



RESEARCH ARTICLE

The Evolving Indo-French Defence Cooperation: Implications for Pakistan

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Article Info	Abstract
<p>Keywords: Indo-French, Defence cooperation, Scorpene-class submarines, Rafale fighter aircraft, Conventional asymmetry, Indo-Pacific region</p>	<p><i>The French presence in the Indian subcontinent began in the 17th century with the establishment of trading posts, which later evolved into settlements. This colonial legacy forms the basis of the modern Indo-French relationship, with military technology and economic cooperation as its main pillars. The Indo-French partnership is driven by mutual cost-benefit analyses. Where India aims to enhance its security and strategic autonomy, while France secures economic and geopolitical gains. Currently, India is modernizing its military systems with French defence equipment, including the Project-75 (P-75) Scorpene-class submarines, Dassault Rafale M fighter aircraft, and many others. The Scorpene-class submarines will bolster India's underwater warfare capabilities and assist in deterrence patrolling. Meanwhile, the Rafale M fighter aircraft will improve India's aerial combat readiness, providing advanced strike and air superiority capabilities. These military advancements provide India with a strategic upper hand, particularly in maintaining a strong maritime presence in the perceived Indo-Pacific region. Consequently, these developments increase the conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan, entailing further military and economic implications for Pakistan. France's equipment would be substantial in meeting New Delhi's offensive warfighting aspirations against Pakistan. In addition, the Indo-French economic partnership is flourishing too, creating an exclusive economic bloc in the region. While the growing Indo-French partnership poses challenges for Pakistan, it also presents opportunities. Pakistan should employ rational strategies to address this evolving asymmetry by diversifying alliances and exploring collaborative opportunities with France.</i></p>

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Introduction

In the dynamic geopolitical landscape of the twenty-first century, the perceived Indo-Pacific region – with the world’s 50 percent of GDP – has emerged as a strategic arena of competition, convergences, alliances, and realignments.¹ The United States has announced its grand strategy for the Indo-Pacific,² vis-à-vis China’s win-win strategy. Meanwhile, France and India have started magnifying the scope of their relationship³ with shared geopolitical objectives of America. While theoretically assuming the role of a strategic counterweight vis-à-vis China, India is exploring avenues to maximize its military and economic resources. Similarly, France is exploring opportunities to strengthen its position and extend its influence in the region.⁴ Furthermore, this paper examines India’s economic and security adventures with China, which is creating both challenges and opportunities for Pakistan. India’s expanding defence ties with France pose challenges by heightening security threats and creating conventional imbalances. Concurrently, this presents opportunities for Pakistan to refine its diplomatic strategies and strengthen deterrence measures. Additionally, Pakistan may benefit from this by strengthening its position, remaining relevant, and countering Indian actions in the region.

This paper follows a structured approach aimed at comprehensively exploring the current state of the Indo-French partnership and its implications for Pakistan’s security dynamics. The introduction provides a contextual backdrop, outlining the

¹ World Bank, "GDP (current US\$) – East Asia and Pacific," *The World Bank*, accessed April 11, 2024, https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKT.P.CD?locations=Z4&most_recent_value_desc=false.

² White House. "U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy." Accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/U.S.-Indo-Pacific-Strategy.pdf>.

³ France 24. "Emmanuel Macron." Accessed March 30, 2024, <https://www.france24.com/en/tag/emmanuel-macron/>.

⁴ French Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, "Indo-Pacific: 8 Questions to Understand on France’s Regional Strategy," accessed September 25, 2024, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/regional-strategies/indo-pacific/indo-pacific-8-questions-to-understand-on-france-s-regional-strategy/>

historical evolution and contemporary significance of the relationship. Subsequent sections explore the military and economic dimensions of cooperation, analyzing key agreements, initiatives, and their impact on regional geo-political dynamics. The evolution of the Indo-French relationship is analyzed where early colonial ambitions of France in India laid the groundwork for a nuanced relationship that evolved over centuries. Despite colonial rivalries and conflicts with other European powers, France maintained a presence in India, particularly in enclaves like the city of Pondicherry.⁵ The political thought espoused by French philosophers also left a lasting impact on India's struggle for independence, strengthening admiration for ideals of liberty and equality.⁶

The post-independence era witnessed the restoration of both India and France's role in international relations. France under Charles de Gaulle's guidance was able to restore and revitalize its national ethos in 1944 through WWII and in 1958 by preventing civil war.⁷ Whereas, India was under suspicion, and the skepticism of its neighbors for hostility and aggression in the estimation of Jawaharlal Nehru and Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel as narrated by S. Jaishankar.⁸ The prominent Indian independence leaders, Mahatma Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru were inspired by the French ideas of liberty and equality. Jawaharlal Nehru was greatly influenced by socialist and liberal ideas. A gradual beginning in Indo-French relations was marked by defence cooperation agreements and cultural exchanges. The 1980s saw a significant increase in defence collaboration, driven by India's quest for modernization and

⁵Puducherry District Administration, "History" Accessed June 5, 2024, visit: <https://puducherry-dt.gov.in/history/>

⁶ Henry Kissinger, *Leadership: Six studies in world strategy*, Penguin Group, 2024.

⁷ Kissinger, "Six Leaders" :8

⁸ Radha Menon, "Book Review: Why Bharat Matters by S. Jaishankar," *Journal of Management & Public Policy* (2024): 60.

France's advanced defence technology.⁹ Subsequent decades witnessed the expansion of ties into diverse domains, culminating in a strategic partnership declaration in 1998.

In the post-Cold War era, the bilateral relationship between India and France entered a new phase characterized by enhanced diplomatic, economic, and military cooperation. Strategic agreements spanning defence, space, and nuclear energy reinforced the broadening ties between the two nations. Collaborative efforts in space exploration and civil nuclear cooperation further solidified their partnership. Currently, French aspirations for a stronger presence in the Indo-Pacific region align with India's strategic imperatives, leading to significant military collaboration with India. Deals for the procurement of fighter jets, submarines, and missile systems underscore the depth of defence cooperation between the two countries. Joint military exercises and intelligence-sharing initiatives serve to bolster maritime security and regional interests.

