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Indo-French Ties: Navigating Global Dynamics Across History, Present Realities, And Future Prospects

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ABSTRACT

This research paper provides an in-depth examination of the multifaceted relationship between India and France, spanning historical milestones, contemporary collaborations and agreements, and potential future partnerships and trajectories. The study encompasses diplomatic treaties, geopolitical strategies, mutual agreements, and the evolving dynamics that characterize this bilateral relationship. Through a meticulous exploration of historical interactions, examination of current partnerships, and forward-looking analysis, the paper aims to illuminate the factors contributing to the strategic significance and potential growth of the Indo-French relationship especially in the contemporary situations through which the world is going on right now. This paper throws light on how the world has changed since India and France started their cooperation. The world is going through a recent turmoil caused by the Russia-Ukraine war, long-standing civil wars in the Middle East, India's diplomacy in its neighbourhood, the South China Sea, India's bid for permanent support to the United Nations Security Council, and much more. This is the time to have a good and healthy relationship between India and countries like France, the USA and other developed countries so that India can gain more acceptance in the region and the world forums.

Keywords: *Indo-French Relations, Blue Economy, Historical Prospective, Strategic Partnership, Indo-France futuristic Perspective.*

I. INTRODUCTION

France is a powerful country situated in the Europe continent. It has so much reach in the world that it follows 12 time zones (the highest) in the world along with its overseas territories. France was the first country in the world that taught us about liberty, equality and fraternity. It also has a permanent set at the United Nations Security Council, a declared nuclear power under NPT and also a member of the EU, NATO, G7 and OECD. France was one of the key powers in World Wars I and II both of which changed the whole scenario of world geopolitics. On the

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development side, it is one of the countries in the world that develops its electricity of 70-80% from nuclear energy, i.e., clean energy.

India on the other hand is still a developing country situated in the Asia continent. It is the seventh largest country in the world in terms of area. France's area is nearly about the same as the Indian state of Rajasthan.

India and France have a long history of their relationships dating back to the colonial era in the 17 and 18th centuries. France being a colonial power had many settlements in the Indian subcontinent mainly the Yanam, Mahe, Puducherry and Karaikal that were part of the French power till 1962. In the world war I and II, many Indian soldiers took part in these wars from the French side.

Bilateral Relationships started between them in 1998, it was one of the first countries to support India by signing the "strategic partnership" after the end of the Cold War era. In 2008, France's President Nicholas Sarkozy came to India 's Republic Day parade. Thus, continuing this series of relationships, India and France celebrated the 25th anniversary of their partnership in 2023.

II. HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

The historical context of India and France relations reflects a journey from colonial interactions and strategic rivalries to a contemporary partnership based on shared values, mutual interests, and a commitment to global stability. It is marked by a multifaceted interaction that evolved over centuries. The roots of their diplomatic ties can be traced back to the early exchanges during the colonial era and subsequent efforts to establish a robust relationship.

- **Colonial Era:** During the 17th and 18th centuries, the French and the British were colonial powers vying for influence in India. The French East India Company established settlements, including Pondicherry, Mahe, Yanam, and Karaikal, on the Indian subcontinent.
- **Anglo-French Rivalry:** India became a theatre for the Anglo-French rivalry, with both powers seeking alliances with local rulers of the Indian subcontinent. The three Anglo-French Wars were fought in India and played a part in the larger global conflicts, that had repercussions on the subcontinent's political landscape. Following the British victory in the Anglo-French Wars², France ceded its Indian territories to the British

² Shahidullah-Bin-Anwar Mohammed. (2024, February). The French and Indian War: A Key Chapter in the Anglo-French Rivalry. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/378068060_The_French_and_Indian_War_A_Key_Chapter_in_the_Anglo-French_Rivalry. Accessed on February, 2024.

Crown. The Treaty of Paris in 1763 marked the formal end of French colonial presence in India.

- **Pondicherry and Other Settlements:** Pondicherry, a significant French settlement, became a centre for cultural, educational, and economic activities. The French presence also extended to other regions, contributing to the cultural diversity of the Indian subcontinent. With this many Indians also embraced the French culture and also helped in sharing the best practices.
- **Post-Independence Diplomacy:** After India's independence in 1947, diplomatic relations between India and France were established. The early years were marked by efforts to redefine the relationship in the context of the changing global dynamics. This was the hard part as India adopted the Non-Alignment and the world was going through the Cold War era. The leaders of independent India and France, Jawaharlal Nehru and Charles de Gaulle, shared a vision of non-alignment and cooperation. Diplomatic ties strengthened during this period, with both nations promoting cultural exchanges and mutual understanding.
- **Nuclear Cooperation:** The 1998 nuclear tests conducted by India impacted its relationships with the world and subsequent international sanctions led to a re-evaluation of India's foreign policy. France played a crucial role in assisting India's civilian nuclear energy program, marking a significant milestone in bilateral relations. France supported India at this time of difficulty and started a bilateral relationship with India. After the signing of 123 agreements, France became one of the largest suppliers of nuclear fuel to India and signed a "Framework Agreement for Civil Nuclear Cooperation" in 2008³.

