

Full Length Research Paper

# The Indo-French Strategic Partnership

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*Indo-French relations got a boost when both the countries signed strategic partnership after India's test explosion. On the issue of India test explosion, with the exception of France, there was worldwide condemnation. But the relations improved and now it is based on three pillars – civil nuclear cooperation, defense and terrorism. The author discusses the need for strategic partnership. This strategic partnership got a boost with the visit of French's President's visit to India in 2016 where both the governments emphasized the importance of nuclear technology, defense, terrorism and trade. In discussing the security dimension of strategic partnership, the author believe the relations were coordinate as it could seen from French support in Sino-India and Indo- Pakistan conflicts. It was in this period India purchased many military equipments from French. But now, it has been changed from buyer to seller and co-producer.*

**Keywords:** *Strategic partnership, civil nuclear cooperation, terrorism, solar thermal technology, nuclear deterrence, Schengen agreement, Nuclear Supplier Groups, Prevention of Consumption of Illicit Drug, FDI, Make in India.*

**Introduction**

A strategic partnership has been explained as a long-term interaction between two countries based on political, economic, social and historical factors. Such a partnership includes variety of relationships. So far India is concerned; it has signed “*strategic partnerships*” with more than 30 countries. The Strategic Dialogue in 1998, soon after India's nuclear tests, was the culminating features that to India and France to enter into a strategic partnership. It covers more or less such sectors such as security, space, defense and civil nuclear cooperation.

Indo-French relationship has been accorded a high priority by all the Presidents of France. With the emergence of the strategic partnership, much progress has been seen in all areas through regular high-level exchanges at the Head of State/Head of Government levels. Indo-French relations received much desired result in 2015 with high level engagements and increase in bilateral cooperation.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi visit to France from 09-12 April, 2015 was a landmark achievement as Prime Minister Modi and President of France Mr. Francois Hollande held a bilateral meeting on the same lines of the United Nations General Assembly in New York in September 2015. They again met in Paris on 30 November 2015 at the Leaders' Event of CoP-21 (21st Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change) in Paris.<sup>1</sup>

The strategic partnership between the two countries is based on three important pillars, i.e. civil nuclear cooperation, defense relations and curbing terrorism as a strategic partner, French support to India has been noticeable. In fact, along with Russia, France refrained from issuing sanctions against India after the 1998 nuclear tests. Similarly, Indo-French technological collaboration covers a wide number of areas like solar thermal technology, robotics and control systems, besides defense technology. India was depended on France for many years for the launching of its heavy satellites.<sup>2</sup>

In the last decade, France has consistently condemned Pakistan for encouraging terrorism in India. In 2010, President Sarkozy strongly condemned Pakistan for providing a safe haven to terror outfits. He also stated that terrorism emanating from Afghanistan and Pakistan were the major source of instability and in security. In May 2011, France has also placed a temporary freeze on arms sales to Pakistan. The major thrust of French engagement with India lies in nuclear trade with India. Unsurprisingly, therefore, it was a major supporter of granting an exception to India at the NSG.

In fact, France was the first country to sign a 5 civil nuclear agreement with India in September 2008. In this, it also included provisions for the transfer of technology. However, France has voiced concerns about nuclear liability laws in India. Moreover, France along with the US and Russia, has supported India's candidature for the four multilateral export control regimes. France has also been

a constant supporter of India's candidature at the UNSC. The growth of Indo-French ties is due to the recognition of India's importance by France in recent years, its technological prowess in certain critical areas, and its capacity to take independent decisions. The above analysis shows that French support to India suggests that France deserves to be graded at seven on how substantial the support was, six on how sustained it was, and seven as regards its future potential.<sup>3</sup>

