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# **Indo-French Defence Cooperation Friends in Need or Friends Indeed?**

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# Introduction

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During his official state visit in January 1998, French President Chirac announced in New Delhi his desire to set up a strategic group with India 'to facilitate a better understanding of [their] defence doctrines and an increased military cooperation'<sup>1</sup>. His speech, entitled 'India and France: A Partnership for the Twentieth Century', was representative of both countries' growing wish to become strategic partners. This first French Presidential visit to India since Mitterand in 1989 led to the establishment of a strategic relationship between the two countries. This new Indo-French dialogue was 'broad enough to allow bilateral and international issues to be discussed with the concept of "security" covering much more than the strict defence field'<sup>2</sup>. As part of this decision to share their experiences and opinions on the concept of global security, India and France decided to extend their already existing defence ties to encompass broader issues than mere armament sales.

India and France have been dealing with each other on defence matters since the early years of India's life as an independent country. Yet for the majority of the Cold War, this relation followed a buyer-seller pattern: France sold weapons to India, and despite cordial dealings, their bilateral dialogue remained very limited. They were business partners rather than friends. The establishment of the strategic dialogue in 1998 took Indo-French defence ties much further, and since then both countries have been continuously working to make it become a real multi-level cooperation. While this process has taken a few years to be

implemented, the results and successes are notable.

This paper aims at understanding the reasons behind the institutionalisation of Indo-French defence cooperation after 1998, and at assessing the future prospects for this collaboration. By retracing its history since 1947 and comprehending the motivations that led each country to get closer together in 1998, it will be easier to grasp the various dynamics that define Indo-French defence cooperation. These bilateral defence relations will be analysed as part of the broader strategic partnership between France and India. While the Indo-French strategic dialogue was rather innovative in 1998 since India had no similar attachments with foreign countries apart from Russia, increasing "competition" has risen from India's recent rapprochement with other countries. In such an evolving context, in which France does not seem to be holding a key position anymore, it seems worthwhile to define what the risks or impediments for future Indo-French defence cooperation could be. While it would be irrational to think that this defence cooperation will remain unique, it seems that both sides' needs and desires will make them work on their now firmly anchored friendship.

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<sup>1</sup> Jacques Chirac, *India and France: A Partnership for the Twentieth Century*, Speech given in Vigyan-Bhavan, New Delhi, on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1998

<sup>2</sup> Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, p165

# The Birth of Indo-French Defence Relations

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Defence association with France dates back to the early years of the Indian Republic. When India gained its independence in 1947, it had to outline a new foreign and defence policy, separate from the British one to which it had been previously subdued. As a recently independent country, India required outside supplies to build up its military power. France emerged as one of India's main and most reliable arms furnishers during the Cold War, although its importance was greatly shadowed by the Soviet Union's supremacy in this sector.

Three phases could be outlined in the evolution of Indo-French defence relationship during the Cold War: 1947-1962, during which the defence ties between the two countries emerged but remained largely strained by colonial issues; 1962-1971, when India embarked on modernising its defence system and France surfaced as one of its main arms suppliers; and 1971-1991, during which India asserted its defence capacities and heavily relied on Soviet supplies. While Indo-French relations in the field of defence have recently evolved to become a deep cooperation on various levels, during the Cold War it was more of a business relationship than a true partnership.

## 1947-1962: THE INFLUENCE OF COLONIAL POLITICS

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was also in charge of foreign affairs for the whole duration of his tenure. India's defence policy from 1947 to 1964 was strongly determined by his understanding of international relations and politics<sup>3</sup>. Since Nehru firmly believed in non-violence and non-alignment, defence matters were

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<sup>3</sup> Claude Arpi, *La fin des comptoirs français: la politique de Nehru (1947-1954)*, Collections des Pavillons, Auroville, September 2001, p11

reduced to low-priority status until the early 1960s, when events forced him to revise his position.

Nehru followed what was called the *Panchsheel* policy, based on the agreements signed with the People's Republic of China in 1954. It was founded on five principles: peaceful coexistence; non-interference in internal affairs of neighbouring countries; equality and mutual benefits; respect of territorial integrity and sovereignty of other nations; and non aggression<sup>4</sup>. The importance of non-violence as a source of inspiration for the Prime Minister greatly undermined the establishment of a sound Indian defence policy.

At the very start of Nehru's governance, he utterly opposed any defence strategy. In 1947, British Commander in Chief Sir Robert Lockhart approached him with recommendations regarding India's security threats, and demanded government directives to properly address them. The Prime Minister's response was firm and heralding for the following fifteen years: 'We don't need a defence plan. Our policy is non-violence. We foresee no military threats. Scrap the Army. The police are good enough to meet our security needs'<sup>5</sup>.

The Pakistani raids in October 1947 forced Nehru to alter his position. He understood that in order to support and spread peaceful co-existence values, India had to survive; it therefore needed the appropriate means to defend itself against potential enemies<sup>6</sup>.

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<sup>4</sup> <http://www.mfa.gov.cn/eng/topics/seminaronfiveprinciples/t140589.htm>

<sup>5</sup> K Subrahmanyam, *Arms & the Mahatma - No place for pacifism in security*, 8 May 1997, The Times of India, <http://www.hvk.org/articles/0597/0138.html>

<sup>6</sup> Claude Arpi, *La fin des comptoirs français: la politique de Nehru (1947-1954)*, Collections des Pavillons, Auroville, September 2001, p15

Until 1962, Pakistan was perceived as the main threat, while the other neighbouring countries were not regarded as a direct menace to India's survival. For the particular case of China, Nehru stated that the Himalayas 'made an effective barrier' to any aggression<sup>7</sup>. The 1947 Kashmiri events thus saved the armed forces from total abandon by the politicians, but the 1950s were nonetheless 'a decade of neglect for the Indian Army' because of the government's overestimated faith in non-violence to solve the problems with India's other neighbours<sup>8</sup>.

Newly independent India had to find solutions to cope with its need for defence equipment in case of hostilities with Pakistan. In the early 1950s, it only possessed the ability to produce shells and other kinds of ammunition, as well as small arms, guns and explosives<sup>9</sup>. Lacking the trained manpower, the experience, the finances and the structures to develop an indigenous defence apparatus, it had no choice but to find outside furnishers. The most obvious supplier was Great-Britain, with which India enjoyed inevitable strong ties. The first jetfighter which India bought in 1950 was the British *Vampire FB-5*. Between 1950 and 1959, India received 333 such aircrafts, 281 of which were produced locally under the manufacturing licence which it had obtained when striking the deal with London. This purchase was followed by that of another British aircraft in 1952, the *Firefly FR-5*<sup>10</sup>. Rapidly however, India became cautious to avoid implementing any

form of neo-colonialist relations with Britain, and it started to look for alternative suppliers.

Among the various potential purveyors, France stood as a good alternative to the United Kingdom. Its defence products, although very expensive, were renowned to be of high quality. India's first step in establishing defence relations with France came in 1949, when it acquired mountain kits for its Kashmiri troops<sup>11</sup>. These ties were further cemented when India purchased the first of a long list of French armaments: the *MD-450 Ouragan* aircraft. The 71 pieces which were ordered in 1953 were delivered the same year. During the following nine years, significant arms deals were struck between the two countries: India purchased 110 *Mystère-4A* fighter aircrafts and 164 *AMX-13/Model-51* light tanks in 1956, 12 *Alizé* anti-submarine warfare aircrafts in 1959, and 3 *SA-316B Alouette 3* light helicopters (useful for high-altitude landings) in 1961<sup>12</sup>.

Despite these important arms sales, political divergences strained the defence relations between France and India until 1962. On one hand, India was reluctant to depend on

<sup>7</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1984/CJB.htm>

<sup>8</sup> K Subrahmanyam, *Arms & the Mahatma - No place for pacifism in security*, 8 May 1997, The Times of India, <http://www.hvk.org/articles/0597/0138.html>

<sup>9</sup> *Indian Defence Industry: Domestic Production and Imports for the Future Balance*, 16 October 2002, [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/official\\_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf](http://www.nti.org/e_research/official_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf)

<sup>10</sup> *Trade in and licensed production of major conventional weapons: Imports sorted by recipient. Deals with deliveries or orders made 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

<sup>11</sup> General Alain Lamballe, *Les relations entre l'Inde et la France de 1947 a 2000 dans le domaine de la securite et de la Defense*, in *Les relations entre la France et l'Inde de 1673 a nos jours*, sous la direction de Jacques Weber, Collection Les Indes Savantes, Paris, 2002, p530

<sup>12</sup> The manufacturing licence was granted in 1962, with the possibility for sales to specific third countries in South and South-East Asia. The *Alouette* deal was furthered by the deal in 1962 to deliver 330 more helicopters, the last of which were delivered in 2003.

General Alain Lamballe, *Les relations entre l'Inde et la France de 1947 a 2000 dans le domaine de la securite et de la Defense*, in *Les relations entre la France et l'Inde de 1673 a nos jours*, sous la direction de Jacques Weber, Collection Les Indes Savantes, Paris, 2002, p530-531

*Trade in and licensed production of major conventional weapons: Imports sorted by recipient. Deals with deliveries or orders made 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

Great-Britain as its sole supplier and was therefore keen on acquiring French products<sup>13</sup>. On the other hand, it strongly disagreed with France on several foreign policy matters. Nehru strictly opposed France's colonial policy. A fervent opponent of colonialism, he contested French presence outside its metropolis, especially in Indochina. It was not until after its withdrawal from the Indochinese Peninsula that France was able to start building constructive ties with India. Similarly, Nehru highly disagreed of France's war in Algeria, and the conflict's end in 1962 was decisive in facilitating Indo-French bilateral relations. The strongest cause of discord between France and India was that of the former's establishments throughout India. Despite the 1954 accord for the *de facto* transfer of the five French "comptoirs" to India, the shift did not occur until 1962 when the Delhi Treaty was signed. The solving of these various contentious issues was vital in bringing France and India closer together in the 1960s.

While France was one of the first countries with which independent India started to build defence ties, their relations remained confined to isolated arms deals until 1962. there was no particular interest from neither side for strengthening bilateral ties further than their commercial interests. This reserve owed to the various political issues that divided the two countries, and to the fact that Nehru and the then Defence Minister V.K. Menon did not perceive France as a foreign policy priority. Things evolved after 1962, with the resolution of the majority of these disputes and with new dynamics emerging within India.

