



**THE FRENCH  
STRATEGY IN THE  
INDIAN OCEAN AND  
THE POTENTIAL  
FOR INDO-FRENCH  
COOPERATION**

Policy Report  
March 2015

**Isabelle Saint-Mézard**

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## Executive Summary

This policy report analyses the articulation between the French strategy in the Indian Ocean on the one hand and the Indo-French partnership on the other. It first highlights France's fairly unique position, as a country claiming to be a nation *of* the Indian Ocean Rim. Such a claim primarily lies on the presence of the French overseas territories of La Reunion and Mayotte in the Southwest Indian Ocean. The report also underlines France's strong military focus on the Northwest Indian Ocean, with two inter-services bases respectively located in Djibouti and in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Finally, it mentions France's renewed interest in the Eastern side of this Ocean, as part of a larger opening onto Asia. Then, looking at the Indo-French partnership, the reports suggests that India is probably the country with which France has tried to build one of its most ambitious strategic partnerships outside Europe and NATO. The Indo-French partnership has

indeed been of prime importance as reflected by the nature of its four pillars of cooperation (civilian nuclear technology, space, counterterrorism and defence). However, the report shows that, while generally positive, the partnership has not yet delivered as much as expected from France's point of view. This is especially the case regarding cooperation in the Indian Ocean. In particular, France has seen India's growing activism in the Southwest Indian Ocean as a signal of its diminishing influence in this sub-region. Nevertheless, the reports suggests that if France and India could accommodate each other and coordinate *with* each other, including in the Southwest Indian Ocean, they could give a truly geopolitical content to their partnership, while substantially contributing to the security and development of the Indian Ocean region. The report proposes a series of recommendations with this general idea in mind.

## Introduction

The complex geopolitics of the Indian Ocean has recently attracted a fair amount of attention. Indeed, the sea-lines of communication (SLOCs) crossing the Indian Ocean and linking Asia to the Persian Gulf and Europe have become critical components of world trade. They have also become vital to the energy security of many countries in Europe and Asia. However, these shipping lines have been exposed to various trans-national threats ranging from terrorism to piracy and their security has become a matter of concern. In response to these challenges, a growing number of European and Asian states have deployed their navies in the Northwest Indian Ocean to conduct anti-piracy operations. India, on its part, has expressed its ambition to play a major role in the Indian Ocean and has engaged in close naval cooperation with the U.S., the dominant force in the region. China has also made forays in the Indian Ocean, developing extensive relations with many countries in the region and deploying its vessels off Somalia for anti-piracy operations.

Among the growing number of states that has developed a presence in the Indian Ocean, France has a fairly unique position. Indeed, this country claims to be a nation *of* the Indian Ocean, i.e. a legitimate regional actor belonging to the Indian Ocean Rim. Such a claim primarily lies on the presence of the French overseas territories of La Reunion and Mayotte in the Southwest Indian Ocean. Moreover, France maintains a substantial military presence in the Northwest Indian Ocean, with two inter-services bases respectively located in Djibouti and in the United Arab

Emirates (UAE). In many ways, France's presence in the Indian Ocean illustrates its ambition to be a middle power with global outreach. While Paris is located 5,000 km away from the western shores of the Indian Ocean, it is anxious to contribute to the security of the region. Its commitments include enforcing the respect of international law and the freedom of navigation, protecting the SLOCs as well as combating terrorism and the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction.

France has also engaged many countries of the Indian Ocean littoral. For instance, Paris has forged intense economic and defence relations with the Gulf countries (especially the UAE and Qatar) as well as some Southeast Asian states such as Singapore. It has also concentrated on building a strategic partnership with India since 1998. The Indo-French partnership has indeed been of prime importance as reflected by the nature of its four pillars of cooperation (civilian nuclear technology, space, counterterrorism and defence). Moreover, in building its strategic partnership with New Delhi, Paris has taken into account India's growing naval ambitions in the Indian Ocean. In this connection, this paper seeks to analyse the articulation between the Indo-French partnership on the one hand, and the French strategy in the Indian Ocean on the other. In so doing, the paper underlines that Paris and New Delhi have so far had converging interests in the region, but it also points to latent divergences. It nevertheless identifies further prospects for the development of the Indo-French partnership in the Indian Ocean.