### Why Indo-French Strategic Partnership?

During the Cold War period, Indo-French 'bilateral cooperation was not so bad though it was somewhat indifferent'. With the emergence of multipolar world India and France understood clearly the theory and practice of international relations. Strategic partnership between them becomes a necessary as it needs to adapt to new emerging world order. Despite having different ideologies during the Cold War, France and India were both 'politically independent minded countries', which attached similar attention to the concept of status and grandeur on the international scene. French nuclear policy in the 1960s, its partial pull-out of NATO in 1966, its ability to develop a national force de frappe and a nuclear deterrence doctrine were viewed with much interest by India. Despite divergent views on international politics there was certain mutual respect between France and India during the Cold War period.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 made both France and India to work for a multipolar order rather than a unipolar world. The historic background of French foreign policy made this desire credible only after the disintegration of the Soviet block. It was soon materialized when France supported India for a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council from 1998 onwards. This has led some scholars such as Alyssa Ayres to describe India as the 'France of Asia', an 'ally of the United States which shares many values with Americans, but pursues its own course'.<sup>4</sup>

Moreover, deep relationship between India and France was not merely ideological but was also related to India's 1990s economic reforms. The Indian Government's new economic policy in 1991 was focused on revitalizing the economy through liberalization and opening up of the market. This greatly attracted France. Major French companies, including high technology and defense sector industries such as Dassault and Aerospatiale, made their appearance in India around that time. Yet the economic relations between the two countries until 1998 remained relatively low, both in terms of foreign direct investment and trade.<sup>5</sup>

The desire to strengthen these low economic ties cannot be underestimated in the decision to establish a strategic partnership between India and France in 1998. Throughout the 1990s, France took some time to grasp its full potential for cooperation. After 1998 the 'awareness was [spread] at the highest levels of the French State that India was now a major emerging power'.<sup>6</sup> This perception of India as a new major player in international politics led France to support the cause of a strategic dialogue in January 1998. This partnership became a reality only when French decided to trust India after the Pokhran tests. When India conducted two nuclear tests on 11th and 13th May 1998, France, though condemned but adopted a distinctly progressive posture. It probably saw in India's nuclear policy an echo of its Gaullist's drive for strategic autonomy.

Rather than punishing and sanctioning India France supported the Indian cause of last explosion. It was based on several arguments. India had been a firm supporter of non-proliferation, it had solely relied on its own capacity to conduct these tests, and it opposed exporting its technical knowledge abroad. Russia also relatively understood vis-à-vis India, but fortunately for France, the difficult Indo-Russian relations under Yeltsin shadowed the constructiveness of this stance. The French attitude therefore stood out as a 'French kiss making up for global bitterness'.<sup>7</sup> To their several visits and an intensified dialogue. Following the nuclear tests both the countries worked for the effective establishment of the strategic partnership. India's strong affiliation with France was first in its nature to work for collaborative activities apart from Russia.

### Boosting the Strategic Partnership

French President Francois Hollande paid a three-day state visit to India from 24 to 26 January 2016. President Hollande was the chief guest at India's 67th Republic Day celebrations. A French military contingent also participated in the Republic Day Parade. France was the first country to which India bestowed such an honour.<sup>8</sup> During the visit, India and France discussed important political, security and economic issues to expand their cooperation at the bilateral and global levels. A number of agreements and MoUs to take their partnership to a new level were signed. Multi-pronged cooperation in the fight against terrorism is crucial for India and France.

Today, the European Union (EU) faces external and internal challenges. Political instability, socio-economic crises in the European neighborhood and terrorism have put unprecedented stress on the EU member states. The EU is taking strong measures to check migration. But it would be difficult to resolve the causes of migrant and refugee crisis. The migration flow has serious implications for European economy, polity and society. The demand to suspend the Schengen zone for some period is arising because there is an extreme view forwarded by Euro sceptic parties to end passport free travel. Amid the migrant crisis and security concerns, the EU is finding it difficult to maintain the status quo on the Schengen agreement.<sup>9</sup> Western Powers have used military forces to wipe out militancy in Syria and Iraq, but the Islamic State is reportedly expanding its base in Libya.<sup>10</sup> The Islamic State expansion in another neighborhood country is a matter of grave concern for the EU. The EU economy has shown signs of recovery. It has varied from country to country. If Germany has reported 'budget surplus',<sup>11</sup> France has to declare 'economic emergency'.<sup>12</sup> Recent trends indicate that these countries would have to spend more on defense in future.<sup>13</sup> The EU was able to reach a deal with the UK and agreed to the demand of reform.<sup>14</sup> The referendum of 23rd June in to U.K. will decide the fate of UK its membership in the EU. In this broader