French economic interests in the Indo-Pacific region merge with India's aspirations for growth and development as an economic hub for major powers. Strategic partnerships in sectors such as defence, space exploration, and civil aviation signal a shared commitment to economic prosperity. Initiatives like the French Indo-Pacific Strategy highlight France's efforts to establish its presence in the region, contributing to economic development and military deterrence.¹⁰ This strategy encompasses a robust military presence with multiple commands and forces across the region,

⁹ Sanjay Gupta, "The Changing Patterns of Indo-French Relations: From Cold War Estrangement to Strategic Partnership in the Twenty-First Century," *French Politics* 7, no. 3-4 (September 2009): 243–262. https://www.researchgate.net/publication/233689481_The_changing_patterns_of_Indo-French_relations_From_Cold_War_estrangement_to_strategic_partnership_in_the_twenty-first_century

¹⁰ Ban Barry, "Posturing and presence: the United Kingdom and France in the Indo-Pacific," *Military Balance Blog*, IISS, June 11, 2021, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2021/06/france-uk-indo-pacific/>

including naval deployments, to protect exclusive economic zones and engage in military diplomacy.¹¹ The evolving partnership between India and France has far-reaching implications for the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. Such collaborative endeavors in defence and diplomacy by India and other Western states are aimed at safeguarding their common maritime interests. However, exclusive alignments and military build-ups risk exacerbating regional tensions and mistrust among middle powers. For Pakistan, the expanding defence cooperation between India and France poses significant challenges, intensifying security dilemmas and conventional asymmetries. The acquisition of advanced military assets by India threatens to upset the regional strategic equilibrium, necessitating diplomatic maneuvering and a delicate balance of deterrence. The findings of this study suggest that Pakistan needs to adopt a multifaceted approach, leveraging economic opportunities while safeguarding national security interests. Cultivating diplomatic ties with France offers avenues for dialogue and cooperation, mutual understanding, and mitigating regional insecurities.

Theoretical Framework

Regional Complex Theory (RCT) in International Relations (IR) is a framework that explains states and other actors make decisions in a strategic manner to maximize their benefits and minimize their costs. It assumes that actors are rational, and they consistently act to achieve their goals in the most efficient way possible.¹² The defence cooperation between India and France can be analyzed through the lens of RCT where both actors seek to maximize their respective benefits while addressing their national and strategic interests. The bilateral partnership is driven by the rational calculations of costs

¹¹ French Ministry, “Indo-Pacific: 8 Questions,”

¹² James S. Coleman, *Foundations of Social Theory*, (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1990).

and benefits, with each actor making decisions based on utility maximization and anticipation of regional and global dynamics.

From India's perspective, the defence partnership with France offers multiple strategic benefits by following their national interest of 'strategic autonomy.'¹³ India seeks to enhance its military power with indigenous capabilities under the policy of 'Made in India'.¹⁴ Through high-value defence acquisitions such as the Rafale fighter jets, Scorpene-class submarines, and other advanced technologies. India aims to modernize its armed forces and strengthen its deterrence capability. For France, defence cooperation with India represents an opportunity to expand its global influence, particularly in Indo-Pacific and strengthen its role as a key player in international defence markets. The economic benefits of lucrative defence deals including Rafale jet contract, are substantial for French defence industries. For Pakistan, the growing defence partnership between India and France poses serious challenges to its security and strategic equilibrium in South Asia. The acquisition of advanced French technologies significantly enhances India's warfighting capabilities. These developments exacerbate Pakistan's security concerns vis-à-vis France, and it perceives this partnership as an effort to alter the regional balance of power.

History of Indo-French Relationship

The French presence in India began with the establishment of trading posts and settlements in the late 17th century. Particularly in the city of Pondicherry, which served as the administrative center for French interests in India. Soon, French colonial ambitions

¹³ Ume Farwa, "India's 'Strategic Autonomy': A Reality Check." Islamabad: Institute of Strategic Studies, January 31, 2024. Accessed December 10, 2024. https://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2024/01/IB_UmeFarwa_Jan_31_2024.pdf.

¹⁴ Government of India, "Make in India," Prime Minister of India. Accessed December 10, 2024. https://www.pmindia.gov.in/en/major_initiatives/make-in-india/.

clashed with those of other European powers, particularly the British. The two nations engaged in several wars and skirmishes. Eventually, France lost its presence in the Indian subcontinent. By the mid-18th century, French colonial control was limited primarily to enclaves of Pondicherry, Chandernagore, Mahe, Yanam, and Karaikal¹⁵ and it continued there until the 20th century. Interestingly, French political thought also influenced the prominent Indian independence leaders including Mahatma Gandhi, and Jawaharlal Nehru. During independence campaigns, Indian leaders often expressed admiration for French political philosophy. Particularly, they were inspired by the ideas of liberty and equality. Jawaharlal Nehru was majorly influenced by socialist and liberal ideas. He drew inspiration from French thinkers such as Jean-Jacques Rousseau and Émile Durkheim. Soon after the partition, India decided to reach out to France to meet its conventional arm's needs. However, during the initial phase of the Cold War, the Indo-French relationship remained only limited to a buyer and seller relationship majorly due to India's stance against colonial exploitation.¹⁶ Their relationship observed a thaw as soon as France decided to hand over the five settlements back to India in 1962 under the Delhi Treaty of 1954.¹⁷ During this buyer-seller phase, France became the largest supplier of weapons to India. This pattern continued until the 1960s, when Cold War politics brought India closer to Russia thereby, it started relying on more durable and cost-effective Russian equipment for its military including tanks and guns.

Following the resolution of the territorial disputes in the 1960s, India and France focused on strengthening their diplomatic and cultural ties by supporting cultural exchanges. Both nations shared a common commitment to secularism and democratic values.