III. CONTEMPORARY RELATIONS

After India and France signed bilateral ties in 2008, the relationship between India and France has reached a new height in contemporary times. Some of them are discussed below:

- (A) **25th Anniversary of the Indo-France Strategic Partnership:** On 26 January 2016, it set a record that France is a country to be invited 5 times to India's national ceremonial events.
- In 2016, French national personnel were involved in the Republic Day parade from

³ Bureau ET. (2008, October 8). India, France ink nuclear deal. *The Economic Times*. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-france-ink-nuclear-deal/articleshow/3546835.cms?from=mdr> . accessed on 01/02/2024.

France⁴.

- In 2023, India and French relationships marked the 25th anniversary of their strategic partnership. Indian Prime Minister joined the French President as the Guest of Honour at the Bastille Day Parade, where the Indian tri-services contingent also participated with the Rafale jets of the Indian Air Force.
- The Indian Prime Minister was honoured with the “France Grand Cross of the Legion of Honour”, France’s highest civilian and military honour, during the visit.

(B) Economic Collaboration: In contemporary times, the economic collaboration between India and France has witnessed a substantial upswing, paving the way for prospects that hold significant promise. Both nations have recognized the potential for mutual growth and development through enhanced trade and investment ties. Bilateral trade volumes have been on the rise, reflecting diversified economic engagements across sectors such as defence, aerospace, technology, renewable energy, and infrastructure. Some of them are discussed below:

- Bilateral trade between the two countries reached a peak at USD 19.2 billion in 2022-23⁵.
- In 2015 India and France launched the International Solar Alliance at COP 21 in Paris⁶.
- French AREVA will set up a nuclear power plant in Jaitpur, Maharashtra India. It will be the largest nuclear power plant in the world.
- Many satellites of GSAT have been launched from French Guiana by Arian rockets of ESA.
- Indo-French is in the discussion on finalizing development funds for the third-world countries for sustainable development projects in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Blue Economy:** India and France launched a partnership on ocean research under the Blue Economy⁷. This has been signed between France’s IFREMER and India’s National

⁴ PTI. (2018, July, 12). Republic Day parade: French soldiers create history by marching down Rajpath. The Economic Times. <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/republic-day-parade-french-soldiers-create-history-by-marching-down-rajpath/articleshow/50728279.cms?from=mdr> accessed on 02/01/2024.

⁵ Press Trust of India. (2024, January 24). “French President Macron’s Visit May Give Push To India-EU Trade Deal Talks: GTRI”. *Outlook Business & Money*. <https://business.outlookindia.com/news/french-president-macrons-visit-may-give-push-to-india-eu-trade-deal-talks-gtri> . Accessed on 15/01/2024.

⁶ Press Information Bureau. (2018. October 02). “PM inaugurates first assembly of the International Solar Alliance”. *Ministry of New and Renewable Energy*. <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1548295> . Accessed on 15/01/2024.

⁷ Ministry of External Affairs. (2022, February 20). “India France Roadmap on the Blue Economy and Ocean Governance”. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/34882/>

Institute of Ocean Technology. This will include the maritime trade, the naval industry, fisheries, marine technology and scientific research in ocean observation, modelling and forecast services, etc.⁸

- France is also helping in India's sustainable cities program 'CITIES 2.0'⁹

(C) Geopolitical Approach: In contemporary times, India and France share a nuanced geopolitical approach that extends across various fields, fostering a robust and multifaceted partnership. Strategically, both nations converge on the principles of a multipolar world with possibilities, advocating for a rules-based international order that champions inclusivity, global governance, and sustainable development. This alignment is particularly evident in their collaboration within international forums, where India and France often find common ground on issues such as climate change, counterterrorism, and the reform of global institutions like the United Nations. Geopolitically, the two countries engage in defence and security partnerships, conducting joint military exercises and collaborating on defence technologies. Their shared commitment to maritime security and the Indo-Pacific region further solidifies their geopolitical cooperation. Some of the major points that testify to their coordinated commitments are as follows:

- **India's bid for a UNSC permanent seat:** France has supported it many times in the UNSC for India's permanent bid. As part of its broader foreign policy goals, France has consistently advocated for India's increased role in global governance, particularly in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). The two countries have strengthened their cooperation on various international issues, sharing common values such as democracy, pluralism, and a commitment to a rules-based world order. France has many times recognized India as a key player in addressing global challenges, and it supports India's bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC. This collaboration is not only a testament to the strong bilateral ties but also underscores France's belief in the necessity of a reformed UNSC that reflects contemporary geopolitical realities

⁸ MINISTERE DE L'EUROPE ET DES AFFAIRES E'TRANGERES. (2022, February, 20). India-France road map on the Blue Economy and Ocean governance. France Diplomacy. <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/india/news/article/india-france-road-map-on-the-blue-economy-and-ocean-governance-20-feb-2022#:~:text=India%20and%20France%20plan%20to,modeling%20and%20forecasting%20services%2C%20marine> . accessed on 12/01/2024.

⁹ Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. (2023, August, 3). "CITIES 2.0" Press Information Bureau. . <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1945495>, accessed on 15/01/2024.

(D) Defense and Security Cooperation: In the modern era, the defence and security partnership between India and France has evolved into a comprehensive and strategic collaboration, encompassing various facets to combat imminent dangers and promote regional stability. One of the hallmarks of this partnership is the procurement and joint development of military equipment. India has acquired state-of-the-art defence systems from France, including the Rafale fighter jets, marking a significant milestone in enhancing India's military capabilities. The two nations engage in regular joint military exercises, such as the "Garuda" series, fostering interoperability and sharing best practices in counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency operations. Beyond the acquisition of military hardware, the partnership involves the exchange of defence technologies, with a focus on research and development in areas such as space cooperation, missile systems, and naval technologies. Both countries collaborate on maritime security in the Indian Ocean region, aligning their interests to ensure freedom of navigation and combat common security threats. This robust defence and security collaboration between India and France underscores their shared commitment to addressing contemporary challenges and reinforces their strategic partnership in the face of evolving geopolitical dynamics. Some of the major collaborations that have strengthened both nations in these fields are as follows:

- India and France both have a bilateral air force exercise named 'Garuda'.
- India and France both have a bilateral joint naval exercise 'Varuna'
- India and France both have a bilateral military exercise 'Shakti'.
- In 2016, France made a deal to provide 36 Rafale jets to India and provided India with state-of-the-art Rafale fighter jets for the Indian Airforce. Rafale means 'gust of wind'. It is a twin-engine fighter aircraft developed by Dassault Aviation. The first batch has already been deployed in the Ambala AirBase¹⁰. It is the most advanced aircraft that can combat aviation missions like air defence, close air support, in-depth strikes, reconnaissance, etc¹¹.
- In 2023, India's ISRO and France's CNES have joint agreements to develop joint Earth Observation Satellite TRISHNA, maritime surveillance satellites in the Indian Ocean

¹⁰ Peri, Dinakar. 2020, July 29). Five Rafales arrive at Ambala airbase. *The Hindu*. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/rafafe-jets-ambala-induction/article61678277.ece> Accessed on 25/12/2023.

¹¹ "RAFALE JETS TO LAND IN INDIA TODAY, SECURITY TIGHTENED AROUND AMBALA AIR BASE: 10 POINTS. (2020, JULY, 29)". *INDIA TODAY*. [HTTPS://WWW.INDIATODAY.IN/INDIA/STORY/RAFALE-FIGHTER-JETS-TO-LAND-IN-INDIA-AMBALA-AIR-BASE-TODAY-TOP-DEVELOPMENTS-1705501-2020-07-29](https://www.indiatoday.in/INDIA/STORY/RAFALE-FIGHTER-JETS-TO-LAND-IN-INDIA-AMBALA-AIR-BASE-TODAY-TOP-DEVELOPMENTS-1705501-2020-07-29) . ACCESSED ON 12/01/2024.

and the protection of Indo-French satellites in orbit.

- **Project 75:** France is helping India in developing Scorpene Class Submarines, also called diesel-electric attack submarines. These are designed by the French naval defence and energy company DCNS and are being manufactured by Mazgaon Dock Limited in Mumbai¹².
- French company Dassault Aviation, which provided us with the Rafale jets, also deals with the Jaguars and Mirage 2000 are jet fighter aircraft currently in use with the Indian Airforce.