regional and global development, it is necessary to examine the key outcomes of President Hollande's visit to India and how it will impact the future course of their bilateral partnership.

### Security and Strategic Partnership:

France has been a staunch supporter of India with regard to nuclear energy. As such both France and India decided to upgrade their relations to a strategic partnership so that the two countries can contribute more on strategic and security matters. India and France followed the same policy that there is the need for urgent reform of the United Nations, including its Security Council. It could be done by expanding the membership, so that it could be made more representative by from different regions. France has also reaffirmed its support for India's candidature for a permanent membership of the UN Security Council. In the same context, in order to make global non-proliferation and export control regimes, France and India committed to continue to work jointly towards India's accession to the multilateral export control regimes, namely, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Australia Group, and the Wassenaar Arrangement.<sup>15</sup>

Recently India has shown solidarity with France during the recent terrorist attack in Paris and France has also extended unconditional support to the Indian demand to stop cross-border terrorism originating from Pakistan. These are two important aspects of the recent Indo-French interaction. As such both India and France have shown their commitment to counter terrorism and welcomed the separate joint statement on Counterterrorism cooperation issued by the two sides and to enhance cooperation between the Indian and French security forces in the fields of homeland security, cyber security, special forces and intelligence-sharing to fight against criminal networks and tackle the common threat of terrorism. They are also working for an Agreement on Prevention of Consumption of Illicit Drugs and Psychotropic Substances. It seems that such kinds of cooperation will lead to the disruption of terrorist financing structures.

The leaders have stressed the necessity of joint military exercises. They welcomed the successful air exercise Garuda in June 2014 and naval exercise Varuna in April 2015, in which the French carrier strike group participated. They welcomed the latest round of the Shakti exercise held in India in January 2016 which brought out useful operational lessons for the two armies, especially in countering terrorism. The leaders welcomed the port call at Toulon by the Indian Naval Ship Triakand in September 2015, and the conduct of a joint exercise to enhance interoperability between the two navies. The French multi-mission frigate Provence is scheduled to participate in the International Fleet Review at Visakhapatnam in February 2016.<sup>16</sup>

Both countries are committed to sustainable development of civil nuclear energy with highest degree of safety, security, non-proliferation and environmental protection. In pursuance of the 2008 Agreement on the Development of Peaceful Uses of Nuclear Energy between India and France, the two leaders encouraged their industrial companies to conclude techno commercial negotiations by the end of 2016 for the construction of six nuclear power reactor units at Jaitapur.

France has also welcomed the decision of the Government to ratify the Convention on Supplementary Compensation for Nuclear Damage. Both the countries have shown keenness for growing collaboration in mutually beneficial scientific and R&D sectors related to peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Indo-French appreciation for the long-standing relations between their nuclear regulatory authorities – India's AERB and France's ASN – have further been strengthened by sharing valuable experience, best practice and development in matters related to nuclear safety and regulatory issues.