¹⁵ George Bruce Malleon, *History of the French in India: From the Founding of Pondicherry in 1674 to the Capture of that Place in 1761*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1868).

¹⁶ Gupta, "The Changing Patterns."

¹⁷ Gupta, "The Changing Patterns."

That played a pivotal role in the development of the current state of their relationship. Under Cultural exchanges, various cultural institutions including the Alliance Française network and Indian Council for Cultural Relations (ICCR) were established to promote understanding of each other's language, cultural values, and cultural norms. It was in the 1980s when both countries recognized the potential for collaboration in the field of defence and technology as well. France's defence industry in the 1980s was known for producing advanced and state-of-the-art technology, including fighter aircraft, missiles, and naval systems. India was already looking to modernize its armed forces at that time, and it took a wise decision to turn to France to meet its needs. In 1982, India and France signed a defence cooperation agreement that marked the beginning of a deeper strategic relationship.

In the post-Cold War era, Indo-French bilateral ties expanded due to shared political values and a shared sense of national prestige. The 1990s economic liberalization of India provided France with the opportunity to expand its economic interests in the Asian region as well. However, in 1998, India and France declared a strategic partnership which marked a new phase in their bilateral relations. This partnership encompassed a range of areas, including defence, space, nuclear energy, and economic cooperation. Furthermore, trade and defence agreements also expanded exponentially in this phase.¹⁸ France and India also have six decades of space cooperation. Since, the early 2000s, Indian Space Research Organization (ISRO) and the French space agency Centre National D'études Spatiales (CNES) have launched several space-based research projects and satellites that are helping India in its various sectors.¹⁹ At a glance, the initial phase of the Indo-French

¹⁸ Sanjay Gupta, "Indo-French Relations in the Post-Cold War Period: Transformation from Commercial to Strategic Partnership," *The Indian Journal of Political Science* (2009): 1179-1199.

¹⁹ Ananth Krishnan, Ananth, "Space Collaboration Between India and France: Towards a New Era," *Ifri*, October 16, 2023. Accessed April 29, 2024.

relationship remained limited majorly due to India's anti-colonial stance and French occupation of Indian territories. However, the handover of these territories in 1962 resulted in a new era of Indo-French relationship, marked by cultural, economic, and healthy defence ties. These healthy relations further solidified in 1998 into a strategic partnership with the beginning of deep and broad strategic cooperation in the defence and technological sector.

Defence and Economic Cooperation

Currently, in the Indo-Pacific region, the global interest of international powers is indeed growing – marked by enduring security, geopolitical, geoeconomic, and technological pursuits. This heightened interest of major powers is exacerbating the conflict complexities between India and Pakistan within the security landscape of South Asia. Concurrently, France appears to be ambitious in expanding its presence in the Indo-Pacific, not only with India but also, with other countries. This is evident in its efforts to renew its relationship with Australia following a two-year breakdown.²⁰ In light of these developments, the French role emerges as pivotal, serving to increase Indian power and enhance Indian policing efforts in the Indo-Pacific.²¹ Against this backdrop, this study further explores the Indo-France partnership, examining the various deals struck to advance both military and economic interests.

India and France have signed several agreements for the joint production of military equipment. The Tata group from India has signed a deal with the AIRBUS group from France for the

<https://www.ifri.org/en/publications/notes-de-lifri/asia-visions/spacecollaboration-between-india-and-france-towards-new>

²⁰ Frederic Grare, "Beyond Strategic Convergence: Defining Australia-France Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific." *Australian Journal of International Affairs* (2024):1-4. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10357718.2024.2324162>

²¹ Grare, "Strategic Convergence,"

manufacture of Helicopters. In any case, the exclusive partnership between India and France will strengthen India's security apparatus. As a result, India's increased military capabilities may undermine the security of its neighbors, creating a security dilemma for them and enhancing conventional asymmetries. In January 2024, with the same vision, India and France signed deals for joint ventures in various sectors, including defence, space exploration, civil aviation, science and technology, health, public administration, and urban development.²² Their collaborations signal a strategic move to enhance capabilities in the so-called Indo-Pacific region. Such cooperative maneuvers are also aligned with the United States' Indo-Pacific objectives.²³ This cooperation also helps empower each other's position in the region, i.e., both states' maintaining and increasing military presence and economic growth. This also signals New Delhi's maritime aspirations and France's emergence as a regional player.²⁴ Furthermore, for an in-depth analysis of the Indo-French partnership, this study examines the military and economic cooperation as follows.

Military Cooperation

France aspires to become one of the defence and security players in the Indo-Pacific.²⁵ Its presence is built on three military commands and two forces covering both oceans. France increased its presence

²² Adersh Kumar, Gupta "French President Macron's India visit: List of deals inked, announcements made," *Hindustan Times*, March 12, 2022, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://www.hindustantimes.com/india-news/french-presidentmacrons-india-visit-list-of-deals-inked-announcements-made101706331642901.html>.

²³ White House, U.S. Indo-Pacific Strategy Year?

²⁴ "France and the Indo-Pacific: Strategic Vision," Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Government of France, accessed April 17, 2024, https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_a4_indopacifique_16p_2021_v4_cl_e4b8b46.pdf.

²⁵ Ban Berry, "France and the UK in the Indo-Pacific," *The Military Balance*, International Institute for Strategic Studies, June 2021, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/military-balance/2021/06/france-uk-indo-pacific/>.

and demonstrated its ability to project hard power and engage in military diplomacy with regional partners.