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<sup>13</sup> Canada, the Soviet Union and the United States were India's only other arms providers until 1962. The first two's supplies were largely insignificant in numbers. The US made a few important deals, providing India with *M-4 Sherman* tanks, *T-6 Texan* trainer aircrafts, *Bell-47/OH-13* light helicopters or *C-119G Packet* transport aircrafts. Compared to the transfers from the UK. However in millions of dollars these transfers amounted to little.

## **1962-1971: THE BIRTH OF A STRONG INDIAN DEFENCE POLICY**

1962 was a turning point for India's defence policy, and the years which followed had a decisive impact on Indo-French relations. While the 1960s saw the gradual demise of strong Indo-British defence ties, they witnessed France emerge as a major defence interlocutor for India<sup>14</sup>.

China attacked India in 1962; catching the Indian Army ill-prepared and logistically weak, the Chinese defeated it in less than six weeks<sup>15</sup>. This striking defeat was a blow to Nehru's policy-making, and from that year onwards proof was given that defence could not be relegated to minor concerns. Building up its armed forces, training and equipping them with up-to-date weaponry became one of India's goals in the 1960s. The country evolved from sustaining minimal defence capacity to modernising its armed forces to acquire an advanced military tool. This upgrading trend was further accentuated with the death of Nehru in 1964 and the second Indo-Pakistani war of 1965.

India could not embark on modernising its defence apparatus by itself: it solicited outside help, particularly to obtain military equipment. France, among many other nations, was approached by India to provide it with further arms supplies. While the deals struck between France and India in the 1960s were not remarkable in terms of numbers, French attitude during that decade was vital for their later defence cooperation, and helped lay the foundations for a serious partnership.

Indo-French deals between 1962 and 1968 averaged only \$13 millions per year, when they had reached \$322 millions in 1957 and \$282 millions in 1958. For the same six

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<sup>14</sup> The "1960s" here will be used to refer to the period from 1962 to 1971.

<sup>15</sup> <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/library/report/1984/CJB.htm>

years, the Indo-British deals averaged \$97 millions a year<sup>16</sup>. French supplies to India for that period of time amounted to 3 *Alizé* aircrafts, 50 *AS-30* air-to-surface missiles, 2000 *ENTAC* and 4000 *SS-11/AS-11* anti-tank missiles. Other orders were passed, such as that of 40 *SA-315B Lama* and 230 *SA-315B Lama* light helicopters in 1968 and 1971 respectively, as well as 500 *AM-50* 120 mm mortars, but none of these were delivered until the 1970s or later<sup>17</sup>.

Compared to the previous decade, the 1960s were therefore not very prolific in terms of arms deals struck between France and India.

It was nonetheless a decade of strengthening Indo-French and gradually decreasing Indo-British defence ties because of broader political concerns. Whereas the United States and the United Kingdom kept their arms deals closely linked to their foreign policies, France remained more neutral on its procurement ethos. The Americans' promised *Phantom* fighters were never delivered to India once the war with China broke out, and during the conflict, they supplied India only with clothes and logistics<sup>18</sup>. The American deliveries to Pakistan worsened their soured relations with the Indians. The tension in their bilateral ties reached such extents that by 1964, defence supplies from the United States to India had stopped.

During the second Indo-Pakistani war of 1965, France officially followed its allies in imposing an arms embargo against both sides. Its attitude was however highly ambiguous because it continued supplying India with detached pieces for French aircrafts, and lifted the embargo as early as

March 1966<sup>19</sup>. France therefore sustained its supplying engagements with India as much as it officially could, while the United States and the United Kingdom imposed much firmer sanctions on it. This commercial behaviour which France adopted led it to be blamed by its Western allies but to be trusted by India as one of its most reliable weapons furnishers.

The 1960s was also a decade which witnessed the emergence of India's reliance on the Soviet Union for defence equipment. When the United States did not deliver its *Phantom* fighter, India turned to the Soviets, from which it bought various versions of the *Mig-21* fighters. The Soviet Union provided cheap products, and as India gradually grew apart from the Americans, it got closer to the Russians. India was officially non-aligned and refused to get drawn in the Cold War, yet on defence matters, the 1960s marked the start of India's siding with the Soviet Union. While India's defence cooperation with the United States disappeared until 1986 and that with the United Kingdom significantly decreased, the Soviet Union became its main weapons supplier, averaging 470 million dollars per year between 1962 and 1971 and reaching a peak of 938 million dollars in 1969<sup>20</sup>. This laid the basis for a supplying scheme which

<sup>16</sup> *Imported weapons to India (IND) in 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

<sup>17</sup> *Trade in and licensed production of major conventional weapons: Imports sorted by recipient. Deals with deliveries or orders made 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

<sup>18</sup> Interview with AVM Kapil Kak, Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2006

<sup>19</sup> General Alain Lamballe, *Les relations entre l'Inde et la France de 1947 à 2000 dans le domaine de la sécurité et de la Défense*, in *Les relations entre la France et l'Inde de 1673 à nos jours*, sous la direction de Jacques Weber, Collection Les Indes Savantes, Paris, 2002, p534

<sup>20</sup> Apart from ten *Hughes-300/TH-5* light helicopters which were delivered in 1971 and 1972.

*Imported weapons to India (IND) in 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database  
*Trade in and licensed production of major conventional weapons: Imports sorted by recipient. Deals with deliveries or orders made 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database



still applies today, in which Russia is by far India's main arms procurer<sup>21</sup>.

The Soviet Union and Great-Britain were far more important than France in providing India with defence equipment during the 1960s. Yet France proved during that decade that it could be seriously considered as an alternative and trustworthy source of weapons supplies. This lesson was an important one for India's later procurement policy.

### **1971-1991: THE INFLUENCE OF BIPOLAR POLITICS ON INDO-FRENCH DEFENCE COOPERATION**

1971 was a second turning point for India's defence policy: while the 1962 war with China was a difficult blow to Indian early foreign and defence policymaking, the decisive military victory over Pakistan in 1971 was the result of a decade of sound defence modernisation. From that point onwards, India gained conscience of its military might and power in the region, which it tried to strengthen through further arms acquisitions.

France's role in India's weapons procurement plan in the 1970s was greatly overshadowed by that of the USSR, which provided the vast majority of India's equipment. This rapprochement towards the Soviet Union was further accentuated by the fact that Indo-American relations by the 1970s were at a very low point<sup>22</sup>. India's imports from the Soviet Union reached as much as \$1099 millions in 1972 and \$1379 millions in 1979, while French imports struggled to maintain a yearly average of \$20

millions for the same period of time<sup>23</sup>. This Soviet-dominated decade ended with India's decision to diversify its supplies. The acquisition of Franco-British *Jaguar* aircrafts in 1979 was accompanied by other French purchases: 1000 *R-550 Magic-1* short range air-to-air missiles to equip combat aircrafts and 40 *PA-6* diesel engines for offshore patrol vessels in 1979, and thousands of *MILAN* anti-tank missiles in 1981, which were delivered throughout the following two decades<sup>24</sup>.

Well until the 1980s, the Soviet Union therefore largely dominated India's defence acquisition program, accounting for more than 90% of its arms imports. However, just like it had been reluctant to rely on Great-Britain in the 1950s, India tried to avoid total dependence on the USSR after the 1970s. India's move back towards Western defence suppliers was also linked to its increasing interest in technology transfer and local production, which the Soviet Union was often unwilling to provide. If the diversity it aimed for never materialised like it had in the 1950s, India nonetheless started to approach other weapons furnishers, notably France and Great-Britain, as well as the Netherlands and Israel to a lesser extent.

The United States' defence procurement policy towards Pakistan was crucial in bringing France and India closer together at the end of the 1970s. In 1979, when the USSR invaded Afghanistan, the Americans chose to help Pakistan by improving its air striking capability to enable it to fight off the Soviets. Pakistan thus received *F-16* fighters and *Sidewinder* missiles, which India decided to counter by purchasing what was seen as an equivalent: the French *Mirage-2000* combat aircraft<sup>25</sup>. Talks were initiated in

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<sup>21</sup> Between 1995 and 2005, Russia provided 76% of India's imported weapons. (Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database: *Imported Weapons to India (IND) 1995-2005*)

<sup>22</sup> The United States' support for Pakistan during the war and its sending of USS Enterprise greatly soured their relations with India.

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<sup>23</sup> *Imported weapons to India (IND) in 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

<sup>24</sup> *Trade in and licensed production of major conventional weapons: Imports sorted by recipient. Deals with deliveries or orders made 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

<sup>25</sup> Dr. K. Manikandan, *Indo-French Defence Cooperation: Experiences, Trends and Opportunities*, in

1979 regarding these aircrafts, and the deal was sealed in 1982 for 40 *Mirages*. They were delivered between 1985 and 1986, and represented a huge step in boosting Indo-French defence ties<sup>26</sup>.

From 1981 onwards, yearly French arms sales to India increased significantly. They averaged \$26 millions between 1982 and 1984, and then peaked to \$467 millions in 1986, following the delivery of the *Mirages*. Between 1987 and 1991, they averaged \$82.8 millions<sup>27</sup>. Among the other arms deals struck between India and France in the 1980s, one could point out a further agreement for 9 *Mirage-2000* aircrafts (*Mirage-2000H* and *Mirage-2000TH* versions) in 1986, and a transfer of technology deal for 30 *TRS-2230/15* air surveillance radars in 1983 and 7 *PSM-33* air surveillance radars in 1988<sup>28</sup>.

Some operational discussions sometimes accompanied these commercial deals. For example, a technical agreement was signed in 1985 regarding the exchange of information about *Mirage-2000* flights security. Furthermore, the French constructor Dassault later trained Indian technicians to enable them to check and revise the aircrafts domestically<sup>29</sup>. However,

because of a lack of cooperation framework between India and France, operational and strategic consultations remained relatively rare during the 1980s. In an effort to institutionalise their defence relations, and an India-France Defence Memorandum of Understanding was signed in 1982, followed by the establishment of an armaments committee and an Indo-French Defence Cooperation Working Group - but they remained largely focused on arms sales rather than on broader security issues affecting the two countries<sup>30</sup>.