### Defence Cooperation

Since the establishment of diplomatic ties in 1949, defence cooperation has proved to be a cornerstone in the bilateral relationship between the two countries. Hence, acquisition of acquiring credible armed forces became necessary for India to safeguarded security interests. India was in dire need to procure defense apparatus to encounter anticipated threats from Pakistan. In such a situation, France was seen as a reliable partner to acquire defense equipment. The equipment included "mountain kits for troops operating in Kashmir from the Indian Army. Further 71 pieces of MD450 Ouragan aircraft were acquired in 1953. These were followed by purchase of 110 Mystere 4A fighters and 164 AMX13/ Model51 light tanks in 1956".<sup>17</sup>

The 1962 war with China proved to be a major turning point for India's defense policy. The military setback in 1962 forced India to modernise its armed forces and France assisted India wholeheartedly.<sup>18</sup> During the cold war period, relations between Paris and New Delhi remained relatively cordial". In the early 1980s, India got the advanced version of Mirage2000 multirole fighter aircraft to counter the threat posed by Pakistan. Moreover, in 1998, when India decided to go nuclear, it got firm support from France.

Modernization of Indian defense forces has become a priority of the Narendra Modi government. Prime Minister Modi has promised to speed up the defense procurement and indigenization of defense manufacturing. The 'Make in India' programme aims at 'promoting self-reliance, indigenization, technology upgradation and achieving economies of scale and developing capabilities for exports in the defense sector.'<sup>19</sup> India is likely to invest more on defense in the future. According to a report from Information Handling Services (IHS) Jane's Defence Budget, India would become the fourth biggest defense spender by 2020. It will be only behind the US, China and Russia and ahead of France, Japan and the UK. The IHS Jane's Defence Budget also projects that India's defense spending would reach US \$65.4 billion in 2020.<sup>20</sup> India is a major market for international defense industry.

The geostrategic environment and the 'parlous state of much of its inventory' points out that the country would be investing in new fighter aircrafts, attack helicopters, howitzers, submarines and aircraft carriers and other programmes.<sup>21</sup> Defence cooperation is thus a crucial area of cooperation between India and France.

During Cold War era, France also sold weapons to India. It was basically a 'buyer-seller' relation. After the Cold War, India-France defense cooperation has gradually expanded. The strategic partnership calls for extensive defense cooperation between the two countries. India and France relations have expanded in the areas of joint military exercise, arms sales, research & development. For instance, technological cooperation in the areas of light aircraft engines, tank technology, etc have been developed.<sup>22</sup> During the visit of President Hollande, there was talk on Rafale deal. Prime Minister Narendra Modi said that he had ordered 36 'ready-to-fly' Rafale fighter jets to modernize Indian warplane fleet.<sup>23</sup> Prime Minister Narendra Modi said, "We have completed an intergovernmental agreement for the purchase of 36 Rafales, with the exception of the financial aspects."<sup>24</sup>

Active cooperation with France will prove fruitful in increasing the defence manufacturing base in India. Defence manufacturing is much related to 'Make in India' programme. It is reported that the, French company, DCNS, is negotiating with the Indian companies for collaboration in manufacturing in India. There has been further enhancement of cooperation in collaboration in defense technologies and research and development. Apart from defence cooperation, India and France have frequently indulged in military exercises. The purpose of military exercise is also to counter terrorism.

The Indo-French defense ties further improved in 2005, when the Indian government took the decided to procure French Scorpène class submarines for Indian defense. Further, both the countries frequently shared prime ministerial level visits, where, in January 2008, Nicolas Sarkozy was the chief guest of the Republic Day parade in New Delhi and reciprocally in 2009, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was the Guest of Honor in the Bastille Day military parade, where Indian troops marched next to the French troops.

The Indo-French strategic dialogue has reached new height. Further, the cooperation in annual joint military exercises have been increasing at a rapid pace. There have been several service exchanges and meetings on industrial collaboration within the framework of the Indo-French Defence Cooperation Agreement. The partnership between the two is not only confined to defense and other military apparatus, but it is extended to Research and Development programme with to transfer of technology. It is important to note that after Russia, France has become the major arms suppliers to India. Apart from the strategic dimensions, on the global platform, India's permanent membership of the UNSC has been consistently supported by France.