Main French naval assets based in the Indo-Pacific

Asset	Total ships in the class	Of which active	Of which based in the Indo-Pacific	Date of commissioning of the lead ship	Comment
<i>Floreal</i> -class frigates (FFH)	6	6	4	1992	First unit to be decommissioned in 2030
<i>D'Entrecasteaux</i> -class patrol ships (PSO)	4	4	3	2016	
<i>Lapérouse</i> -class oceangoing patrol craft (PCO)	1	1	1	1990	To be replaced as part of the POM procurement programme
<i>Le Malin</i> -class oceangoing patrol craft (PCO)	1	1	1	1997	To be replaced as part of the POM procurement programme
<i>L'Audacieuse</i> -class coastal patrol craft (PCC)	10	1	1	1986	To be replaced as part of the POM procurement programme

Source: IJSS

Recently, the government of France has responded to India's plea for 26 Dassault Rafale M carrier-based fighter Marine aircraft jets.²⁶ It will bolster Indian naval air power and projection

²⁶Manjeet Negi, "France responds to India's bid for acquisition of 26 Rafale Marine fighters," *India Today*, December 20, 2023. accessed April 17, 2024, Visit:<https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/rafale-marine-aircraft-france-indian-navy-ins-vikrant-ins-vikramaditya-defence-ministry-arms-deal-2478550-2023-12-20>

capabilities. For Pakistan, this escalation heightens the conventional asymmetry, compelling a recalibration of its defence strategies and deterrence posture. The advanced Rafale M jets will enable India to assert greater control over maritime domains. It will potentially influence Pakistan's strategic calculations and prompt an intensified focus on counter-balancing measures. Also, Safran, a leading French aerospace engine manufacturer, recently inked a deal²⁷ with the Indian research agencies. This deal establishes maintenance, repair, and overhaul services for advanced aviation propulsion engines, specifically the LEAP engines, within India. According to the deal, they will also maintain the engines of the Rafale fighter jets already procured by India for its Air Force and Navy. This agreement was formalized during President Macron's visit to India in January 2024. This collaboration is expected to reduce the maintenance, and costs associated with the Rafale jets by eliminating the need for them to be sent back to Europe. Notably, uncertainties persist regarding the extent of technology transfer that will take place in India to address all maintenance requirements for the aircraft and its engines.²⁸ As the whole Southern part of India is surrounded by sea, India wants to leverage it to develop a blue water navy. For this purpose, India desires to have advanced military technologies and opted for partnerships with major powers including France. For instance, in 2023, a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed between

²⁷ Ministry of External Affairs India, "India -France Joint Statement on the State Visit of H.E. Mr. Emmanuel Macron, President of French Republic, to India (25 -26 January 2024)" *Press Release*, January 26, 2024, visit: https://www.me a.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37534/India__France_Joint_Statement_on_the_State_Visit_of_HE_Mr_Emmanuel_Macron_President_of_French_Republic_to_India_25__26_January_2024

²⁸ Negi. "France Responds to India."

Paris and New Delhi for joint development of six P-75 Scorpene-class submarines²⁹ in 15 years for the Indian Navy.³⁰

These Scorpene submarines are difficult to detect. This type of submarine is armed with powerful missiles, torpedoes, mines, special forces, and other loads. They can hold at target a wide range of seaborne and land targets with little danger to themselves. They are exceptionally difficult to encounter by an adversary. Also, India's collaboration with France grants India access to French underwater technological and operational superiority. This is likely to endure their partnership with the submarine program. In addition, this collaboration promises to provide much more than just the replacement of submarines. It might give India a new and highly potent strategic deterrent. The ambition of being at high strategic leverage and a strong deterrent country may increasingly be attractive to India. The dominance of the maritime domain promises a level of conventional deterrence that is difficult to replicate through other means. It could contribute substantially to preserving its hegemonic designs in the Indo-Pacific.

The strategy for this project – joint development of six P-75 Scorpene-class submarines – will be designed by both the French company Safran and the Indian Defence Research and Development Organization (DRDO). This program is a continuation of India's submarine construction Project-75, which began in 2005. While the acquisition and construction of submarines enhance India's deterrence, it also alters the regional strategic equilibrium by enhancing India's undersea warfare capabilities. These submarines

²⁹ Ranjana Prasad and Divyam Singh, "Celebrating 25 Years of the India-France Strategic Partnership: A Blossoming Alliance," *Invest India*, July 19, 2023, <https://www.investindia.gov.in/blogs/celebrating-25-years-india-france-strategic-partnership-blossoming-alliance>.

³⁰ "India, France sign MoU for construction of three Scorpene submarines," *Live Mint*, July 15, 2023, accessed April 17, 2024, visit: <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/india-france-sign-mou-for-construction-of-three-scorpene-submarines-11689408453435.html>.

serve as a conventional deterrent against regional adversaries like Pakistan. They also provide India with critical tools for power projection and maritime dominance. Additionally, the submarines empower India to secure vital Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), crucial for trade and military operations.

Furthermore, there are chances that France may lease a nuclear-powered submarine to India similar to AUKUS. Ashley Tellis, a renowned international affairs expert, labeled it as INFRUS similar to Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States (AUKUS) partnership.³¹ If such steps are taken then this Indo-France partnership would accentuate India's assured second-strike capability resulting in further complicating already volatile Indo-Pakistan relations. Furthermore, these submarines enhance India's second-strike capability for its nuclear arsenal, bolstering its strategic deterrence posture. This power shift will lead to both regional and global strategic autonomy for India.³² The emphasis on the 'Make in India' strategy allows India to acquire advanced stealth technology for underwater warfare.³³ This initiative strengthens India's defence manufacturing base and reduces dependence on foreign suppliers. An overview of existing defence agreements and developments between India and France is mentioned in Table 2 below.

Table 2

Continuing Indo-French Defence Deals			
Date	Description	Costs	Details

³¹ Abdul Moiz Khan and Amna Saqib, "India Getting French Nuclear Sub Technology Could Trigger Indian Ocean Arms Race," *South China Morning Post*, October 19, 2022. <https://www.scmp.com/comment/opinion/article/3196272/india-getting-french-nuclear-sub-technology-could-trigger-indian-ocean-arms-race>.

³² Jaishankar, "Why Bharat Matters": 67-68.

³³ Jaishankar, "Why Bharat Matters" : 71.