From 1984 to 1989, India consistently spent over 3.3% of its GDP on building up its armed forces, and as a result became one the world's largest importers of conventional weapons. France's share in these deliveries remained very small, despite India's attempt in the 1980s to diversify its foreign defence equipment supplies from Soviet domination. Even if the increase in Indo-French defence equipment sales greatly increased compared to what they had been in the 1970s, they still represented a proportionally minuscule part of India's total imports. While French imports amounted to \$1403 million in the 1980s, Soviet imports reached \$19428 millions<sup>31</sup>.

Throughout the Cold War, India and France constantly dealt with each other on defence matters, but their relations remained commercial. France figured among India's most important weapons suppliers after than the Soviet Union, but the two countries remained business partners which did not engage in strategic discussions. The decade following the end of the bipolar conflict saw a substantial alteration of Indo-French relations in the field of defence.

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*India and France: Past, Present and Future*, edited by B. Krishnamurthy, Pondichery, 2006, p103

<sup>26</sup> *Trade in and licensed production of major conventional weapons: Imports sorted by recipient. Deals with deliveries or orders made 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

<sup>27</sup> *Imported weapons to India (IND) in 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

<sup>28</sup> The other deals included: 8 *Agave* aircraft radars for combat aircrafts in 1982, 4 *TRS-2100 Tiger* air surveillance radars in 1983, 8 *PA-6* diesel engines for corvettes in 1983, 294 *Super-530D* beyond visual range air-to-air missiles for *Mirage-2000* aircrafts in 1984, 500 *R-550 Magic-2* short range air-to-air missiles for *Jaguar*, *Mirage-2000* and *Sea Harrier* combat aircrafts in 1988, and 8 *PA-6* diesel engines for corvettes in 1990

<sup>29</sup> General Alain Lamballe, *Les relations entre l'Inde et la France de 1947 a 2000 dans le domaine de la securite et de la Defense*, in *Les relations entre la France et l'Inde de 1673 a nos jours*, sous la direction de

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Jacques Weber, *Collection Les Indes Savantes*, Paris, 2002, p532

<sup>30</sup> Dr. K. Manikandan, *Indo-French Defence Cooperation: Experiences, Trends and Opportunities*, in *India and France: Past, Present and Future*, edited by B. Krishnamurthy, Pondichery, 2006, p104

<sup>31</sup> *Imported weapons to India (IND) in 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

The years between 1991 and 1998 witnessed the 'dramatic rise of India'<sup>32</sup>. With the Soviet Union disintegrating and the socialist model of economy losing its credibility in the face of rising globalisation, India decided to follow up on the "liberalisation trend". The economic situation of the country was such that it neared bankruptcy, and having lost a major ally with the disappearance of the Soviet Union, India had no choice but to embark on quick and far-reaching reforms. It thus decided to concentrate all its means and efforts to adapting and liberalising its economy, while putting other sectors, including its defence, "on hold" for a few years. India's defence spending, which had reached nearly 4% of its GDP in the 1980s, fell to 2.5% in the early 1990s<sup>33</sup>. When it became clear that these reforms would be beneficial for India, it shifted its attention back to areas it had neglected, notably that of defence.

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with AVM Kapil Kak, 6<sup>th</sup> November 2006.

<sup>33</sup> *Indian Defence Industry: Domestic Production and Imports for the Future Balance*, 16 October 2002, [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/official\\_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf](http://www.nti.org/e_research/official_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf)

# The Establishment of the Indo-French Defence Cooperation as part of the Strategic Dialogue

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France was quicker than others in recognising India's growing economic and political potential in the aftermath of the Cold War. During the early years of the 1990s, India faced a 'window of vulnerability', but halfway through the decade it became clear that concentrating on reforming the national economy would be successful<sup>34</sup>. France, despite relatively neutral ties with India up to the 1990s, gradually developed the will and interest to deepen these relations. As early as 1994, French Minister for External Affairs Alain Juppé expressed his country's 'willingness to give "a new push" to political and economic bilateral relations' with India. Such wishes however were not commonly addressed by the two countries until President Chirac's state visit in January 1998. That same year came as a 'watershed' in Indo-French bilateral relations: it witnessed the elaboration of a strategic dialogue between the two countries in January, its materialisation in May (after France's appreciated reaction regarding India's nuclear tests) and its initiation during Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee's visit to Paris in September<sup>35</sup>. The first session of the Indo-French strategic dialogue took place the following month in Delhi.

The strategic partnership implied extensive discourse and increased exchanges on defence matters – among various other sectors. Arms deals had formed the skeleton of defence ties between France and India for fifty years. Once the Cold War "chains" disappeared, cooperation on defence matters was able to extend to become more

substantial and involve strategic discussions. To understand the structure of this four-level defence cooperation, it will be helpful first of all to examine the motivations driving each country to get closer together in the 1998.

## THE MOTIVATIONS BEHIND THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE 1998 STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

During the Cold War, Indo-French 'bilateral relationship was not bad but somewhat indifferent'<sup>36</sup>. With the end of the bipolar conflict and many of its constraints disappearing, India and France grew closer in their understanding and in their practice of international relations. Implementing a strategic partnership with each other resulted in great part from the disappearance of bipolarity and from both countries' need to adapt to this new emerging world order.

Despite their diverging allegiances during the Cold War, France and India were both 'politically independent minded countries', which attached similar attention to the concepts 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*<sup>37</sup> and a nuclear deterrence doctrine were viewed with interest by India. Regardless of their diverging international positions, a certain mutual respect thus endured between France and India during the Cold War<sup>38</sup>.

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<sup>34</sup> Interview with AVM Kapil Kak, Monday 6<sup>th</sup> November 2006

<sup>35</sup> Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, pp. 161-162

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<sup>36</sup> Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, p159

<sup>37</sup> Striking capacity

<sup>38</sup> Sougoumar Mayoura, *France and Franco-Indian Relations Since 1958*,

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 made both France and India strive for a multipolar order rather than for an American-dominated unipolar world. The historic background of French foreign policy made this desire credible, and the new direction in which India embarked after the disappearance of its Soviet mentor made it possible. This theoretical link was materialised with France's support for an Indian permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, voiced from 1998 onwards<sup>39</sup>. This similar approach to world politics 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>40</sup>.

This international relations connection is part of what could be termed broader cultural affinities. Both countries have always admired each other for historical and cultural reasons. The French Revolution greatly influenced the Indian strive for independence and was frequently referred to as a model to learn from; India on the other hand has often been seen by France through a 'romantic lens' and has fascinated the French – the intellectuals like the rest of the population - for centuries (it still does according to the number of French tourists to India every year). These cultural ties had a secondary role but were nonetheless

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<http://www.upf.pf/recherche/IRIDIP/RJP/RJP6/0Mayoura.doc>

*Special Report on Indo-French relations: Interview with Dominique Girard*, in *Force*, Volume 3 No5, January 2006, p9

<sup>39</sup> Chirac's declaration in Delhi on 25<sup>th</sup> January 1998 regarding the need for the international practices and treaties to be reformed according to an evolving world order implied France's adherence to an Indian permanent seat at the UNSC. This idea was subsequently voiced in clearer terms.

<sup>40</sup> Alyssa Ayres, *Is India Emerging as France of Asia?*, *YaleGlobal*, 21 November 2006, <http://yaleglobal.yale.edu/display.article?id=8452>

important in helping the France and India grow closer together.

The rapprochement between India and France was not merely ideological: it was also tightly linked to the former's 1990s economic reforms. The Congress Government's new economic policy in 1991, aimed at revitalising the economy through liberalisation and opening up of the market, greatly attracted France. Major French companies, including high-technology and defence sector industries such as Dassault and Aerospatiale, started settling in India around that time. Yet the economic relations between the two countries until 1998 remained relatively stagnant, both in terms of foreign direct investment and trade<sup>41</sup>. The desire on both sides to strengthen these startlingly lagging economic ties cannot be underestimated in the decision to establish a strategic partnership between India and France in 1998.

Throughout the 1990s, France followed India's evolution from a distance, and took a few years to grasp its full potential. Despite some calls in France, mainly from the strategic community, to start viewing India with 'a different eye', it was not until 1998 that the 'awareness [spread] at the highest levels of the French State that India was now a major emerging power'<sup>42</sup>. This evolving perception of India as a new significant player on the world scene led France to support the implementation of a strategic dialogue in January 1998. This partnership was really cemented three months later when French resolve to trust India was proven after the Pokhran tests. When India conducted two nuclear tests on

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<sup>41</sup> In 1996, India was France's 35<sup>th</sup> importer (0,41% of French imports) and France's 43<sup>rd</sup> exporting country (0,37% of French exports) Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, p160

<sup>42</sup> VisaFrance, *France in India, State Visit of the president of the Republic of France, Mr Jacques Chirac, 19<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> February 2006 in India*, p3

11<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> May 1998, France condemned it like the rest of the international community, but it adopted a distinctly progressive approach. It probably saw in India's nuclear policy an echo of its Gaullist's drive for strategic autonomy. Rather than punishing and sanctioning India like many other countries did, France emphasized the need to encourage it to adopt the right attitude. It based its judgment 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 was also relatively understanding 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 mak[ing] up for global bitterness'<sup>43</sup>. France's demonstrated trust in India was perceived as a proof of its commitment to their bilateral friendship. Several visits and an intensified dialogue following the nuclear tests enabled the effective establishment of the strategic partnership, India's first such strong affiliation with an outside country apart from Russia.

### **A FOUR-PILLARS DEFENCE COOPERATION**

According to Dominique Girard, France's ambassador to India, the 'strategic partnership that [the two countries] have forged with one another must be based on sound and coordinated defence systems'<sup>44</sup>. Both levels are tightly linked: decisions and actions taken in the field of defence directly result from common perceptions and goals fixed at the strategic level. It is therefore essential to analyse defence cooperation as

part of the broader Indo-French strategic partnership.

Talks had been initiated as early as 1995 to revive the Indo-French Defence Cooperation Working Group to regularise and increase exchanges between the two defence ministries. These discussions really became substantial once they became part of an established partnership. The evolving perception of India by France was an important factor in tightening their defence relations: France's growing interest for India and its future made it keener to engage it more substantially on defence matters<sup>45</sup>. At the same time, India's development 'beyond the old privileged Russian connection' made it eager to find new defence partners<sup>46</sup>.