IV. CULTURAL AND EDUCATIONAL EXCHANGES

Cultural and educational exchange programs between India and France serve as dynamic avenues for fostering mutual understanding, promoting academic collaboration, and strengthening the bonds of friendship between the two nations. These initiatives encompass a rich tapestry of activities, including student exchanges, joint academic programs, and cultural events that showcase the diverse heritage of both countries. Students from India and France often benefit from scholarship programs, allowing them to immerse themselves in each other's academic environments, fostering cross-cultural perspectives and enhancing educational experiences. Additionally, cultural festivals, art exhibitions, and language programs contribute to a vibrant exchange of ideas, further deepening cultural ties. These programs not only facilitate academic and cultural enrichment but also play a crucial role in nurturing lasting connections between the people of India and France, contributing to a robust foundation for future collaboration and understanding. France has announced plans to welcome 30,000 Indian students by 2030. This is part of a larger effort by France to strengthen its ties with India, both economically and culturally. For this, France has made arrangements for International Classes in French universities and colleges. France also offers a five-year Schengen visa to Indian students with having master's degree and above and have spent at least one semester studying in France. The students having such visas will allow them to travel freely within the Schengen area, which includes 26 European countries.¹³

¹² Mukherjee, Vasudha. (2023, July 12). "Project-75I: What is it, and how has India's submarine ambitions evolved?." *Business Standard*. https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/project-75i-what-is-it-and-how-has-it-progressed-since-1997-123071200224_1.html accessed on 12/01/2024.

¹³ Sharma, Sanjay. (2023, September 4). ' Study Abroad: France invites 30,000 Indian students by 2030'. *The Times of India*. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/education/study-abroad/study-abroad-france-invites-30000-indian-students-by-2030/articleshow/103364271.cms>. Accessed on 12/01/2024.

V. WAY FORWARD, A FUTURISTIC PERSPECTIVE

France and India both share many common things like democratic government, historical ties, etc. and many more. Therefore, the partnership between the two governments has a very bright future, especially in the modern era where the world is going through major turmoils and there arises a need to have a good partnership between some countries that can balance the geopolitical scenarios. Following are some major points for their future collaborations:

- France has again shown a clear stance of mutual partnership by accepting India's invitation for a Republic Day celebration on 26 January 2024. President Emmanuel Macron's arrival will mark another milestone in the relationship between the two countries¹⁴.
- France's continuous support for India's permanent membership in the UNSC is very crucial for India as France is a permanent member and also holds the veto power.
- France also opens many pathways for India to engage more with Europe, especially after Brexit.
- **Defense and Security Cooperation:** Strengthening the defence ties that already exist and making new ones through joint military exercises, intelligence-sharing, and collaborative efforts in counter-terrorism to address common security challenges, will further boost each other's cooperation. Various deals signed between the countries in defence and security areas will serve as a better example of the international bilateral commitment.
- **Technology Transfer and Innovation:** Both can facilitate the exchange of technology by promoting joint research and development initiatives in areas such as space exploration, renewable energy, artificial intelligence, and biotechnology.
- **Economic Partnerships:** By further enhancing economic partnerships and collaboration through increased trade, investment, and joint ventures, with a focus on sectors like infrastructure, digital technology, and sustainable development, India can take good economic benefits from such a developed nation.
- **Climate Change and Sustainable Development:** Both countries were instrumental in the establishment of the International Solar Alliance in 2015. By Collaborating on such

¹⁴ 75th Republic Day celebrations conclude with a show of force by the Indian Air Force. (2024, January, 26). The Hindu. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/republic-day-2024-live-updates-kartavya-path-emmanuel-macron-chief-guest/article67778947.ece>

climate change initiatives, renewable energy projects, and sustainable development goals to address environmental challenges and promote green technologies, both nations have shown their commitment towards sustainable development for future generations.