2005	Scorpene Submarine Project	This varies to different segments of the project.	Collaboration between India and France for the construction of Scorpene-class submarines under Project-75. e.g. launched INS Kalvari, INS Vagsheer, INS Vela, INS Khanderi, INS Karanj, and INS Vagir ³⁴
2016	36 Rafale Fighter Jets Deal	Euro 7.9 billion (USD 9.5 billion) ³⁵ Approximately	India signed a deal with France to acquire 36 Rafale fighter jets from Dassault Aviation
2023	26 Dassault Rafale M carrier-based fighter Marine aircraft jets	Euro 5.5 billion ³⁶ Approximately	Multirole carrier borne fighters (MRCBF) programme intends to acquire 57 naval fighters to partly equip India's first

³⁴ "Project 75 India - All You Need to Know," Textbook, accessed April 17, 2024, visit: <https://testbook.com/ias-preparation/project-75-india>.

³⁵ "Indian Air Force receives first three aircraft for second Rafale squadron," *Jane's Defence Weekly*. May 6, 202. Accessed March 23, 2024. <https://www.janes.com/osint-insights/defence-news-details/indian-air-force-receives-first-three-aircraft-for-second-rafale-squadron>.

³⁶ "India gives LoR to France for buying 26 Rafale-M fighter jets for Navy," *Business Standard*, June 14, 2024. Accessed: April 17, 2024, <https://www.business-standard.com/topic/rafale-deal>.

			indigenous aircraft carrier (IAC), INS Vikrant ³⁷
2023	3 Scorpene Submarine	Euro 6.9 billion ³⁸ Approximately	The total cost is yet unknown under the Scorpene submarine project started in 2005, but the total deal is amount \$13.3 billion (Euro 12.3 billion) amounting to Euro 5.5 billion for 26 Dassault Rafale jets.
Ongoing	Missile Systems	Ongoing	Procurement of various missile systems from France, including the MBDA Mistral anti-aircraft missiles and Scalp cruise missiles.
Ongoing	Helicopter Deals	Various costs to the	Acquisition of helicopters from France, such as the

³⁷ “Indian government positioning for Rafale M acquisition,” *Jane’s Defence Weekly*. July 12, 2024. Accessed April 17, 2024. Visit: <https://www.janes.com/osint-insights/defence-news/air/indian-government-positioning-for-rafale-m-acquisition>.

³⁸Manu Pubby, “India to buy 26 Rafales, 3 Scorpene submarines from France; deals likely to be announced during PM Modi’s visit,” *The Economic Times*. November 23, 2023. Accessed April 17, 2024. visit: https://www.linkedin.com/posts/economictimes_india-to-buy-26-rafales-3-scorpene-submarines-activity-7084157803698765824-OGHI?trk=public_profile_like_view

		different batches	Airbus Helicopters H225M and Eurocopter AS565 Panther.
Ongoing	Maintenance, Repair, and Overhaul (MRO) Agreements	Various costs to the different projects	Agreements between India and France for the maintenance, repair, and overhaul of defence equipment.

Both countries have also conducted several joint military exercises in the Indo-Pacific. When their national security advisors met in 2023, the security environment of the Indo-Pacific was the focal point of their discussions.³⁹ The joint statement released after PM Modi’s visit to France on Bastille Day emphasized the broadening and deepening of bilateral defence cooperation⁴⁰ with the ambition to work on different issues, including those related to regional security.⁴¹

Economic Cooperation

France is strengthening its foothold for economic imperatives and staying cognizant of the region’s strategic relevance.

³⁹Manjeet Negi, “Ajit Doval meets French diplomat ahead of Macron’s Republic Day visit,” *India Today*, January 13, 2024, accessed April 17, 2024. <https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/ajit-doval-meets-french-diplomat-ahead-of-macrons-republic-day-visit-2488108-2024-01-13>

⁴⁰ “India-France Joint Statement during State visit of President of France to India,” Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. March 10, 2018. Accessed: April 17, 2024.

https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29596/IndiaFrance_Joint_Statement_during_State_visit_of_President_of_France_to_India_March_10_2018

⁴¹ Harsh V. Pant and Thibault Fournol, “Indo-Pacific Lies at the Core of India-France Ties,” *Hindustan Times*. Accessed April 17, 2024. <https://www.hindustantimes.com/opinion/indopacific-lies-at-the-core-of-india-france-ties-101689598918948.html>

Simultaneously, France has substantial overseas territories in Oceania, including French Polynesia and New Caledonia.⁴² These territories contribute to its 93% exclusive economic zone in Asia and the Pacific Oceans. The EU industry chief Thierry Breton, a close ally of President Macron, said in January 2024, “We need to continue to promote Europe as a third bloc, a balancing force between the US and China.”⁴³ Nevertheless, the India-France strategic partnership preserves their mutual interests and upholds American regional strategic aspirations to use India as a counterweight to China.⁴⁴ As outlined in the French Indo-Pacific Strategy 2022, France is enhancing diplomatic engagements through multilateral agreements with territorial states and regional islands.⁴⁵ For example, Macron’s visit to India, the launch of multilateral forums like Indo-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) in 2014, and subsequent heightened diplomatic engagements reflect France’s growing involvement in the region. It is helping France enhance its presence in the region, which accounts for half of the world’s GDP. With these aspirations, President Macron is actively engaging in the region. France aims to protect its economic interests and ensure its continued relevance in global affairs. One of its purposes

⁴²Pranav Anand, “France’s Engagement in Indo-Pacific,” *The Geostrata*. Accessed April 17, 2024. Visit: <https://www.thegeostrata.com/post/france-s-engagement-in-indo-pacific>

⁴³ Finbarr Bermingham, “Xi Jinping and Emmanuel Macron hail 60 years of China-France diplomatic relations,” *South China Morning Post*. April 26, 2024. Accessed April 17, 2024. <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3249809/xi-jinping-and-emmanuel-macron-hail-60-years-china-france-diplomatic-relations>