Since 1998, defence relations between India and France have evolved to become a true cooperation, touching upon various aspects of each country's defence. There are four main pillars to this cooperation: high-level visits between representatives of each country; joint trainings and exercises; research and development programs; and arms procurement.

### **High-level visits**

Chirac's visit in January 1998 was highly symbolic as he was invited as the Chief Guest for India's Republic Day on its 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary as an independent state<sup>47</sup>. Despite the fall of India's Third Front Government a few weeks before, the fact that the French President's visit was maintained illustrated Paris' willingness to address India as an important partner, regardless of which government was in

<sup>43</sup> Title of an article in *The Economic Times*, 14 May 1998 (unknown author)

<sup>44</sup> <http://www.wsws.org/articles/2006/feb2006/indi-f28.shtml>

<sup>45</sup> Dr. K. Manikandan, *Indo-French Defence Cooperation: Experiences, Trends and Opportunities, in India and France: Past, Present and Future*, edited by B. Krishnamurthy, Pondichery, 2006, p104

<sup>46</sup> Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, p158

<sup>47</sup> Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, p162

place. This determination was further strengthened by the fact that Yeltsin did the contrary: by postponing the visit he had planned to make to Delhi during the same month, he showed a certain reluctance to trust and engage with India<sup>48</sup>. After the implementation of the Indo-French strategic dialogue in 1998, a mechanism for exchanges and discussions on security issues was established at the highest executive levels.

The number of meetings aimed solely at defence issues, separate from broader foreign policy discussions, attests of the importance of the defence cooperation between France and India. While broad geopolitical issues are generally discussed within the strategic dialogue, the Indian and French armed forces and ministries have separate consultations on military doctrines which also aim at defining closer service to service cooperation<sup>49</sup>. Following is the list of the bilateral exchanges on defence issues that have taken place every year since 1998:

- 1998: General Douin, Chief of Staff of the French Army, visited India on *10-12 February*, and was followed by General Rannou, Chief of Staff of the French Air Force, who visited India from *6<sup>th</sup> to 11<sup>th</sup> December*<sup>50</sup>.
- 1999: Indian Defence Minister, Mr. George Fernandes, went to France on *11-13 January*<sup>51</sup>.
- 2000: On *23-26 April*, French Chief of Defence Staff Jean-Pierre Kelche went to India to hold discussions on

defence cooperation. These talks were furthered by the visit on *18-19 May 2000* of French Defence Minister Alain Richard, accompanied by Ambassador J.B. Ouvrieu (co-Chairman of the Indo-French Joint High Committee on Defence) and Mme Kocher (Adviser to the French Prime Minister)<sup>52</sup>. During this consultation, Alain Richard and Prime Minister A.B. Vajpayee agreed to intensify political dialogue and high-level military consultations<sup>53</sup>.

- 2001: General Yves Crène, Chief of Staff of the French Air Force, visited India from *17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> April*. The 4<sup>th</sup> meeting of the High-Level Defence Committee took place in Delhi in *June*. Mr. Jaswant Singh, Indian Minister of External Affairs and Defence Minister, accepted Foreign Minister Hubert Védrine's invitation to visit France on *28<sup>th</sup> September*. There he met with President Chirac, with Mr. Védrine and with the Defence Minister Alain Richard<sup>54</sup>.
- 2002: The Committee on Foreign Affairs, Defence and Army of the French Senate, led by Vice-President Mr. André Dulait, came to India on *4<sup>th</sup> to 6<sup>th</sup> March*. The Chiefs of the Indian and the French Armies met for the first time from *11<sup>th</sup> to 14<sup>th</sup> March*. Admiral JL Battet, Chief of Naval Staff, visited India from *1<sup>st</sup> to*

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<sup>48</sup> *Russie : report de la visite en Inde de Boris Eltsine et du sommet de la CEI*, in *Le Monde*, 8 January 1998

<sup>49</sup> Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, p168

<sup>50</sup> <http://www.ambafrance-in.org/news/FranceAndIndia/topichome.asp?Type=&Year=1998>

<sup>51</sup> <http://www.ambafrance-in.org/news/FranceAndIndia/topichome.asp?Type=&Year=1999>

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<sup>52</sup> Indian Ministry of External Affairs *Annual Report for 2000-2001*, p64

<sup>53</sup> Dr. K. Manikandan, *Indo-French Defence Cooperation: Experiences, Trends and Opportunities, in India and France: Past, Present and Future*, edited by B. Krishnamurthy, Pondichery, 2006, p104

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.ambafrance-in.org/news/FranceAndIndia/topichome.asp?Type=&Year=2001>

4<sup>th</sup> May<sup>55</sup>. Chief of Army Staff General S. Padmanabhan visited France in *November*. The 5<sup>th</sup> meeting of the High-Level Defence Committee took place in Paris from 5<sup>th</sup> to 8<sup>th</sup> *November* and focused on an in-depth review of bilateral defence cooperation and step to further deepen and diversify it<sup>56</sup>.

- 2003: French Defence Minister Michèle Alliot-Marie visited India on 27-28 *April*. A 90-member delegation from the French General Staff School (CSEM) visited India in *May*. Rear Admiral Richard Wilmot-Roussel came for the Indo-French Navy-to-Navy Operational Staff Talks which were held in Mumbai on 9<sup>th</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> *September*<sup>57</sup>. Admiral Madhavendra Singh, Indian Chief of Naval Staff, paid a visit to France from 19 to 24 *October*. The 6<sup>th</sup> meeting of the High-Level Committee on Defence met in Delhi from 19 to 21 *November*<sup>58</sup>.
- 2004: Indo-French Staff Talks were held in France from 1<sup>st</sup> to 4<sup>th</sup> *March*<sup>59</sup>. Indian Chief of Air Staff visited France in *April*. Navy-to-Navy Operational Staff Talks were held

from 10<sup>th</sup> to 12<sup>th</sup> *June*<sup>60</sup>. The 7<sup>th</sup> Round of the High-Level Defence Committee, led by J.F.Thibault (French Defence Minister's Personal Representative) and India's Defence Secretary Ajay Prasad took place in Paris on 17-19 *November*, and the three sub-Committees also met. Exchange program between the armed forces of both countries continued and many visits at senior staff officer level occurred<sup>61</sup>.

- 2005: The third Indo-French Navy-to-Navy Staff Talks were held from 17<sup>th</sup> to 21<sup>st</sup> *January*<sup>62</sup>. Admiral Alain Oudot de Dainville, head of the general staff for the Navy, visited India on 21<sup>st</sup> *June*. The 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the High Level Defence Committee took place on 8-9 *December* in New Delhi, with Mr. Thierry Borja de Mozota leading the French side and the Defence Secretary leading the Indian delegation.
- 2006: President Chirac's visit to India on 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> *February* led to the establishment of an Agreement on Defence Cooperation. Defence Minister Pranab Mukherjee met French Defence Minister Michele Alliot Marie in Paris on 4<sup>th</sup> *September*, as part of a three-day trip to France during which he visited Centre for Planning and Operations Management (CPCO) and the Command of Air Defence and Air Operations (CDAOA) at Taverny<sup>63</sup>.

The Strategic Dialogue takes place twice a year to address global issues on a regular

<sup>55</sup> <http://www.ambafrance-in.org/news/FranceAndIndia/topichome.asp?Type=&Year=2002>

<sup>56</sup> <http://www.tribuneindia.com/2002/20021106/nation.htm#2>

Indian Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2002-2003*, p124 <http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/FileContent?serviceID=7&fileid=6871B0D7-C00C-F8FF-DA09-25B9ADCD858C&lng=en>

<sup>57</sup> Indian Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2003-2004*, p43, p 197, <http://mod.nic.in/reports/welcome.html>

<sup>58</sup> Indian Ministry of External Affairs *Annual Report for 1<sup>st</sup> March 2003-31 March 2004*, p84

<sup>59</sup> Indian Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2003-2004*, p43, <http://mod.nic.in/reports/welcome.html>

<sup>60</sup> Indian Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2004-2005*, p50, <http://mod.nic.in/reports/welcome.html>

<sup>61</sup> Indian Ministry of External Affairs *Annual Report for 2004-2005*

<sup>62</sup> Indian Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2004-2005*, p49, <http://mod.nic.in/reports/welcome.html>

<sup>63</sup> <http://www.india-defence.com/reports/2453>



basis. The High Committee on Defence Cooperation was established at the same time as the Strategic Dialogue (1998). Constituting a crucial portion of the broader bilateral partnership, it illustrates perfectly the density of Indo-French defence cooperation. The High Defence Committee is co-chaired by two representatives appointed by each country's Defence Ministries. During each meeting, the committee undertakes an assessment of the previous year, examines the current activities taking place in the field of defence, establishes a cooperation plan for the following year and reviews its sub-groups' actions<sup>64</sup>. Taking place every year, alternately in France and in India, it goes beyond a sharing of views and perceptions regarding defence matters<sup>65</sup>. It is divided into two sub-committees: military cooperation and defence equipments. These two categories, which are completed by consultations on strategic matters and exchanges on defence doctrines, show how this bilateral defence cooperation has evolved since 1998 when it was still limited to arms sales. This progress also shows the important distinction between the various aspects and categories of *defence* cooperation: military cooperation relates to joint exercises and operations, and industrial cooperation mainly encompasses defence equipment and arms deals. The military sub-committee organises and directs military cooperation with the aim of undertaking 'mutually advantageous activities for the French and Indian armed forces'<sup>66</sup>. The defence equipment sub-

committee is tasked with examining current programs and identifying new opportunities in the area of industrial armament cooperation. While many countries limit their relations to arms transfers, France and India enjoy much broader defence cooperation.

In addition to the annual Strategic Dialogue and the High Committee on Defence Cooperation, an Indo-French Joint Working Group on International Terrorism was also established, a few days before the 9/11 terrorist attacks. This idea had been discussed as early as June 2000, showing the convergence of France and India on global security issues. The twice yearly meetings of this working group aim at increasing exchanges in order to reinforce both countries' ability to promote security and fight international terrorism<sup>67</sup>.

While ministerial and high level military visits have significantly developed since 1998, they constitute only a side of Indo-French defence cooperation. Meetings of the High Committee on Defence lead to an increased number of cooperative actions, which are then set up at the level of the armed forces and of the defence industry.

