# India - France

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1 Background

- Historically, India and France have shared a close and friendly relation. The relationship is based on shared values and real convergence on a whole range of regional and global issues. Both nations announced a ‘Strategic Partnership’ in 1998 and since then, relationship has been further strengthened.
  - France is a major supplier of military equipment to India.
  - France was one of the few nations who did not condemn India's nuclear tests in 1998.
  - France was the first country with which India entered into an agreement on Civil Nuclear Cooperation.
  - France is one of the largest suppliers of nuclear fuel to India.
  - France supports India's bid to become a permanent member of the UN Security Council as well as G-8.

- The recent PM’s visit was the first full bilateral visit to France in 9 years.
  - With the theme of “Make in India”, the two sides signed about 20 pacts, covering areas like civil nuclear energy, urban development, railways and space.
  - France pledged €2 billion for sustainable development in India.
  - Aircraft manufacturer Airbus announced its decision to enhance outsourcing in India over the next five years.
  - The Indian decided to buy 36 Rafale fighter aircraft in fly-way condition “as quickly as possible”, bypassing the log-jammed deal for supply of 126 aircraft.

2 Areas of Cooperation

2.1 Defence Cooperation

- In the area of defense cooperation, India falls back on France to expand the defense industrial base, build a modern nuclear industry, strengthen the aerospace sector and gain access to high technology
- France has always been a critical partner to India in this regard.
  - France aids to India in the diversification of its defence sector began as early as 1953, when the Dassault-Ouragan fighters were supplied to the India Air Force, which played a leading role in the 1961 liberation of Goa.
  - The importance of France as a key partner was accentuated in 1998 following India’s nuclear tests, India’s agreement to launch satellites from French Guinea stayed intact despite the sanctions imposed by other European Union countries across a range of technological sectors, especially space.
  - In 1999, during the Kargil war, the French maintained its supply to the IAF, which allowed it to operate without worrying about smart weapon reserves.
  - France was arguably the first western country to de-hyphenate its relations with Pakistan from those with India.
  - Today, France is at the forefront of India’s ambitions of modernising its sub-surface fleet.
    - Scorpène class submarines are being built at Mazagaon docks and Dassault's Rafale has won the Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft (MMRCA) tender.
  - India’s only dedicated military satellite, the GSAT-7, was launched from Ariane 5 at French Guiana.
  - Currently, French representatives have also approached the Indian side for exploring avenues for cooperation on the SSN project.
    - The Indian SSN project is an ambitious plan to design and produce a nuclear attack boat with the help of the private sector. SSNs are nuclear powered submarines, but do not carry nuclear warheads, relying instead on conventional weapons and stealth to hunt ships and other submarines.
  - India has extended invitation to France for ‘India Aviation 2016’.
- Despite all this, it seems as if the mood of the Indo-French engagement is being determined only by the progress on the Rafale deal. Much like the U.S. and India relationship which had to find a way past the Civil Nuclear Agreement. The focus should be on host of possibilities in Indo-France bilateral ties, presented by India’s growing economic and geo-strategic strength.
2.2 Indian Ocean Region

- To secure its presence in western Indian Ocean Region, France has its outposts at Mayotte & La Reunion islands and military bases in Djibouti and Abu Dhabi.
- At a grand strategic level, France and India's interests in the Indian Ocean are closely aligned.
  - Historically played an active custodial and humanitarian role in the region.
  - Share concerns over the risks of sea-borne nuclear proliferation.
  - Uphold similar core values on freedom of navigation.
  - Closely monitor the threats to the security of sea lines of communication.
- Paris recognizes that the Indian Ocean Region’s strategic equilibrium can only be truly maintained once India has emerged as a more powerful naval actor. More than military diplomacy, France is working for India’s capacity building in the region.
- The latest edition of the Indo - French naval exercise EX - VARUNA, was held off the coast of Goa in May 2015.
- Given the increasing involvement of countries such as China and USA in the Indian Ocean region, France and India may look to increase its own regional involvement as a way of staying relevant in that part of the world.

2.3 Nuclear Cooperation

- A landmark Agreement on Civil Nuclear Cooperation was signed between India and France in 2008
- During Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s visit MoUs were signed
  - between NPCIL and AREVA,
    - This will ensure an early conclusion of construction of nuclear power plants at Jaitapur,
  - between AREVA and L&T,
    - This will widen the scope of our industrial cooperation as well as the conclusion of Pre-engineering studies agreement.
- Prime Minister declared the French contribution in setting up nuclear plant to be the biggest achievement for India, even bigger than Make in India.

2.4 Space Cooperation

- France and India are two important partners in space technology and applications. The Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO) and its French counterpart, the Centre National de Etudes Spatiales (CNES) have a rich history of cooperation and collaboration spanning five decades.
- Arianespace, France has been the major provider of launch services to Indian Geo-Stationary satellites.
  - 18 Indian satellites have been launched by Arianespace on a commercial basis till date.
  - India’s multi-band telecommunications satellite GSAT-16 was precisely placed into the intended Geosynchronous Transfer Orbit by the Ariane-5 launch vehicle in December 2014.
  - Indian government has felicitated Professor Jacques Blamont (French Scientist), one of the chief architects of this cooperation, with the Padma Shri Award in 2015.
- To commemorate the 50th anniversary of Indo-French space cooperation, the Leaders welcomed
  - Cooperation for joint realization of third earth observation mission, earth observation applications, and planetary exploration;
  - MoU on Ka-band propagation experiment
  - Utilization of Indo-French Joint Satellite, Megha Tropiques, for two more years.
  - Releasing of joint stamp to mark successful joint research and missions over the last 50 years.
2.5 Cultural Cooperation

- The second edition of ‘Namaste France’ festival will be organized in several cities of France in September-November 2016.
- In order to realize their cultural aspirations, GOI has decided to establish an Indian Cultural Centre (ICC) in Paris and it is expected to be opened in 2016.
- France welcomes India’s decision to extend Tourist Visa on Arrival - Electronic Travel Authorisation (TVOA-ETA) scheme to France. India welcomes the French decision to implement a scheme for expedited 48 hours visa issuance for Indian tourists.

2.6 Potential

- Many avenues of cooperation between Indo-French remain underexplored. Both nations have significant interests in the Indian Ocean, West Asia and North Africa. More meaningful cooperation is possible here through a robust platform.
- France is set to host the most important of climate conventions at the end of this year, one that will determine the successor to the Kyoto Protocol. This makes for an important area where the two countries can cooperate.
- French government is assisting India in Smart City project for sustainable development. Work will start in Puducherry, followed by Nagpur and Chandigarh.
- As strategic partners, India and France should continue to support each other on international matters in a spirit of mutual understanding and commitment.