## French strategic interests in the Indian Ocean Region

France has traditionally been focused on the Western side of the Indian Ocean. Interestingly though, it has recently renewed its interest in the Eastern side of this Ocean, as part of a larger opening onto Asia.

### A strategic focus on the Western Indian Ocean Region

As stated by Admiral Dufourcq, “the Indian Ocean presents two major focal points of military interests for France”.<sup>1</sup> One is in the Southwest Indian Ocean and the other in the Arabo-Persian gulf. In the Southwest Indian Ocean, France has sovereignty responsibilities over its two overseas *départements* of La Reunion and Mayotte, which together account for about one million citizens. The French Southern and Antarctic territories must be added to these two tiny islands, a vast maritime expanse that is hardly inhabited, but which is of important economic, scientific and strategic significance. Altogether, these territories account for a vast Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) of more than 2.6 million square kilometres and require the maintenance of two military bases, one in La Reunion and the other in Mayotte, with about 1,900 troops and a few maritime standing forces (see Figure 1). However, the protection of this EEZ proves a challenging task, especially as these forces have to fight non-traditional security threats such as illegal fishing, illegal migration (mostly from the Comoros to Mayotte) as well as the southward movement of Somali piracy. To meet these challenges, France promotes maritime cooperation with the other states of the region, Madagascar and the Seychelles, as well as South Africa and Mozambique.

The second area of military interest is in the Northwest Indian Ocean. With two major inter-services bases respectively located in Abu Dhabi and Djibouti, France maintains a permanent military presence in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Aden.<sup>2</sup> While the base in Djibouti is linked to the French

colonial presence in the horn of Africa, the one in Abu Dhabi is recent (it was opened in 2009 following an inter-governmental agreement between France and the UAE in 2008). Briefly, the presence of these two bases reflects France’s ambition to meet three major strategic objectives:

1. To contribute to the stability of the Middle East, the Persian Gulf and the Horn of Africa—a vast region that is both volatile and conflict-ridden, but critical for global security.
2. To maintain an operational capability near the crucial Straits of Hormuz and Bab-el-Mandeb and along the sea-lines between the Persian Gulf and the Mediterranean Sea, which are vital in terms of energy imports and global trade.
3. To have a capacity to project force in the greater Indian Ocean Region (with Abu Dhabi hosting the French Indian Ocean Regional Command, Alindien).

In point of fact, France has in recent times frequently used these bases to conduct military interventions in the region, especially in Afghanistan, off Somalia and lately in Iraq. Thus, France maintains a substantial military presence in the Indian Ocean. According to the French ministry of Defence, there would be:

“an average of 700 sailors serving permanently in the Indian Ocean aboard French Navy warships such as frigates engaged in combatting piracy (Operation *Atalanta*), or terrorism (Operation *Enduring Freedom*), or on board of some occasional carrier battle group deployments structured around the aircraft carrier *Charles-de-Gaulle*, some amphibious task group led by a Combined force projection and command ship (BPC) or some mine warfare group”.<sup>3</sup>

1 Admiral Jean Dufourcq, “La France et les enjeux stratégiques de l’océan Indien”, *Hérodote*, n° 145, 2012.

2 For a map of France’s military presence in the Indian Ocean and Asia Pacific Regions see French Ministry of Defence, France and Security in the Asia-Pacific, Paris, April 2014: <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/das/international-relations/regional-issues/asia/asia-pacific>

3 French Ministry of Defence, *France and Security in the Asia-Pacific*, Paris, April 2014. Retrieved from

**Figure 1**  
**French military assets in the Western Indian Ocean Region**

### French Forces in the Southern Indian Ocean Zone (FAZSOI)

	Number of soldiers	Army	Air Force	Navy
La Reunion	• 1850 (of which 140 are permanent)	• The 2 <sup>nd</sup> Marine Infantry Parachute Regiment	• 2 C-160 ( <i>Transall</i> ) tactical transport aircrafts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 2 surveillance frigates with 2 Panther helicopters</li> <li>• 1 light-transport ship</li> <li>• 1 Southern Ocean patrol vessel</li> <li>• 1 patrol vessel</li> <li>• 1 'gendarmerie maritime' coastal patrol boat</li> </ul>
Mayotte		• The Foreign Legion Detachment in Mayotte	NIL	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 1 barge</li> <li>• 1 'gendarmerie maritime' coastal patrol boat</li> </ul>