### **Joint trainings and exercises**

The Indian and French armed forces have increasingly participated in joint trainings and exercises since 1998. Being very far apart geographically, cooperation between the two armies is more difficult than with the two other branches of the armed forces. Naval exercises have become institutionalised to take place every year, and

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<sup>64</sup> *Décret n° 2006-1403 du 17 novembre 2006 portant publication de l'accord de coopération dans le domaine de la défense entre le Gouvernement de la République française et le Gouvernement de la République de l'Inde, signé à New Delhi le 20 février 2006 (1)*, <http://www.admi.net/jo/20061119/MAEJ0630095D.html>

<sup>65</sup> Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, p168

<sup>66</sup> *Décret n° 2006-1403 du 17 novembre 2006 portant publication de l'accord de coopération dans le domaine de la défense entre le Gouvernement de la République française et le Gouvernement de la République de l'Inde,*

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*signé à New Delhi le 20 février 2006 (1)*, <http://www.admi.net/jo/20061119/MAEJ0630095D.html>

<sup>67</sup> *Décret n° 2006-1403 du 17 novembre 2006 portant publication de l'accord de coopération dans le domaine de la défense entre le Gouvernement de la République française et le Gouvernement de la République de l'Inde, signé à New Delhi le 20 février 2006 (1)*, <http://www.admi.net/jo/20061119/MAEJ0630095D.html>

cooperation is also on the rise between the two air forces. These bilateral trainings and exercises are becoming increasingly multilateral, with other countries participating in order to achieve maximum interoperability for eventual international operations.

### *Naval exercises and trainings*

France was the first country with which India conducted a naval exercise after the Pokhran tests of 1998<sup>68</sup>. This exercise, codenamed Springex-2000, 'aimed at validating existing and future tactical doctrines along with new weapons and sensors'<sup>69</sup>. It was not part of the Varuna series of joint Indo-French naval exercises, which are now established between the two navies and constitute the bulk of their joint exercises.

While the Indian navy undertakes numerous joint naval exercises with foreign countries, France figures among the only three countries with which it has institutionalised these exercises<sup>70</sup>. The Varuna series of joint naval exercises between France and India was initiated in 1998 and started in 2001. Since then, these naval cooperation drills have grown noticeably both in scope and in complexity. Comprising of only naval vessels during their first exercise in November 2001 off the Mumbai coast, they have evolved to integrating aerial components. Since 2002, the French nuclear powered aircraft carrier *Charles de Gaulle* regularly participates in these exercises. Vessels and aircrafts which participate in the exercises are placed alternately under French

and Indian command. Numerous visits of naval establishments, training sessions, professional discussions, sports, cultural activities and social events occur during the harbour phase of each exercise. Such operational and theoretical exchanges enable the two navies to interact professionally in various spheres of maritime warfare. They are aimed at achieving greater understanding and interoperability between the two navies in the view of achieving joint operations at sea. They constitute a significant indicator of the growing Indo-French defence cooperation.

As table 1 shows, the Varuna exercises have greatly evolved and have covered a variety of fields, ranging from anti-submarine warfare to counter-mine measures.

### *Aerial exercises and trainings*

Bilateral exercises are also on the rise between the Indian and the French Air Forces. The Indian Air Force's (IAF) first bilateral exercise with a foreign counterpart was Garuda I, performed with the French *Armée de l'Air* in February 2003, in Gwalior (India). During this exercise, India was exposed to French mid-air refuelling tankers for the first time. Garuda II was performed in June 2005 at the Air Force Station 125 "Charles Monier" in Istres (Southern France). This second exercise lasted two weeks and was notable since it was the first time a contingent of the Indian Air Force exercised in European skies. Garuda II focused on Beyond Visual Range (BVR) combat and In-Flight Refueling (IFR) procedures<sup>71</sup>. The French contingent, led by Lieutenant-Colonel Jean-Sébastien Macke, second-in-command of the 2/5 fighter squadron, consisted of five *Mirage 2000RI* and *Mirage 2000-5* fighters of the 2/5 "Ile-de-France" fighter squadron, one *Boeing KC-135 FR* and an *E-3F AWACS* aircraft. On the Indian side, six *Sukhoi-30* Multi-Role Combat Aircraft, an *Illyushin-78MKI IFR*

<sup>68</sup> Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, p168

<sup>69</sup> John Cherian, *Peace-time Manoeuvres*, Volume 17, Issue 04, Feb. 19 - Mar. 03, 2000, <http://www.hinduonnet.com/fline/fl1704/17040460.htm>

<sup>70</sup> The Indian Navy undertakes joint patrols with Indonesia and has also institutionalised joint exercises with the United States and Singapore. It has also hosted the Royal Navy several times.

<sup>71</sup> Sayan Majumdar, *Garuda II: IAF's Expeditionary Aspirations*, <http://www.indiadefence.com/GarudaII.htm>

tanker and two *Illyushin-76* transport aircrafts were led by Group Captain Shreesh Mohan and comprised 120 personnel<sup>72</sup>. Garuda II gave the IAF the unique opportunity to work with *E-3Fs*, which it does not possess, and to familiarise itself with NATO procedures, while it enabled the French Air Force to practice with the *Sukhoi-30s*.

India has only recently engaged in joint air exercises with foreign countries, and the Garuda experiences are very innovative in this sense. They illustrate both India's desire to benchmark procedures and tactics with friendly air arms, and France's interest in augmenting air links with India within their broader defence cooperation<sup>73</sup>. In addition to these joint exercises, the IAF personnel regularly participate in training programs in France.

### **Joint Research and Development programs**

As its economic power rapidly grew, India has increasingly aimed at developing a home grown and state controlled defence industry as well as a research and development capability to support its armed forces. The driving idea was to bring to an end its long-term reliance on foreign supplies. Being fairly novice in the field of defence R&D (Research and Development), it has greatly valued outside help and experience sharing. Indeed, despite being one of the most significant defence producers in the developing world, India 'has been spectacularly unsuccessful in growing its defence R&D capability'<sup>74</sup>.

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<sup>72</sup> *Garuda II: New challenges*, <http://www.france-in-india.org/CalendarOfEvents/CalendarEvents/preview.asp?EventID={E29BDF55-71AE-4596-BE7B-C90DA902D881}>

<sup>73</sup> <http://www.vayuaerospace.in/2005issue4/garuda.html>

<sup>74</sup> *Indian Defence Industry: Domestic Production and Imports for the Future Balance*, 16 October 2002, [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/official\\_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf](http://www.nti.org/e_research/official_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf)

India stated its intention to develop and deploy indigenously developed weapons systems by 2005, but these results have been inconsistent, since the majority of the important programs experienced time and cost over-runs<sup>75</sup>. It therefore views France's proposal to develop common material with great interest. Joint production and collaboration projects are becoming increasingly frequent between French and Indian defence companies. For example the French aviation giant Snecma is already collaborating with HAL on the production of aero engines powering the Advanced Light Helicopters (ALH) and is working with the DRDO's on producing Kaveri engines for the Tejas Light Combat Aircraft (LCA). Turbomeca is also cooperating with HAL, to codevelop the Ardiden 1H - called Shakti - engine for the twin-engined Dhruv ALH. This is developed under an industrial partnership signed in February 2003, and the engines should be ready in March 2007. GIAT is cooperating with the DRDO to develop a redesigned turret for the Arjun Mk2 Main Battle Tank (MBT).

In September 2006, during Mr Mukherjee's visit to France, a suggestion was made for the joint research and development of missiles. The proposed agreement envisaged the transfer of technology from European missile consortium MBDA to India's Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO). The deal, meant to be signed during Mr Mukherjee's visit but postponed for unknown reasons, would represent a significant advance in boosting joint R&D defence programs<sup>76</sup>.

### **Arms deals**

Arms sales, which used to be the sole feature of defence ties between France and India during the Cold War, still remain the

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<sup>75</sup> Damien Bristow, *India Fails to Hit Target*, <http://www.global-defence.com/2001/RSp2a.html>

<sup>76</sup> Press Trust of India, *Missile Pact Lands Falls Short of Signature*, <http://indianexpress.com/story/12085.html>

core of their current defence cooperation. As the first part of this paper explains, Russian purchases constituted the bulk of India's defence procurement. Yet France for many years constituted an alternative source of supply, and it still does. French military sales to India have been averaging €300 millions to €2 billions a year, for the past few years, making French defence companies the third largest weapons and armament system suppliers to India<sup>77</sup>.

Proportionally, French weapons sales to India remain relatively small despite their strategic partnership and their growing cooperation on defence issues. Between 1998 and 2005, France represented only 2.48% of India's total weapons imports, compared to 76.65% for Russia<sup>78</sup>. Indo-French defence equipment cooperation is nonetheless broad in the scope it covers: rather than being limited to sales and deliveries, it increasingly evolves in encompassing local construction under licence, transfer of technology, joint research and industrial cooperation.

Several major deals have been struck between France and India since 1998. The deal for six *PA-6* Diesel Engine was concluded in 1999, and four pieces still need to be delivered. This contract was followed by a much more prominent one: that of the ten *Mirage-2000H* and *Mirages-2000TH* jets in 2000, delivered in 2004. This deal was worth approximately \$320 millions<sup>79</sup>. Apart for a deal struck in 2001 for *TM-333 Ardiden* turboshaft engines for the Dhruv LCH combat helicopter, two other Indo-French

arms deals are worth looking into: the finalised *Scorpène* deal and the still debated IAF request for 126 fighters. French companies are also bidding for other deals like the sale of helicopters, of radars and of other advanced systems.

The \$3 billions 6 *Scorpène* submarines deal was signed in October 2005 between India and Armaris (a subsidiary of France's Thales group) and *Direction des Constructions Navales* (DCN). The submarines will be developed by DCN, in cooperation with the Spanish industrial company Izar, and the commercialisation part of the project will be granted to Armaris. This contract is a technology transfer agreement: six submarines will be assembled by India's state-owned Mazagon Dockyards Limited (MDL), but the French DCN will produce various key parts that require equipment unavailable at Indian shipyards. These submarines will be armed with 36 MBDA *SM39 Exocet* anti-ship missiles as well as *Black Shark* and other advanced torpedoes. The construction of the first *Scorpène* started in April 2006, in DCN Cherbourg. The French company will be in charge of all the "sensitive" parts, such as the torpedo tubes, the modern sonar detection equipment, the missile launchers, the propellers, the hatches and the front and back bulkheads. The French defense group Thales will be providing the electronics. 200 French personnel will be working on the submarines over the coming eight years, while the bulk of the construction and assembling will be made in MDL's Mumbai shipyard<sup>80</sup>. The assembling of the first *Scorpène* started on 14<sup>th</sup> December 2006 in Mumbai, and should be ready by 2012. The five remaining submarines should be delivered every year after that<sup>81</sup>.

