals. Green hydrogen, which is produced by water electrolysis from renewable energy sources like solar and wind, provides a solution to decarbonize hard-to-reach industries including transportation, manufacturing, and electricity production.

They embraced the “Indo-French Roadmap on the Development of Green Hydrogen, aiming to converge their hydrogen ecosystems for a sustainable value chain”. [10]

Conclusion

The Indo-French relationship has seen remarkable growth in the past five years, evolving into a multifaceted partnership characterized by strong political ties, economic collaboration, defense cooperation, advancements in space and nuclear energy, and cultural and educational exchanges. This strategic alliance has been significantly bolstered by the mutual recognition of the importance of Indo-French relations, leading to enhanced mutual trust and cooperation. As India's stature on the global stage continues to rise, the bond with France is poised to strengthen further, contributing to both regional and global stability. The state visits of Modi and Macron in 2023 and 2024 respectively, serve as pivotal moments in this burgeoning partnership. These visits underscored the commitment of both nations to deepen cooperation across a spectrum of sectors, reflecting a unified stance on tackling global challenges. The collaboration extends beyond diplomatic and economic engagements to include support for landmark initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance, co-founded by *la France*, and the adoption of the UPI payment system by France, marking a first among European countries. This partnership also stands out in its strategic maritime cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region, predating the formation of the Quad and showcasing the enduring commitment of both nations to safeguarding regional stability without France's direct involvement in the Quad. The dynamic interactions between Modi and Macron have continually opened new avenues for cooperation, emphasizing the strategic importance of Indo-French relations in bridging the Global North-Global South gap. The synergy between India and France is emblematic of a broader need for a diplomatic bridge that can seamlessly connect different global quadrants. The unique rapport between Modi and Macron offers an exceptional opportunity to leverage this Indo-French friendship towards achieving comprehensive global harmony and stability. Through their joint efforts, India and France are not only reinforcing their bilateral ties but also setting a precedent for international cooperation, underscoring the critical role of strategic partnerships in tackling the intricate problems of the twenty-first century. In essence, the Indo-French relationship, enriched by its depth and diversity, stands as a testament to the power of international collaboration. It exemplifies how shared strategic goals, economic interests, and visions can forge strong bilateral ties, which in turn contribute significantly to the broader objectives of peace, stability, and sustainable development on a global scale.

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