### French Forces in Djibouti (FFDj)

Number of soldiers	Army	Air Force	Navy
• 1,900 (of which 1,400 are permanent)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 5<sup>th</sup> Overseas Inter-arm Regiment</li> <li>• 4 <i>Puma</i> and 2 <i>Gazelle</i> helicopters</li> <li>• 1 Combat training Centre of Djibouti (CECAD)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 7 <i>Mirage-2000</i> fighter aircrafts</li> <li>• 1 C-160 military transport aircraft</li> <li>• 2 <i>Puma</i> helicopters</li> </ul>	• 2 barges

### French Forces in the United Arab Emirates (FFEAU)/ALINDIEN

Number of soldiers	Army	Air Force	Navy
700 (of which 250 are permanent)	Zayed Military City: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The 13<sup>th</sup> Foreign Legion's half-brigade</li> <li>• 1 Combat training centre (desert areas and urban areas)</li> </ul>	Al Dhafra Air base: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6 <i>Rafale</i> fighter aircrafts</li> <li>• 1 C-135 military transport aircraft</li> </ul>	The naval base of the Mina Zayed port in Abu Dhabi <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Headquarters of the French Indian Ocean Regional Command (Alindien)</li> </ul>

Sources French Ministry of Defence (<http://www.defense.gouv.fr/ema/forces-prepositionnees>); French Ministry of Defence, France and Security in the Asia-Pacific, Paris, April 2014. Available at: <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/das/international-relations/regional-issues/asia/asia-pacific>

## A new approach toward Asia: implications for the Eastern Indian Ocean Region

France has substantially enhanced its focus eastwards since the coming to power of President Hollande in 2012.<sup>4</sup> Paris has indeed fully acknowledged the growing clout of Asia and has sought to boost its interests in that part of the world. In particular, France has realised that its prosperity was inherently linked to Asia's, especially as a growing number of its citizens and business companies were based in that region.<sup>5</sup> However, this renewed focus on Asia is not restricted to economics; it also derives from a larger sense of France's global responsibilities as a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and as an ally of the U.S., which is heavily engaged in Asia. As a result, Paris has expressed its ambition to be a committed player for security, as reflected by the 2013 Defence White Paper, which stated: "For our country, the stability of Asia and freedom of navigation are diplomatic and economic priorities. Alongside its allies, France would, in the event of an open crisis, make a political and military contribution at the appropriate level."<sup>6</sup>

However, there is no denying that France has limited operational capabilities in the Eastern Indian Ocean and East of Malacca. Thus, Paris has sought to develop a strategic presence based on defence and security cooperation with various states in the region. France's oldest partnerships are with Japan (1995), China (1997) and India (1998). Interestingly, Paris has recently reoriented its approach in order to tone down its traditional focus on China and to build stronger relations with other partners in the region. For instance, while maintaining intense interactions with China, France has elevated its strategic dialogue with Japan to the ministerial level since 2012. In the same year, France signed a strategic partnership with Australia, a country with which it has had converging interests regarding maritime security issues in the Pacific and Indian Ocean. In the same perspective, Paris has focused on strengthening

its links with Southeast Asia, as reflected by the strategic partnerships signed with Indonesia (2011), Singapore (2012) and Vietnam (2013). France has also been engaged in close defence cooperation with Malaysia, providing this country with two Scorpene-class submarines and training expertise. In point of fact, defence cooperation in general, and arms exports in particular, have always stood as an important dimension of France's strategic interests in Asia. In this respect, Singapore has been a partner of choice, being France's second foreign partner in defence research and technology after the U.S.

Lastly, it should be mentioned that despite its limited operational capabilities in the Eastern Indian Ocean, France has conducted occasional operations in the area over the past decade. For instance, it deployed its naval and air assets to provide assistance to the countries hit by the December 2004 tsunami. It also dispatched its combined force projection and command ship (BPC) to Burma following the 2008 Nargis cyclone, in order to provide food and medicine. Moreover, France has actively supported counter-piracy and maritime security initiatives in Southeast Asia. It had assigned a permanent naval Liaison Officer at Singapore's Information Fusion Centre (IFC) since the creation of this body in 2009 (the IFC collates and shares information about maritime security in a vast area stretching from India to the Philippines and from Taiwan to Australia). Paris had also shown interest in joining the Regional Cooperation Agreement on Combating Piracy and Armed Robbery Against Ships in Asia (ReCAAP). More generally, France has been keen to be more involved with regional security organisations in Asia.<sup>7</sup> It was the first EU country to join the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in South-East (TAC) in January 2007. Its defence minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian, has participated in every IISS Shangri-La Dialogue conference since assuming office in 2012. Paris has also made it known that it would like to join the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting Plus (ADMM+).<sup>8</sup>

4 <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/das/international-relations/regional-issues/asia/asia-pacific> François Godement, « France's « pivot » to Asia », *ECFR policy brief*, n° 101, May 2014.