<sup>77</sup> Gurmeet Kanwal, *Indo-French Defence Cooperation Cemented Further*

<sup>78</sup> The *Mirage* deal was struck in 2000 but the aircrafts were delivered in 2004, explaining France's second rank among India's arms importers.

*Imported weapons to India (IND) in 1995-2005*, SIPRI arms transfer database

<sup>79</sup> *Trade in and licensed production of major conventional weapons: Imports sorted by recipient. Deals with deliveries or orders made 1950-1995*, SIPRI arms transfer database

<sup>80</sup> The shipyard was audited in March 2005 to ensure the efficiency of the transfer of technology

<sup>81</sup> Ajit K. Dubey, *Friends with French: India and France have been forging a multi-faceted relationship*, in *Force*, Volume 3, No5, January 2006

Other deals are currently being debated within and outside India. The IAF has announced plans to buy 126 multi-role combat aircraft (MRCA) but it still needs to finalise the contract offer. India wants to replace hundreds of its non-upgraded *Mig-21* by lightweight multi-role fighters. The Request for Proposals (RfP) it was meant to float might be converted into a Request for Quotations (RfQ) instead, to shorten the time interval between the evaluation and the price negotiations; this could enable the IAF to chose the deal by mid-2007<sup>82</sup>. 'The biggest fighter aircraft deal since the early 1990s' is expected to be worth \$9 billion<sup>83</sup>. In February 2006, Charles Edelstenne, CEO of Dassault Aviation accompanying President Chirac to India, replaced its *Mirages 2000-V* offer by a proposal to field upgraded new multi-mission *Rafale* fighters for the deal. This decision was taken in the face of the decision-making process in India: believing that it would take three to four years to sign a contract with India and having no additional export prospects for the *Mirages*, keeping the factories running for such a long time would be too costly. Edelstenne assured that India's extensive *Mirage* repair and servicing facilities set up in Bangalore by Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) would require only 'limited modification' to accommodate the *Rafale*, given its commonalities with the *Mirage*

*2000s*<sup>84</sup>. Dassault further justified it by explaining that it was 'on the verge of closing the *Mirage* fighter assembly line'. Such a purchase would represent 'a quantum jump in technology' for India<sup>85</sup>. It would also be significant in that a great part of the Russian aircrafts currently composing the majority of the IAF's strength would be replaced by French aircrafts. Dassault's *Rafale* is competing for the IAF deal with the Boeing's *F/A-18 Hornet*, the Lockheed's *F-16*, the Saab *JAS-39 Gripen* and the Russian *Mig-29M2*. In the meantime, the IAF will eventually purchase 28 second-hand *Mirage 2000-5* from France (and 12 from Qatar) as a stopgap measure until the arrival of the remaining fighters it still has to purchase<sup>86</sup>. New Delhi is said to be in the process of negotiating with French officials regarding this eventual contract.

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*Scorpène indien : La construction du premier sous-marins a commence*, <http://www.meretmarine.com/article.cfm?id=1659>

Agence France Presse, *Work Begins On First Franco-Spanish Scorpene Submarine for India*, 28 April 2006, <http://www.defensenews.com/story.php?F=1738617&C=europe>

<sup>82</sup> *Indian Government to put Air Force 126 M-MRCA deal of fast-track*, 3 October 2006, <http://www.india-defence.com/reports/2566>

<sup>83</sup> *The \$3billion Indian companies (HAL, TATA) may build F-16s*, <http://www.india-defence.com/reports/2127>

*Mirage 2000s Withdrawn As India's MRCA Fighter Competition Changes*, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/2006/03/mirage-2000s-withdrawn-as-indias-mrca-fighter-competition-changes/index.php>

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<sup>84</sup> In light of Dassault's recent proposal to field *Rafale* fighters for the IAF deal, Snecma has offered to mount the Kaveri engines in two *Rafales*.

*Mirage 2000s Withdrawn As India's MRCA Fighter Competition Changes*, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/2006/03/mirage-2000s-withdrawn-as-indias-mrca-fighter-competition-changes/index.php>

<sup>85</sup> *France offers Dassault Rafale advanced fighters to the Indian Air Force*, <http://www.india-defence.com/reports/1375>

<sup>86</sup> The IAF currently has 52 *Mirage 2000* aircrafts in three squadrons; its total fighting squadron strength has plunged to a low of 39 squadrons.

# Future Prospects for Indo-French Defence Cooperation

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'The cooperation between [India and France] in the defence sector has been the most visible and both sides have decided to work on a framework agreement for defence cooperation'<sup>87</sup>. This agreement was signed between President Chirac and Prime Minister Singh in February 2006. A further step in increasing defence cooperation, it provides the required framework for simpler and better organisation for coordinated efforts in the field of defence. It is a good illustration of the actual commitment of India and France to continuously deepen their defence cooperation. The recent visit of Defence Minister Mukherjee to Paris in September 2006, during which he discussed critical situations like Lebanon, Iran or Afghanistan with his French counterpart, demonstrates the extent covered by Indo-French defence cooperation apart from military contracts<sup>88</sup>.

If this defence association currently looks successful and rather promising, its future prospects nonetheless need to be assessed. Before doing so, the motivations of each country in strengthening this defence cooperation will be outlined. While the establishment of a strategic partnership with India was ground-breaking for France in 1998, this move has been followed by other countries since then. In the light of India's increasingly multidirectional diplomacy, one could wonder what the future of its strategic partnership with France will be, and what place defence cooperation will hold within this framework. While a few obstacles remain as to seriously strengthen Indo-French defence cooperation, the general outlook of this association remains very bright. Both countries present certain

features regarding defence matters which make them mutually attractive.

## **WHAT DOES EACH SIDE EXPECT FROM THIS DEFENCE COOPERATION AND WHAT CAN THEY GAIN FROM FURTHERING IT?**

At first glance, it could be said that regarding Indo-French bilateral relations, India has the upper hand for the future: with a sustained economic growth rate of more than 7% over the past few years and a population which is estimated to become the world's largest by 2050, it is highly attractive as a market and is viewed as a growing pole of power in Asia and in the world<sup>89</sup>. France on the other hand has a small and critically aging population, a stagnant economy growing at hardly over 1%, and seems to be struggling to maintain influence on the international scene. While India increasingly attracts, France faces more and more challenges, from within and from without. In the defence sector however, India's advantage is less obvious.

France obviously views India as a promising market for its defence products. France possesses a strong defence industry and is one of the main weapons exporters internationally. The fact that India is increasingly interested in diversifying its armament procurement scheme, and is striving to modernise its defence apparatus make it an attractive partner for France. Its domestic armament industry being currently unable to meet its need, India is looking at importing en masse. As the recent Indo-French arms deals have shown, France has all to gain from cultivating strong ties with

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<sup>87</sup> *Friends with French: India and France have been forging a multi-faceted relationship*, Ajit K. Dubey, in *Force*, Volume 3, No5, January 2006

<sup>88</sup> <http://www.teluguportal.net/modules/news/article.php?storyid=12432>

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<sup>89</sup> The CIA estimation for India's growth rate in 2005t is 8.4%. <https://www.cia.gov/cia/publications/factbook/geos/in.html>  
<http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/3575994.stm>

India which is looking at purchasing defence equipment. Furthermore, the more clients France has for its defence industry, the cheaper its products will be for its own armed forces. The bigger the scale of production, the cheaper the unit cost for each defence product, and this is an important parameter for the French military and civilian officials when they deal with a partner like India.

There is, however, another strategic logic behind France's attitude towards India in the field of defence. If less apparent, this issue is nonetheless equally important in shaping France's approach to India: France perceives India as a vital stabilising force for South Asia, a region in which it has vital interests. France possesses more than 2 million km<sup>2</sup> of territories in the Indian Ocean, which it views as a key 'strategic region'. France still possesses a dozen islands in these seas, and 200 nautical miles of Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ) around each one of these. It is therefore 'a main country of the Indian Ocean and the guardian for the strategic route between the Cape of Good Hope and the Gulf countries'<sup>90</sup>. As an important player in the Indian Ocean, France carefully works on establishing a safe environment in South Asia. India appears as the most obvious partner to help France to achieve such goals. Currently overstretched internationally, French defence forces view trusted allies as vital to safeguard their national interests abroad. By engaging substantially on defence matters with India, France hopes that in the long term it will be able to rely on India for guarding the Indian Ocean and maintaining peace in South Asia. France therefore greatly values training Indian armed forces, sharing its experiences on modern type security threats and equipping it with up-to-date armament. This fits within France's broader defence policy conceived in 'a global and collective manner' and

aimed at establishing a stable and secure international environment.

France's desire to sustain a good armaments trade with India is echoed on the Indian side. Trying to modernise its defence tool and willing to acquire Western military hardware, it values French equipment which has a reputation for being of high quality. During the first Gulf War, India noted the efficiency of Western high-technology equipment, thus it started to shift away from its focus on Russian source of supply. The desire existed to obtain the material as well as the know-how to adapt to modern warfare. France, a key player in the field of defence, was therefore a highly interesting partner for India. If France is nowhere to match the American military capacity, it is precisely the fact that it is non-american which makes it attractive to India. France provides a good alternative to Western defence equipment, technology and know-how other than the United States or Great-Britain.

### **POTENTIAL IMPEDIMENTS TO DEEPER INDO-FRENCH DEFENCE COOPERATION**

Several issues of contention could be pointed out regarding Indo-French relations in the field of defence. While these are not matters of severe tension, they are nonetheless issues that need to be analysed to understand each side's position in this defence cooperation.

#### **Pakistan and China**

Since their independence, India and Pakistan have always considered each other as a threat, and have subsequently embarked on an arms race. The first section of the paper showed how France was approached by India early in the 1950s to supply it with defence equipment. Pakistan, also considering France as an interesting supplier with high-quality equipment, started acquiring French products in the mid-1960s. France's commercial approach to arms deals

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<sup>90</sup> *Terrorisme, pêche illicite et points d'appuis stratégiques : La France en Océan indien*, <http://www.meretmarine.com/article.cfm?id=1248>

made it reluctant to choose sides, thus it provided military hardware to Pakistan as well as to India. Throughout the Cold War, both countries therefore received similar French weapons, and the parallelism went as far as making both sides sometimes obtain them at the same time, as was the case for the *Alouette III* helicopter in the second half of the 1960s.