Trade and investment remains another top priority for the countries. India's trade in goods with France was 7879 million Euros in 2014. Trade has registered a growth of around 10 per cent from the previous year. Bilateral trade in goods in 2013 was around 7088 million Euros. There are fluctuations in bilateral trade in goods. However, bilateral trade in services has been constantly growing. Trade in services was 1992 million Euros in 2011; it reached around 2922 million Euros in 2013.<sup>25</sup> France is an important partner in terms of investment. It was the ninth largest investor in India in 2014. The total French FDI inflows in India were around US\$ 4.41 billion in 2014. On the other hand, with cumulative FDI inflows amounting to € 410 million, India ranked 47th largest foreign investor in France in 2013.<sup>26</sup>

The major emphasis is on the 'Make in India' programme. France has promised to support India's ambitious programme in the manufacturing sector. In the Business meeting with industry leaders, both Modi and Hollande advocated for harnessing the economic opportunities of 'Make in India' programme. Regular business interactions may help to develop understanding about the business environment and facilitate greater economic linkages. France and India have also launched the CEO forum. In the Joint Statement, both leaders appreciated the first meeting of the CEO forum, which was held in a short timeframe of nine months.<sup>27</sup> As part of 'Make in India' initiative, an agreement was signed between Airbus Group and Mahindra to manufacture helicopters.<sup>28</sup>

### Science and Technology

There has been much cooperation in science and technology between India and France. Both countries have extended their partnership in several areas. One such area is nuclear technology. France is very active in developing nuclear technology. Nuclear energy would diversify the energy basket and enhance energy security of the country. Although there are challenges in nuclear cooperation between the two countries, France sees India as a potential market for its nuclear technology. Prime Minister Modi and French President Hollande 'encouraged industrial companies to conclude techno-commercial negotiations by the end of 2016 for the construction of six nuclear reactor units at Jaitapur.'<sup>29</sup> Rehabilitation package agreement has been signed between NPCIL and Maharashtra government in 2010. The MOEF accorded the environmental clearance and Coastal Zone clearance in 2010.<sup>30</sup> The French role would be crucial for India's membership in export control regimes. France has provided support for India's entry into international export control regimes.<sup>31</sup> India and France have signed MoUs to increase cooperation in scientific research.

### Conclusion

Honoring the French President in India is not merely a matter of symbolic affirmation of the continuity of Indo-French relations but it is also a matter of great strategic significance. The Republic Day parades and the invitation to the French President as the Chief Guest is an honour and is a significant indicator of the larger goals of Indian diplomacy and foreign relations. As such President Hollande's

visit was an important step towards growing cooperation between India and France. Political interactions on crucial issues of security may lead to more interaction on global and regional crises. Threats of terrorism and extremism are rapidly growing and multilateral efforts are being made to eliminate the root causes of the menace. India and France have decided to fight against all forms of terrorism irrespective of their ideologies, religion and political motive.

India has also focused on modernizing defense and expanding defense manufacturing base. France can be the potential partner in defense manufacturing as well as modernization of Indian armed forces. Defence forces of both countries from time to time have participated in the bilateral military exercises. These reflect a high level of maturity of defense partnership.

Cooperation between India and France has the potential to facilitate growth and generate employment opportunities in France. Science and technology is one such areas of cooperation and both countries have made great stride in expanding cooperation in areas of space and nuclear technologies. Today, India's necessity is to harness all possible legitimate sources of energy to meet the growing demands. On the other hand, France is interested in India's nuclear sector. Hence, both countries have made efforts to expand civil nuclear cooperation. On global issues Indo-French cooperation is important and can play an effective role at the multilateral forums and international organizations. France has shown its great interest in having India as permanent member of UNSC and member of multilateral export regimes. Their commitment also extent to expand cooperation at the EU level. The joint statement calls for negotiations on the BTIA. Thus, the recent visit of French President has raised the India- France bilateral cooperation to a new height and has been helpful in widening the specter understanding on global and regional issues of mutual importance.

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