5 For a map depicting some of France's major interests in the Asia Pacific Region—FDI flows, French expatriate communities (by country) and French overseas territories see French Ministry of Defence, *France and Security in the Asia-Pacific*, Paris, April 2014. Available at: <http://www.defense.gouv.fr/english/das/international-relations/regional-issues/asia/asia-pacific>

6 French Ministry of Defense, *French White Paper on Defense and National Security*, July 2013.

7 French Ministry of Defense, *French White Paper on Defense and National Security*, July 2013, p. 55.

8 *Speech of French Minister of Foreign Affairs Laurent Fabius at the ASEAN Headquarters, Jakarta, 2 August 2013*; Senate Committee for Foreign Affairs, Defence and the Armed Forces, *Regaining a foothold in Southeast Asia*, Report n° 723, 15 July 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.senat.fr/rap/r13-723/r13-7230.html>

## France's ambitious strategic partnership with India

India is probably the country with which France has tried to build one of its most ambitious strategic partnerships outside Europe and NATO. While generally positive, the partnership has not yet delivered as much as expected from France's point of view. This is especially the case regarding cooperation in the Indian Ocean.

### The four pillars of the Indo-French strategic partnership

The strategic partnership with India was launched in 1998 under the presidency of Jacques Chirac, one year after the establishment of the global partnership with China. Paris and New Delhi have since maintained regular exchanges at the highest level and have built a solid relationship. In a symbolic gesture, President Hollande made his first non-European trip to India in July 2013, to celebrate the 15<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the strategic partnership. The Indo-French partnership is based on the common values of democracy, the rule of law and individual freedom. One additional shared value is that of strategic autonomy. Broadly speaking, this refers to France and India's desire to single-handedly decide their respective foreign policies while having close partners (in the case of India) or being part of a security alliance (in the case of France). The Indo-French partnership is also based on converging interests. From an Indian viewpoint, France stands out as a potential high-technology provider, especially in dual-use technologies. This is also a useful alternative to other Western partners such as the U.S. and the U.K. From a French viewpoint, India is an emerging market that its industries cannot afford to ignore. France is also seen as a rather reliable power that can exert a stabilising influence in Asia, congruent with French regional interests.

In other words, France has clearly identified India as a privileged partner in the region and has decided to contribute to its rise. In a significant statement made in 2013, French Defence Minister, Jean-Yves Le Drian declared that, "apart from our Allies and European partners, there are few countries across the world with which we are prepared to go as far

as we do with India".<sup>9</sup> Indeed, the main pillars of the partnership encompass areas of cooperation that the French and Indian States regard as crucial elements of power. One of the most talked about area of cooperation has been in the field of civilian nuclear technology. Along with Washington, Paris actively lobbied the international community to allow civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India. Following the waiver, it was one of the very first countries to sign a USD 9.3 billion framework agreement for the construction of two reactors in Jaitapur, Maharashtra. Intelligence and counter-terrorism have also allowed for close cooperation, especially in the wake of the amphibious attacks on Mumbai in November 2008. Spatial cooperation has been on the agenda since the 1960s and has grown fairly successful, as reflected by the launch of the Indo-French satellite SARAL in February 2013. Incidentally, the SARAL satellite is designed to measure the rise in the sea levels, a threat that is a major concern for many Indian Ocean Rim countries.