⁴⁴ Rajat Pandit, Rajat, “France submits bid for selling 26 naval Rafale fighters to India,” *The Times of India*. January 30, 2023, accessed April 17, 2024. https://www.reddit.com/r/IndianDefense/comments/18n2ofy/france_submits_bid_for_selling_26_naval_rafale/

⁴⁵ “Indo-Pacific: France’s Strategy,” Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Government of France, Accessed April 17, 2024. https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_a4_indopacifique_synthese_rvb_cle068e51.pdf
https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/IMG/pdf/en_a4_indopacifique_synthese_rvb_cle068e51.pdf

highlighted⁴⁶ in the French vision states, “The Indian Ocean is a growing focus of the French strategy for the Indo-Pacific, as President Macron stressed during his visit to La Réunion in October 2019 (see the “Choose La Réunion” speech).” It further says, “Two French territories, La Réunion and Mayotte (with one million inhabitants), are located in the region, in which France has also developed a diversified economic footprint. Deployments by the French Navy are organized there regularly.” The strong presence of France in the Indo-Pacific region may intensify competition among existing states for influence, resources, and strategic positioning. This could lead to heightened tensions and rivalries, particularly among regional powers. On the other hand, French diplomatic engagements and initiatives in the region, such as multilateral agreements and forums (e.g., with India, Australia, etc.) may provide states with opportunities for enhanced diplomatic cooperation and engagement.

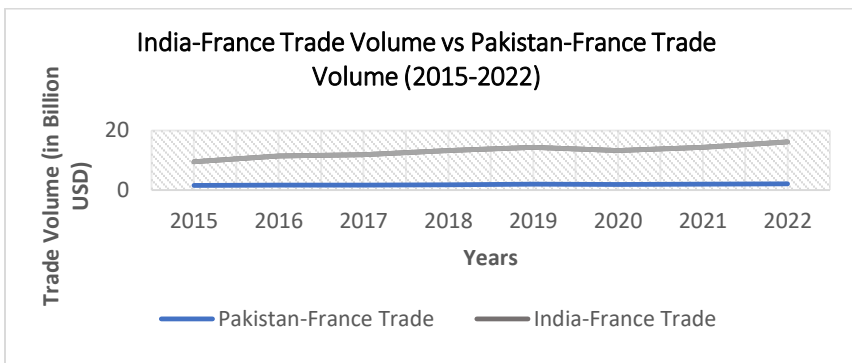


Figure 1. India France Trade Volume vs Pakistan France Trade Volume (2015-2022)

As shown in the diagram, there is a steady increase in India-France trade volume, from approximately \$8 billion in 2015 to \$14.3 billion

⁴⁶ “France and the Indo-Pacific: Strategic Vision,” Ministry for Europe and Foreign Affairs, Government of France, accessed April 17, 2024, <https://www.diplomatie.gouv.fr/en/country-files/regional-strategies/indo-pacific/>

in 2022.⁴⁷ It shows Indo-French economic partnership with several strategic merits. For India, this growth reflects enhanced bilateral cooperation, diversification of trade relations, and increased foreign investments. Particularly cooperation in sectors like defence, technology, and renewable energy—areas critical to its long-term development goals. The “Make in India” initiative further aligns with Indo-French collaborations, strengthening technological transfer and innovation—negating Indian concern over the trade imbalance with China.⁴⁸ However, for Pakistan, this expanding Indo-French economic relationship presents certain challenges. It not only marginalizes Pakistan in terms of strategic European partnerships diplomatically but also accentuates the growing disparity in defence modernization and economic resilience between India and Pakistan.

Implications for Pakistan

In the post-Cold War era, Indo-Pacific emerged as a critical juncture in global strategic affairs becoming a focal point of contention among major powers. Consequently, *inter alia*, India and France have heavily invested in the region. This collaboration, resultantly, not only supports India’s interests in the Indian Ocean and South Asia region but also aligns with French presence in the Indian Ocean due to its overseas territories such as La Réunion and Mayotte for safeguarding economic interests. From a strategic vantage point, the Indo-French partnership⁴⁹ has the potential to counterbalance China by underscoring a commitment to defending and ensuring access to

⁴⁷ India-France trade data: “India (IND) and France (FRA) Trade,” The Observatory of Economic Complexity (OEC), Accessed September 26, 2024. <https://oec.world/en/profile/bilateralcountry/ind/partner/fra%26?dynamicBilateralTradeSelector=year2017>

⁴⁸ Jaishankar. “Why Bharat Matters.”

⁴⁹ Anirban Bhaumik, “Modi, Macron meet in March may lead to India buying more Rafale jets,” *Deccan Herald*, visit: <https://www.deccanherald.com/india/modi-macron-meet-in-march-may-lead-to-india-buying-more-rafale-jets1178256.html>.

common maritime areas.⁵⁰ For instance, through sharing data and intelligence, both countries would have a better understanding of maritime activities, including shipping traffic or maritime activities of other states including China. Such collaborative efforts under the US patronage may deepen mistrust with China. As seen in the past, the US-China relationship has further deteriorated after the containment policy adopted by the US through its National security strategies over the years. Unfortunately, India's military posture is heavily focused on Pakistan, with the three major strike corps deployed primarily against Pakistan. Similarly, almost 70% of the Indian Air Force is focused on countering Pakistan. Additionally, most of India's missiles are Pakistan-specific due to their limited range, which prevents them from reaching mainland China. On the other hand, India-China trade volume continues to grow, and both states are close to concluding a formal treaty for border patrolling that may resolve their decades-old border conflict. Thus, India is using China as a bogey to benefit from the great powers' competition in its regional and global aspirations. However, France enjoys cordial economic relations with China and has major economic stakes in the region unlike India which has security interests as well. Simultaneously, India in its current capacity could not bear to confront China directly. Thus, this partnership does not reflect strategic challenges for China in the region, making Pakistan the prime affectee of this collaboration.