French procurement policy during the Sino-Indian war of 1962 and the Indo-Pakistani wars of 1965 and 1971 has been interpreted differently. While the point was previously made that French attitude during the 1960s had helped lay foundations for trusted Indo-French defence relations, sceptics on the Indian side still resent French decision-making back then. Such proponents criticise France for having imposed an arms-embargo against India during the 1965 war. However, while France was allied to Western countries, it was not allied to India; it was difficult for France to do otherwise than follow the other Western countries in establishing an arms embargo against both Pakistan and India. By 'supply[ing] some critical spare parts for its combat equipment within the Indian Armed Forces', and by making the embargo as limited in time as possible, France tried to avoid displeasing India<sup>91</sup>. The French managed to honour their engagements towards India unlike other of its suppliers. Nonetheless, France also supplied Pakistan with important weapons during the Cold War and after; on this basis, people can rightly criticise France for not being able to conciliate its commercial and its political interests.

Despite France's ambiguous positions during the bipolar conflict, it is necessary to keep in mind the fact that until the 1990s, Indo-French defence relations remained limited to a buyer-seller pattern. It was therefore not surprising that France would

put its commercial interests before its political ones when dealing with arms sales to South Asian countries. After 1998 and the establishment of a defence cooperation between India and France, the parameters changed as they became strategic partners. Given the tensions that remain in Indo-Pakistan relations, many in India expect France to abandon its arms transfers to Pakistan. This is however not yet the case: since 1998, France has been Pakistan's second weapons supplier, amounting to 26,46% of its weapons procurements, close behind China, which delivered 29,98% of Pakistani weapons imports<sup>92</sup>. France tries to avoid making any clear statement on the issue of its arms deliveries to Pakistan, and tends to justify itself towards India by declaring that it is only sticking to early engagements it has made with the Pakistanis.

Former Prime Minister Mr. Atal Behari Vajpayee's declaration that France had to 'make a strategic decision between India, a great democratic power and Pakistan, a little country under military dictatorship' shows that many in India still see Franco-Pakistani relations as a major hindrance for greater Indo-French defence cooperation<sup>93</sup>. France should be cautious in dealing with Pakistan not to upset its precious Indian defence partner and not to alter the balance of power between the two South Asian rivals. Yet India should also appreciate the different defence relations France enjoys: while Indo-French partnership is strategic and is long-term based, Pakistani-French relations are much more short-term based and tactical. France should be careful not to challenge the valuable partnership it has established with India, but expecting it to refute all ties with Pakistan is unrealistic.

Similarly, some people on the Indian side resent France's close ties with China, which

<sup>91</sup> The embargo was lifted in March 1966. Dr. Subhash Kapila, *South Asia: France Moves Strategically Towards India*, <http://www.saag.org/papers2/paper127.html>

<sup>92</sup> *Imported Weapons to Pakistan (PAK) in 1995-2005*, SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

<sup>93</sup> <http://www.defencejournal.com/2000/mar/peace-sasia.htm>



they perceive as a major regional competitor. Indo-French economic exchanges between India and France amount to €3,5 billion/year, and have witnessed an important increasing rate of 30 % in 2004 and 42% in 2005<sup>94</sup>. However, French exports to India are still three times smaller than to they are China, and French imports from India are six times smaller than imports from China<sup>95</sup>. French imports to India amounted to less than 2% of India's total imports and Indian imports to France less than 0.5% in 2004<sup>96</sup>. France's weapons transfers to China have been growing over the past decade, even if deliveries in the past five years were less important than those in the early 1990s<sup>97</sup>. Many Indian officials expect France's strategic partnership to be reflected, if not in its economic ties with China, in its arms sales policies regarding China and its investment in India's defence industry. This position was reiterated in September 2006 by Mr. Mukherjee, during his visit to France<sup>98</sup>.

### **The United States**

While India begrudges France's weapons deliveries to Pakistan and its close economic links with China, some people in France often regret India's fascination with the United States. Clinton's policy to tighten relations with India in 2000 was expanded

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<sup>94</sup>[http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/interviews\\_articles\\_de\\_presse\\_et\\_interventions\\_televeees./2006/fevrier/intervie\\_w\\_accordee\\_par\\_le\\_president\\_de\\_la\\_republique\\_a\\_l\\_hebdomadaire\\_india\\_today.40567.html](http://www.elysee.fr/elysee/elysee.fr/francais/interventions/interviews_articles_de_presse_et_interventions_televeees./2006/fevrier/intervie_w_accordee_par_le_president_de_la_republique_a_l_hebdomadaire_india_today.40567.html)

<sup>95</sup> Avis et Rapports du Conseil Économique et Social de la République Française, *Les relations économiques et culturelles entre la France et l'Inde*, Etude présentée par M. George Abadie, 2004, p50-51

<sup>96</sup> Avis et Rapports du Conseil Économique et Social de la République Française, *Les relations économiques et culturelles entre la France et l'Inde*, Etude présentée par M. George Abadie, 2004, p50

<sup>97</sup> *Imported Weapons to China (CHI) 1989-2005*, SIPRI Arms Transfer Database

<sup>98</sup> <http://www.hindu.com/2006/09/06/stories/2006090608901200.htm>

by the Bush administration, which worked hard on developing this partnership at the strategic level. The United States are now a key strategic partner of India, and their links are continuously growing, be it culturally, politically, economically or even technologically - the recent Indo-US nuclear deal is the most recent example of this flourishing partnership.

It would be unrealistic of India to expect France to renounce its relationships with Pakistan and China, just as it would be idealistic of the French to expect their strategic partnership with India to remain inimitable. For the same reasons that France has shown growing interest in India, the United States are working on strengthening their Indian connections. The growing strategic partnership India enjoys with the United States does not necessarily have to be at the expense of its association with the French.

This conclusion applies to broad Indo-French bilateral relations as well as to their defence cooperation. History has given India reasons to be careful in dealing with the United States, which have not always been reliable as an arms supplier. France has delivered substantial amounts of defence equipment to Pakistan, but it has never chosen to support it over India. Despite criticism voiced by some people on the Indian side, the majority acknowledge France's attitude during the Cold War as being relatively favourable to them. The French value their good reputation in India in the defence sector, but they would like it to be kept deeper in the Indian minds. Fascination for the United States could lead India to overlook France which has up till now been a very valuable partner on defence matters.

The French Ambassador to India, Dominique Girard, explains that France does not expect to stand on top of India's agenda: 'We will never be your neighbours but we can certainly be very close. We will never be number one in India, we will

always be much smaller for obvious reasons than the United States or Japan or even China'. He nonetheless singles out the quality of Indo-French defence relations by explaining that he 'believe[s] that the Indian military are among [France's] best interlocutors and are reliable partners'<sup>99</sup>. This optimism has been echoed by the Indian Ministry of Defence, which thinks that 'the evolving relationship with France shows that there is a good potential for a path-breaking defence-industrial relationship in areas of advanced technologies cutting across the normal pattern of North-South relations'<sup>100</sup>.

Two things are worth observing regarding these two statements. The first one is that both sides are highly positive about the gains of deeper Indo-French defence cooperation. France acknowledges its lesser role than the United States and does not claim to be holding a comparable position. India does not seem to be taking France for granted as it as it openly declares its promising expectations regarding their defence relations. The second observation relates to each side's understanding of this defence cooperation. Optimism is present on both sides, but for different reasons. It seems that the French are emphasising the success of the recent military cooperation whereas the Indians are putting the accent on the quality of Indo-French armament relations. Such different analyses can be positive for broader defence cooperation as it can mean that both sides will push for strengthening different aspects of this cooperation.

<sup>99</sup> *Special Report on Indo-French relations: Interview with Dominique Girard*, in *Force*, Volume 3 No5, January 2006, p10

<sup>100</sup> Indian Ministry of Defence, *Annual Report 2002-2003*, p8 <http://se1.isn.ch/serviceengine/FileContent?serviceID=7&fileid=6871B0D7-C00C-F8FF-DA09-25B9ADCD858C&lng=en>

## France's attitude to India during the Cold War

Despite friendly rhetoric, it seems that France and India sometimes still consider each other as strategic partners rather than as friends. This reserve from both countries owes to the state of their current bilateral relations, which could be deepened in various areas, as well as to France's attitude towards India since its independence. Many in India still underline the fact that for a long time their country did not figure on France's foreign policy agenda. French policy during the Cold War towards the developing countries was focused on Africa and the Middle East, as well as Latin America. India was never 'in the radar screen of French decision makers' who were allocating the majority of their aid to their former colonies<sup>101</sup>. This attitude is often used as a reason to explain why France and India will be able to enjoy good bilateral relations but will never become friends. Such believers think that France's strategic interests in India are too linked to the latter's recent economic progress. This perception is certainly founded, but it is redundant. Rather than going over hurdles that have paved Indo-French relations since their creation, a more prospective approach to analysing Indo-French bilateral ties would be to emphasise the considerable progress achieved over the past eight years. Having sold armaments to India for the past fifty years, the French have evolved into opening up to Indian officials and trying to prove their commitment to the Indo-French strategic partnership. They have trusted their Indian counterparts in engaging them on national security issues and have welcomed them into some of their major national defence establishments. The growing scope and complexity of Indo-French joint exercises also attests of France's resolve to share its experiences and defence material with India. The French

<sup>101</sup> Jean-Luc Racine, *The Indo-French Strategic Dialogue: Bilateralism and World Perceptions*, in *Journal of Strategic Studies*, n° 25-4, p160

seem deeply committed to alter Indo-French defence relations to become a two-way partnership from which both sides can learn and gain. Indian reserves are only natural, especially considering the growing number of partnerships it is being offered worldwide. Nevertheless, considering the recent and considerable advancement of Indo-French defence cooperation, there is no need to harp on the last fifty years. India's growing ease at trusting France on sharing defence experiences and projects augurs good for their future relations. On this basis, there should be no reason to rule out the establishment of a prospective and lasting friendship.