Finally, defence and military cooperation, the fourth pillar of the partnership, stands as a central area of cooperation, involving politico-military dialogues, armament transfers and joint exercises. Without a doubt, prospects of weapons sales have been a major incentive for France to engage India. French arms sales to India, which started in the 1950s, reached a peak in 2005 with a USD 3 billion-deal to transfer six Scorpene-class submarines to the Indian Navy (IN). France hopes to bring its weapons sales to new heights with the finalisation of a short-range surface-to-air missile project, and, more importantly, with the confirmation of a deal to transfer 126 Rafale combat aircrafts to the Indian Air Force. As far as joint exercises are concerned, France and India have had regular joint manoeuvres between their Navies (Varuna), Air forces (Garuda) and Land forces (Shakti). The Varuna exercises, which were started in 1998, have reached a fairly advanced stage and have built confidence and trust between the two Navies. At a deeper level, they reflect a convergence of interest in the Indian Ocean, based on a common will to enforce the freedom of the seas and to protect the security of the SLOCs.

9 Mr Jean-Yves Le Drian, Minister of Defence of the French Republic, *Lecture on Indo-French Defence Partnership: the Choice of Strategic Autonomy*, New Delhi, 26 July 2013.

## The limits of the Indo-French partnership in the context of the IOR

Looking at the strategic partnership in the context of the Indian Ocean, the French objectives have not been fully met, as reflected by the two following observations:

- While the French Navy has been very keen to work with IN, it had sometimes felt that India was a difficult partner. For instance, the convening of the 2013 and 2014 sessions of the Varuna exercises proved to be a protracted process, with the Indian side rescheduling the event several times, to the dismay of the French (as per the latest new reports, i.e. in December 2014, this two-year interruption in the Varuna series is to come to an end, with a major aero-naval exercise being planned in April 2015).
- The French side has so far failed to bring the IN into multilateral operations such as the EU-led Atalanta operation. This has created frustration in Paris. Nevertheless, the French Navy still hopes that it will eventually succeed in convincing the IN to conduct joint operations to secure the Indian Ocean.

An important objective for France has been to ensure that India acknowledged its status as an Indian Ocean Rim country as well as its special interests in the Southwest Indian Ocean. This has been

achieved to some extent, as reflected by the fact that the IN invited the French Navy to be a founding member of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium initiative (IONS), a forum it launched in 2008 to foster cooperation on regional maritime security. At the same time, the IN plays a growing role in the region and extends its reach towards the small island-states of the Southwest Indian Ocean. . In other words, India is increasingly active in an area that used to be “a French ‘private preserve’”.<sup>10</sup> It has been especially active in developing cooperation with Mauritius and the Seychelles in the field of hydrography, maritime security and counter-piracy, providing both island-states with coastal surveillance radar system, fast patrol vessels and other surveillance equipment.<sup>11</sup>

For France, India’s activism is a signal that it is losing its special relations with these island-states. Nevertheless, despite its overstretched capabilities, Paris is anxious to maintain its influence over the sub-region and remains very active in the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), a regional organisation that includes the Seychelles, Mauritius, the Comoros and Madagascar. However, if France and India could accommodate each other and coordinate *with* each other in the Southwest Indian Ocean, they could give a truly geopolitical content to their partnership, while substantially contributing to the security and development of the sub-region. Most of the ideas and recommendations that follow are proposed with this general idea in mind.

10 Bouchard C. and W. Crumplin (2011) « Two faces of France: ‘France of the Indian Ocean’/‘France in the Indian Ocean’ », *Journal of the Indian Ocean Region*, vol. 7, no. 2, pp. 161–182. It is worth mentioning, as Bouchard and Crumplin do, that the French language is much in use in the Comoros, Madagascar, the Seychelles and Mauritius.

11 Yogesh V. Athawale, « Maritime Development in the Southwestern Indian Ocean », *Strategic Analysis*, May 2012, pp. 424–439.

## How to Frame an Indo-French Partnership for the Security of the Indian Ocean?

### Recommendations for France: Be more active in promoting France's Indian Ocean strategy

As reflected by the publication of a Blue Book in 2009, the French policy community has become aware of the strategic importance of the seas and oceans.<sup>12</sup> The so-called “maritimisation of the world”—a concept used to describe the fact that human activities, interests and concerns are increasingly related to the seas and oceans—has been increasingly factored in the policy debates. The Indian Ocean has been given due attention in this context: the release of the Southern Indian Ocean Blue Book in 2011 emphasised the need to promote the “blue economy” of the overseas territories of La Reunion and Mayotte, while the 2008 and 2013 White Papers on Defence and Security pointed to the growing geopolitical centrality of the IOR in world affairs.<sup>13</sup> However, these maritime policy narratives have not yet fuelled a clear strategy for the Indian Ocean. As of now, France has a wide array of strategic interests in the Indian Ocean, but this has not led to a holistic, well-coordinated strategy, which may partly explain why France's role in this part of the world is overlooked abroad.