- **Space Exploration and Satellite Launching:** France has always helped India in its launching of satellites in the past. Leveraging India's expertise in space exploration and France's advancements in satellite technology for joint space missions, satellite launching, and exploration projects can further build a new era of space exploration capabilities for both nations.
- **Cultural Exchanges and Education:** Expanding cultural ties through increased educational exchanges, joint academic programs like the Schengen Visa, and initiatives that promote mutual understanding between the people of India and France.
- **Healthcare and Biomedical Research:** The world has already seen the Corona pandemic in 2019 and everyone should be future-ready. Thus, collaborations on healthcare initiatives, medical research programs, and pharmaceutical developments to address global health challenges, as highlighted by the importance of such collaboration during health crises are of great importance.
- **Smart Cities and Urban Development:** France has been of major help to India in its auspicious city development programs by sharing best practices in urban planning, smart city initiatives, and sustainable urban development, drawing on the experiences of both nations to address the challenges of rapid urbanization.
- **Maritime Security and Blue Economy:** Maritime Security is of utmost importance to India as it is surrounded by the ocean from all the bottom sides. By strengthening cooperation in maritime security, including joint naval exercises, and exploring opportunities in the blue economy, such as sustainable fisheries and marine resource management India and France can develop a secure region in the Indian Ocean initiatives.
- **Global Governance and Multilateralism:** France as a permanent member of the UN can help India in collaborating in international forums to advocate for multilateralism, reform of global institutions, and addressing global challenges such as cybersecurity, pandemics, international peacekeeping, etc. Both can use their diplomacy at the international level to benefit them.
- **Infrastructure Development:** India is a tropical country that can harness the power of

solar energy, wind energy, etc. with the best technological and infrastructure support from a developed country such as France thereby, collaborating on infrastructure projects, including transportation, energy, and connectivity initiatives, to promote economic growth and regional integration in the country.

- **Diplomatic Coordination:** India and France can coordinate diplomatic efforts on key global issues, including participation in international organizations such as the most recent G20 summit being organized by India in 2023 in which PM Modi praised France for the support to India¹⁵ and other forums, to amplify their collective voice on matters of mutual concern that may have international repercussions.
- **Inclusive Development Initiatives:** Both can enhance their cooperation by working together on initiatives that promote inclusive development initiatives such as social justice, and poverty alleviation, India's initiatives of Swachha Bharat Abhiyan, etc. with a focus on empowering marginalized communities. India has already launched the Swachhata Start-Up challenge to provide a boost to innovative start-ups to come forward and bring a change in this sector¹⁶.
- **Tourism and Hospitality Industry:** India has a vast possibility in the tourism sector and it runs programs such as the Swadesh Darshan Scheme which covers about 15 thematic circuits. Collaborating to boost tourism in such schemes and through joint promotional campaigns, cultural events, and initiatives that showcase the diverse attractions of both nations can further boost interrelations.
- **Cybersecurity Collaboration:** With the advent of the internet and social media online platforms and digitization of many services, there arises a need to combat and take corrective measures by collaborating on cybersecurity measures, information sharing, and other such initiatives to address the challenges posed by cyber threats and ensure the security of digital infrastructure that has a cross border nature of crimes

VI. CONCLUSION

From the past and contemporary relationships, this can be stated that the Indo-French friendship

¹⁵ PIB. (2023, September 10). India-France Joint Statement. Prime Minister's Office. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1956054#:~:text=Prime%20Minister%20Modi%20thanked%20President,a%20more%20stable%20global%20order>. Accessed on 15/01/2024.

¹⁶ PIB. (2022, January 27). MoHUA-AFD Launch Swachhata Start-Up Challenge to Nurture the Evolving Ecosystem of Indian Waste Management Sector. Ministry of Housing and Urban Affairs. [https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1793015#:~:text=Ministry%20of%20Housing%20%26%20Urban%20Affairs%20\(MoHUA\)%2C%20Government%20of,come%20forward%20and%20drive%20catalytic](https://www.pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1793015#:~:text=Ministry%20of%20Housing%20%26%20Urban%20Affairs%20(MoHUA)%2C%20Government%20of,come%20forward%20and%20drive%20catalytic). Accessed on 12/01/2024.

has witnessed significant milestones, with both nations recognizing the importance of collaboration for addressing global challenges. The mutually agreed partnership between India and France extends to diverse fields, reflecting a learning, cooperative, and futuristic approach. Furthermore, the strategic partnership between India and France extends to addressing global challenges such as climate change, energy security, cybercrimes, etc. Both nations have championed the cause of sustainable development, renewable energy, and environmental conservation. The International Solar Alliance, co-founded by India and France in 2015, exemplifies their joint commitment to promoting clean energy solutions globally. Thus, looking forward, the Indo-French relationship is poised for a better future as both nations continue to navigate the complexities of the 21st century. With a forward-looking approach, they aim to leverage each other's strengths in diverse fields, fostering innovation, economic growth, and cultural exchange. The cooperative spirit between India and France serves as a model for international collaboration, emphasizing the importance of shared values and common goals in shaping a more prosperous world.