### **Limited defence budgets**

The quality and extent of Indo-French defence cooperation largely depends on both countries' defence budgets and the particular amounts allocated to cooperating with foreign defence establishments. For the year 2005, France's budget for the Military and Defense Cooperation Direction (*Direction de la Coopération Militaire et de Défense, DCMD*) amounted to €94.7 millions. Only 4.93% of this budget was allocated to defence cooperation with the whole of Asia, while 71.75% of it was directed to Africa<sup>102</sup>. India's defence budget is still increasing, but the share allocated to cooperation with other countries is not<sup>103</sup>. It is trying to reduce the number of joint exercises with foreign countries because of the high expenses they cause. For example the IAF has been required to hold two joint fighter

exercises every year, one at home and one outside, and decided to 'stop air exercises involving several countries since they are usually held at low level'<sup>104</sup>. While such measures will probably not damagingly impact cooperation with the French (which is valued given the fact that the IAF possesses and is interested in acquiring further French aircrafts for which they have the necessary know-how and experience), it nonetheless shows India's limited budget for the particular issue of defence cooperation with foreign countries. Such limitations are important in slowing the deepening of Indo-French defence cooperation. The issue is therefore not to improve the quantity of Indo-French defence exchanges and consultations, but rather improve their quality.

### **WHAT IS THE LIKELY OUTCOME OF INDO-FRENCH DEFENCE COOPERATION?**

Jaswant Singh likes to underline the fact that he does not 'think countries have best friends. Countries have best interests'<sup>105</sup>. In the field of defence cooperation, it seems that despite their individual interests, France and India nonetheless deal with each other like old friends would. Indeed, Indian and French national interests in the area of defence are convergent. Both are keen to establish a safer environment in South Asia. France is willing to share its knowledge on defence matters, its experience and its technology with its Indian partner for which it has a growing trust. India is keen to improve its defence capacity by obtaining modernised equipment and appropriate know-how, which it can obtain from France. Both perceive each other as a pole of power in a world which they perceive as increasingly multipolar.

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<sup>102</sup> [http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/actions-france\\_830/defense-securite\\_9035/cooperation-militaire-defense\\_9037/direction-cooperation-militaire-defense\\_9227/budget\\_26191.html](http://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/fr/actions-france_830/defense-securite_9035/cooperation-militaire-defense_9037/direction-cooperation-militaire-defense_9227/budget_26191.html)

<sup>103</sup> Finance Minister Mr. P. Chidambaram announced in March 2006 a 7% increase in India's Defence budget for the next fiscal year, from INR 83,000 crore to INR 89,000 crore (\$20.11 billion)  
*India's Defense Budget Rises 7%, to \$20.11 Bn*, <http://www.defenseindustrydaily.com/2006/03/indias-defense-budget-rises-7-to-2011-bn/index.php>

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<sup>104</sup> 'Centre Asks IAF to Reduce Joint Exercises', *The Hindu*, 6 April 2006

<sup>105</sup> *Jaswant Singh Interview*, SBS Television, 20 June 2001, <http://news.sbs.com.au/dateline/index.php?page=archive&daysum=2001-06-20#>

Indo-French defence cooperation faces several challenges but the fact that both countries have national interests they try to pursue should not stop them from establishing a lasting defence friendship. Despite the various areas of disagreement which have just been mentioned, Indo-French defence cooperation has greatly evolved. More remains to be done, but the prospect for the evolution of these defence ties should be looked at with hope rather than with doubts.

First of all, it is only worth emphasising again the quality of Indo-French bilateral relations, which defence cooperation is a part of. Doubts should be analysed and worked upon rather than cast away. While some Indians discard France as being a depreciating power struggling to retain some kind of importance on the international arena, it nonetheless remains among the world's most influential countries at present. While this situation is likely to evolve in the coming fifty years, France is currently one of the only five permanent members at the United Nations Security Council, and is a key member of both the European Union and NATO. France could also be a major supplier of civilian nuclear reactors to India. All these factors are kept clearly in India's mind when it addresses France, which provides it with a window on the West and on the European Union, India's biggest trading partner. India knows that comprehensive strategic cooperation with France can ensure that its points of views and desires are correctly appreciated and understood in Europe<sup>106</sup>. The French are more consensual among themselves about India's promising future, but many are not ready to put in the correct efforts to promote the exclusive relations their two countries enjoy. The French cannot afford to be sensitive regarding India's turning to other countries since it would play against

them and impede the deepening of their bilateral relations with India.

India is not likely to "abandon" or even jeopardise its defence cooperation with France. Still dragging in terms of military hardware production and new operational experience, its exchanges with the French provide the Indians with a unique window on the Western defence systems and doctrines. Indian policymakers are decided to diversify their sources of military equipment and technology acquisitions, which remain largely Russian. India is therefore keen to deepen its defence partnerships with other countries. It is very attracted to Western technology, which has proved its supremacy over the past decade. India will therefore be increasingly looking at "Western countries" for its defence supplies. Among these, one can only highlight France's key position, both politically and industrially.

France is one of India's most important and most trusted Western defence partners. The United States fascinate India and the two countries have grown closer together over the past years, but some degree of caution remains on the Indian side. As previously explained, the United States seem difficult to trust and engage as a friend given their past. While their bilateral relations and their defence cooperation are currently good, India knows it cannot predict their evolution with any certainty in the long-term. The approach is one of "wait-and-see" rather than an established friendship. Indo-British relations are traditionally good but historical legacy often make their interactions more complex than with other countries. Germany is enjoying growing ties with India, and is unlikely to be a serious challenger for Indo-French defence relations in the short term. Furthermore, Germany being a key strategic European partner of France, increased Indo-German defence cooperation would suit France and would improve interoperability between them. Israel has become a recent key arms supplier for of India, but their defence ties

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<sup>106</sup> Subhash Kapila, *France Moves Strategically towards India*, Saag paper 127, [www.saag.org/papers2/paper127.html](http://www.saag.org/papers2/paper127.html)

are limited to arms sales. France, relatively independent on the international scene yet a key European and NATO member, devoted to establish a multipolar order in which India would have a key role to play, is likely to remain a very important defence as well as strategic partner of India. The fact that President Chirac, highly implicated in furthering Indo-French defence relations within the strategic dialogue, will most probably be replaced in the upcoming French presidential elections should not be a matter of concern for the evolution of Indo-French defence relations. The French strategic and political community in France and in India is consensual about the importance of their partnership with India. The view is widespread that France should only work on deepening its defence ties with India. The French should make sure their resolve is well understood from their Indian partners.

Politically therefore, both countries seem to agree over the importance of maintaining strong cooperation in the field of defence. In terms of equipment however, it is likely that French sales to India will face increasing competition. Its defence products remain very expensive compared to the Russian or the American products. The recent Indo-US strategic partnership and India's agreement to extend its defence cooperation with Russia to 2010 will make it even more inclined to consider the United States and Russia as serious defence products suppliers. Israel is also becoming a main competitor as was witnessed over the issue of radar sales to India. Yet Indian defence up-gradation plans will call for such sizeable acquisitions of military hardware in the next two decades years that French defence companies are bound to find some opportunities to seize. Indian defence R&D's mitigated successes have caused the country to shift away from its home grown programmes and back towards external procurement<sup>107</sup>. Given its state of the art

defence production capabilities and India's need for avionics, combat aircrafts, combat helicopters or main battle tanks, France should be able to further its defence equipment ties with India.

In 1998, India and France had identified 52 areas 'where each other's technological expertise could be jointly tapped'<sup>108</sup>. Some of these areas, like the co-production of engines or diesel-electric submarines, have been well exploited since 1998. Many joint possibilities still remain. The French, who helped upgrade the Indian *Mig-21s*, should work hard to get the right to upgrade the aging *Mig-29s* and *Sukhoi 30s* of the IAF. Further investment from French companies in Indian industries will be a key factor in deepening Indo-French defence cooperation. Thales' will to invest in defence and other Indian Public Sector Undertakings should be taken as an example by other French companies.

In the near future, India is likely to 'look abroad to full-fill the majority of its top-end defence needs'. In the long-term however, this requirements for outside defence products are likely to decrease, and France needs to be able to adapt to this shift in India's procurement pattern. France's ability and determination to engage in joint research and joint production of defence equipment with India will be a significant area to distinguish it from the other competitors in the field. Despite some major setbacks, India will most likely pursue its desire to establish its own defence industry, while at the same time heavily relying on outside supplies. 'As the process of globalisation and consolidation in the defence industry continues to gather pace and the price of designing, developing and producing modern defence equipment increases rapidly, India' aspirations would

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<sup>107</sup> *Indian Defence Industry: Domestic Production and Imports for the Future Balance*, 16 October 2002,

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[http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/official\\_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf](http://www.nti.org/e_research/official_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf)

<sup>108</sup> Prasun K. Sengupta, *Enduring Ties: Indo-French defence relations go back a long way*, in *Force*, Volume 3 No 5, January 2006, p11

also be greatly helped if it could rapidly involve foreign companies in the process of defence production<sup>109</sup>. France has made a significant step in signing several transfer of technology deals with India, but it needs to deepen these ties by engaging in more joint productions. The possibilities are numerous, but they will prove France's resolve to treat India as a defence partner and not as a defence client anymore.

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<sup>109</sup> *Indian Defence Industry: Domestic Production and Imports for the Future Balance*, 16 October 2002, [http://www.nti.org/e\\_research/official\\_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf](http://www.nti.org/e_research/official_docs/cia/111501CIA.pdf)

## Conclusion

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Indo-French defence ties have traditionally been good even when their broader bilateral relations were relatively indifferent. Since 1998, the fast evolution from a buyer-seller relationship to a trusted multi-faceted defence cooperation is remarkable. The success of this association in the field of defence could be used as a lever for boosting other areas of Indo-French bilateral relations which are still dragging. Despite a somewhat indifferent past, defence cooperation between India and France since the establishment of their strategic partnership has proven that while both in need, the two countries have

become friends indeed, which have a lot to gain from continuously improving their exchanges in the field of defence. The near future will be determining for this new-born friendship. The time has come for Indo-French defence cooperation to evolve to real mutual dependence. This will be tested by France's ability to assist India in the field of defence high technology and in the two countries' ability to design and develop *joint* defence projects. The possibilities are numerous but need to be seized if France and India want to become true friends in the field of defence.

**About the Author**

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