Paris should internally clarify its policy and objectives so as to project itself as an Indian Ocean power in a more systematic manner and enhance the visibility of its commitments and interests in this vast region. For instance, the French Navy could enhance its participation in the IONS. France could also show more interest in the evolution of the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), especially as it is a dialogue partner of this organisation. France's interest would no doubt come as a welcomed development at a time when India and Australia seeks to revitalise the IORA and to strengthen links with its dialogue partners. Of the six priority areas promoted by the IORA, France could probably push for greater interactions in the fields of maritime safety and security, fisheries management and disaster risk management.<sup>14</sup>

In particular, France could be more proactive on Search and Rescue (SAR) issues. The tragic disappearance of the Malaysian Airlines flight MH370 in March 2014 has indeed revealed serious gaps in regional SAR arrangements. The 14<sup>th</sup> Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the IORA, which took place in Perth in October 2014, highlighted “the pressing need for greater coordination and cooperation among national search and rescue services in the Indian Ocean region”.<sup>15</sup> In this context, France has a legitimate role to play: La Reunion and Mayotte have each one Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre, covering a substantial SAR area in the Southern Indian Ocean (NAVAREAS VIII (S) along with Mauritius). Moreover, France's sophisticated observation satellite industry and long-range naval and aerial capabilities could provide useful assistance in SAR operations in the larger region.

### Put the Indian Ocean at the forefront of the bilateral agenda of cooperation

More importantly, Paris should try to make India more aware of its interests (as well as those of the EU that for matter). It is striking indeed to note that the Indian vision of the Indian Ocean primarily focuses on the role and influence of the U.S. and China, and hardly takes France or the EU into account. This does not do justice to the security efforts of France—as well as those of the EU—in the region. To bridge this perception gap, the following initiatives could be considered:

- Paris and New Delhi should have a regular dialogue on the Indian Ocean, with a view to framing a shared strategic vision of the maritime challenges in the region and the policy responses to envisage accordingly. Incidentally, this would help belie the notion that prospects of arms exports primarily drive the French engagement with India. This may also help India to gain better understanding not only of the French maritime vision but also of the EU maritime Security strategy.

<sup>12</sup> French Government, *Blue Book: a National Strategy for the sea and oceans*, 2009. Retrieved from <http://www.sgmer.gouv.fr>

<sup>13</sup> French Government (2012). *The Southern Indian Ocean Blue Book*. Retrieved from <http://www.reunion.pref.gouv.fr/livrebleu/>

<sup>14</sup> Basrur Rajesh, Bateman Sam, Chan Jane (Eds), *Workshop on IORA and Strategic Stability in the Indian Ocean*, RSIS Event Report, last updated on 3 November 2014. Retrieved from: <http://www.rsis.edu.sg/rsis-publication/idss/37298/#.VlbW-SdJ8dU>

<sup>15</sup> *Final Communiqué of the 14th Meeting of the Council of Ministers of the IORA*, Perth, 9 October 2014 ; See also: Vijay Sakhuja, « Indian Ocean and the IORA : Search and Rescue Operations », *IPCS article n° 4724*, 3 November 2014.

- France could also develop further naval cooperation with India on the basis of its strategic interests in the Western Indian Ocean. For instance, it could suggest joint manoeuvres in the Mozambique Channel. This does make sense on two accounts: first because the Mozambique Channel is a major shipping route between the Middle East and the Atlantic Ocean; and second, because India is eager to project its presence in this area, with the IN regularly cruising off Mozambique as part of India's maritime security cooperation with this country.

Security issues notwithstanding, France could encourage greater economic and people-to-people interactions between La Reunion and India. Indeed, an enduring challenge for France has been to boost the socio-economic development of its overseas territories and to have them better integrated in their regional environment. In La Reunion's case, this meant developing relations with the other island-states of the region, as part of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), or with Southern and Eastern Africa. However it would make sense for Paris to enlarge the regional horizon of La Reunion, especially as approximately 25 per cent of its population is of Indian origin. In other words, rather than seeing India as a growing competitor in the region, France could as well open its territories to India's dynamism and try to attract Indian capital, whether through FDI or tourism. Interestingly, some recent steps have been taken in this direction, with La Reunion Chamber of Commerce and Industry opening a representation desk in Chennai in 2013 and Paris granting a short-term visa waiver for Indian tourists visiting the island from 2014 onwards.