From a South Asian lens, this deepening of partnership has a long-term impact on Pakistan's national security apparatus. With this collaboration, India is enhancing its overall maritime capabilities, specifically its military capabilities. This results in an overall maritime challenge for Pakistan. Along with providing military apparatus, France is also facilitating India in supporting the

⁵⁰ Farzana Siddique, "India Doctrinal Orientation: Causing Instability in the Region," *CISS Insight*, Vol. 1, No. 2, (2013): 12-21, visit: <https://www.journal.ciss.org.pk/index.php/ciss-insight/article/download/94/89>.

‘Make in India’ Initiative. Collectively, it will further accentuate the already existing conventional asymmetry between India and Pakistan. Resultantly, it will increase the security dilemma for Pakistan.⁵¹ The Scorpene class submarine is an important addition to the Indian Navy. As discussed above, the submarine is suitable for different kinds of missions including anti-submarine warfare missions, anti-surface warfare missions, ISR operations, special operations, and deterrent operations. Indian submarines have been already caught thrice by the Pakistan Navy in the last decade and the most troublesome detection was near Gwadar’s deep waters. Under these conditions, the Scorpene class submarine would be crucial for covert ISR missions, special operations, and anti-surface warfare missions along Pakistan’s coastline. This submarine is even capable of sabotaging the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) project and its associated activities along with other Pakistan’s long-term maritime interests. Simultaneously, the presence of a greater number of submarines enhances India’s influence in the Indo-Pacific region, allowing it to assert its role as a regional hegemon. These Indian hegemonic aspirations have their own implications not just for Pakistan, but rather for the whole region. India, with French assistance, would be able to maintain a robust submarine fleet in the Indo-Pacific region that would help India in projecting power and influence in the region and beyond,⁵² leading to more hostility towards its adversaries and regional instability. For instance, first, the presence of Scorpene class SSKs will assist the activities of SSBNs in the region. This will ensure that India maintains a credible second-strike capability. Additionally, in the event of a conflict escalation, India’s SSKs could be used to enforce a naval blockade

⁵¹ Musavir Hameed and Harsa, “Indo-French Strategic Partnership in The Indian Ocean: Implications for Pakistan,” *Polaris Journal of Maritime Research*, July 28, 2024, Vol VI, I (2024), <https://nimapak.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/01/PJMR-02-2024.pdf>

⁵² Riya Anand, “The India-France Partnership: New Avenues for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific,” *South Asian Voices*, April 28, 2023. <https://southasianvoices.org/the-india-france-partnership/>

or deny the Pakistani Navy access to critical sea lines, thereby disrupting Pakistan's maritime trade and military logistics.

There is a simmering debate about providing AUKUS-type nuclear-powered submarines to India's US patronage and French technology through INFRUS. If France, with US support, leases a nuclear-powered submarine to India, it would potentially escalate the already tense Indo-Pak relations. Furthermore, these submarines along with Anti-Ballistic Missile Defence (BMD) systems like S-400 and with recently tested MIRV missile Agni- P would provide a false sense of security and a perception of the first strike stability to India against Pakistan. This undermines the South Asian equation of strategic stability. Simultaneously, the two versions of Rafale, land, and sea, will enhance the interoperability of Indian armed forces including the Navy and Airforce. These jets would be critical for deep strikes over enemy lines either its sea or land. They would also strengthen India's naval capabilities including increased naval resonance patrols, anti-ship strikes, in-depth attacks on enemy systems, and nuclear deterrence patrols. Most importantly, India could use these aircraft to diversify its air-based nuclear delivery systems.⁵³ Under this partnership, India will have intelligence and data to predict its adversary's actions and even pre-empt them before any action is taken. Additionally, joint surveillance missions and intelligence sharing enhance Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA), allowing India to monitor and understand maritime activities better. This plays an important role in real-time information in maintaining security and strategic advantage in the Indo-Pacific. This collaboration not only boosts maritime security but also provides a strategic edge to India in anticipating adversary's actions. At the same time, the Pakistan Navy would be under severe surveillance

⁵³ Shafeeq Maheen, "Indo-French Partnership and Implications for Pakistan." *Issue Brief*, Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad. February 15, 2024, <https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-indias-republic-day-indo-french-partnership-and-implications-for-pakistan/>

by India with the help of French ISR equipment and assistance. Particularly, Pakistan's submarines would be more prone to Indian detection. This would give a false sense of security to India and would compel leadership in New Delhi to go for nuclear options as they would already have an eye on Pakistan's naval-based deterrence systems. However, despite India's immense arms procurement Pakistan has so far avoided conventional arms race in the region.

Enhanced interoperability is one of the prime objectives of the theaterization of Indian armed forces. However, it is important to note that the current state of inter-agency coordination in India is not up to the mark. This lack of coordination can lead to miscalculations, inadvertent use of force, and conflict escalation. By addressing these coordination issues, theater commands could mitigate these risks, ensuring a more synchronized and efficient defence strategy. Thus, while the integration of Rafale aircraft will enhance operational capabilities, it is imperative to simultaneously improve inter-agency coordination to fully realize the benefits of theaterization and avoid potential pitfalls. After the Indian military had opted for the strategic force posture of counterforce, France's equipment would be substantial in meeting New Delhi's offensive warfighting aspirations especially, against Pakistan. From an economic perspective, this partnership results in an exclusive economic club in the region which prioritizes economic activity under common geo-political interests resulting in the alienation of other regional countries from certain economic activities. This will result in more 'haves and have-nots' in the economic domain. In the meanwhile, both countries have openly vowed to defend a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. This exclusive club of countries in the region would be able to coerce others to work on their norms and values by exploiting the information shared under the MDA. Despite a joint vision with India, France enjoys constructive economic ties bilaterally with China. These

arrangements could affect China's regional aspirations either economically or militarily.⁵⁴