### **Open up bilateral cooperation to broader multilateral frameworks**

France and India may explore new avenues of cooperation with other small island-states in the Indian Ocean. For instance, India helps Mauritius and Seychelles to develop their coastal surveillance and beef up their anti-piracy capabilities. France also engages these island-states on the same issue, either bilaterally or as part of the IOC or EU's anti-piracy efforts. In view of these potentially overlapping initiatives, it would make sense for Paris and New

Delhi to further apprise each other of their respective initiatives, and on that basis, to coordinate and perhaps mutualise their efforts when and where possible.

A more ambitious agenda would be for India and France to jointly promote capacity building programmes for the island-states (Mauritius, Seychelles, the Maldives and Madagascar) as well as the rim states (Mozambique, Kenya, Tanzania) of the Western Indian Ocean. Indeed, many of these states do not have the capabilities to monitor and govern their maritime domain, as they lack maritime surveillance and enforcement capacities. Under the banner of the EU (and with its funding), France has been involved in various programmes to build regional maritime capacities in the region. In this respect, two programmes deserve special mention:

- EUCAP Nestor: launched in July 2012 under the Common Security and Defence policy of the EU, this project, which is headed by French Admiral Etienne de Poncins, aims at reinforcing the maritime capabilities of the states in the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean (Djibouti, Somalia, Yemen, Kenya, the Seychelles, Tanzania).<sup>16</sup>
- The Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean Project: with an initial focus on Tanzania, Yemen, Kenya, India, Singapore and South Africa, this programme's objective is to improve maritime security in the West Indian Ocean through Information Sharing, Capacity Building and Operational Policies and Governance. It also plans to establish new Fusion Information Centres in the region.<sup>17</sup>

Clearly, in developing these programmes, France and the EU should try to work closely with India. This would bring substance not only to the Indo-French partnership, but also to the EU-India partnership, which has for long tried to develop cooperation on maritime security.

In addition, India and France could focus their efforts on helping the island-states of the Indian Ocean to improve the protection of their maritime environment and the management of their marine resources, including their fish, mineral and energy resources. Here, one interesting template can be found in the

16 *Factsheet on EUCAP Nestor (Regional maritime capacity building for the Horn of Africa and the Western Indian Ocean)*, September 2014. Retrieved from [http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eucap-nestor/index\\_en.htm](http://eeas.europa.eu/csdp/missions-and-operations/eucap-nestor/index_en.htm)

17 The implementation of the Critical Maritime Routes in the Indian Ocean Project (CRIMARIO) is to start at the end of 2014. Retrieved from <http://www.crimson.eu.com/projects/cmr-indian-ocean-crimario/>

Southern Pacific Ocean with the QUAD (*Quadrilateral Defence Coordination Group*) involving France, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand. Indeed, the QUAD has proved successful in promoting maritime security in Oceania and in supporting its island-states to manage their natural resources, especially their fisheries.<sup>18</sup> Incidentally, the fact that France is an active member of this mechanism could further facilitate its adaptation to the Indian Ocean conditions.

Finally, France should persuade India to join occasional multilateral operations and to develop inter-operability with the Navies of its closest partners. More often than not, current maritime threats call for multi-national operations. If India is willing to endorse some responsibilities in the protection of the

freedom of the seas, it may eventually have to join forces with its closest partners. In this respect, the Varuna bilateral exercises between the Indian and French navies should open up to other European nations. The U.K. appears as the most natural partner in this perspective. Not only are France and the U.K. the most active European powers in terms of defence, but they have also engaged in an ambitious bilateral cooperation since the 2010 Lancaster House agreements. Moreover, the U.K. has a close defence partnership with India, including in the naval field with the Kankan exercises. Planning for trilateral exercises between the Indian, British and French navies would thus prove a milestone in the progressive development of a maritime security rapprochement between India and Europe in the Indian Ocean.

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18 France holds three territories in the South Pacific (New Caledonia, Wallis and Futuna, and French Polynesia).

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

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