Policy Options for Pakistan

France pursues a policy of strategic autonomy regarding its relationship with China. Last year, during Macron's visit to China, he signaled regarding the Taiwan issue that France does not want to follow Washington's line.⁵⁵ This pattern indicates that France is exploring economic opportunities and ways to strengthen its foothold in the region. In the future, there is a possibility that France may also be interested in working on CPEC. However, Chinese funds along with French expertise could boast economic opportunities of CPEC. This will help in counterweighting the French perception in the region which is currently portrayed as anti-China particularly when it comes to defence cooperation between India and France. This future Pak-French partnership could counter the prevailing narrative of anti-China in the Indo-Pacific region and would contribute to a more prosperous security situation as well. The Indo-French trade volume has shown a steady increase, growing from approximately \$8 billion in 2015 to \$14.3 billion in 2022. Pakistan-France trade volume remains relatively lower, starting at around \$1.3 billion in 2015 and increasing modestly to \$2.1 billion in 2022. Both Pakistan and France vowed to boost economic activity last year, but substantial steps have not been taken by either side to boost these activities. This data shows that it is high time where Pakistan can explore different means of economic market to maintain qualitative parity vis-à-vis India in the region politically,

⁵⁴ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, "Joint Strategic Vision of India-France Cooperation in the Indian Ocean Region, New Delhi, 10 March 2018," *Press Release*, March 10, 2018. <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/29598/Joint+Strategic+Vision+of+IndiaFrance+Cooperation+in+the+Indian+Ocean+Region+New+Delhi+10+March+2018>.

⁵⁵ "Macron: Europe Should Not Follow US or Chinese Policy Over Taiwan," *Reuters*, April 9, 2023, <https://www.reuters.com/world/macron-says-europe-should-not-follow-us-or-chinese-policy-over-taiwan-2023-04-09/>.

militarily, and economically. France and China already have joint investments in certain countries of the Indo-Pacific region.⁵⁶ French President during his visit to China, showed interest in investment in CPEC.⁵⁷ Recently, the Prime Minister of Pakistan Mr. Shahbaz Sharif also invited French companies to invest in Pakistan.⁵⁸ Hence, Pakistan can explore more options to strengthen its economic and military ties with France. Finally, cultural and student exchanges between France and Pakistan are not at a level that India enjoys. Despite having some religious and political differences over some international issues, an increase in such exchanges would be crucial to develop Pakistan-France relations. Learning from the Indian model, a deep-rooted cultural relationship could be a game changer, and result in a more broadened Pakistan-French relationship.

Conclusion

The history of the Indo-French relationship reflects a gradual evolution from a colonial connection to a modern strategic partnership. Initially constrained by France's colonial presence and India's anti-colonial stance, the relationship began to thaw following the transfer of French territories to India in 1962. This shift opened the door to cultural and diplomatic exchanges, particularly during the 1980s when defence and technology emerged as central pillars. The post-Cold War era further expanded cooperation into economic, nuclear, and space sectors, culminating in a robust strategic partnership founded on shared values and mutual interests. Today, defence and economic cooperation between India and France has become the cornerstone of this partnership,

⁵⁶ Qi Xijia and Chen Qingrui, "China Signs 18 Deals with France to Expand Economic Cooperation, Opening Up Wider for France, Europe," *Global Times*, May 7, 2024, <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202405/1311825.shtml>.

⁵⁷ Pervaiz Ishfaq Rana, "French Companies Interested in CPEC, Says Envoy," *Dawn*, May 15, 2018, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1407685>.

⁵⁸ "PM Shehbaz Invites French Companies to Invest in Pakistan," *Dawn*, May 8, 2024, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1825565>.

aligning closely with the geopolitical objectives of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region. The acquisition of Rafale M fighter jets and Scorpene-class submarines significantly enhances India's defence posture and contributes to its maritime dominance and support its second-strike nuclear capabilities. The provision of 26 Dassault Rafale M carrier-based fighter jets will significantly enhance Indian naval air power and projection capabilities. Simultaneously, Scorpene submarines are challenging to detect and armed with advanced missiles, torpedoes, and other capabilities. These submarines allow India to engage a wide range of targets while minimizing risk. India's collaboration with France not only enhances its submarine program but also provides access to superior underwater technology. This partnership potentially offers India a powerful new strategic deterrent. Such developments bolster India's aspirations for a blue-water navy while heightening conventional asymmetries with Pakistan. This dynamic complicates the already delicate security landscape. Furthermore, the partnership extends beyond mere acquisitions to encompass joint ventures and technology transfers. These elements reinforce India's drive for self-reliance through initiatives like "Make in India." The implications of the Indo-French partnership are profound for Pakistan, particularly concerning national security and regional stability. As India enhances its military capabilities with French support, the conventional gap between New Delhi and Islamabad widens. This widening gap presents challenges for Islamabad's strategic calculations. The potential leasing of nuclear-powered submarines under the INFRUS initiative could further destabilize Indo-Pak relations and intensify the security dilemma. Enhanced naval and air power not only threatens Pakistan's maritime interests but also enables India to assert hegemonic control in the Indo-Pacific. This assertion shifts the regional balance of power. The use of French technology and intelligence-sharing mechanisms heightens India's capacity to monitor Pakistani naval activities and risks escalating tensions.

In response to the evolving dynamics of the Indo-French partnership, Pakistan has several policy options to strengthen its strategic position. One avenue is to bolster economic ties with France. This could involve exploring collaboration on the CPEC, which may counterbalance India's military enhancements and challenge the narrative of France as primarily anti-China. Additionally, increasing trade volumes and fostering cultural exchanges can elevate Pakistan's profile in its relationship with France. This approach has the potential to mirror India's successful engagement strategies. By actively pursuing French investments and enhancing bilateral cooperation, Pakistan can strive for qualitative parity with India across political, military, and economic domains. Ultimately, these efforts will contribute to fostering a more stable and prosperous regional security environment. From the theoretical lens of RCT, the Indo-French partnership underscores the rational calculations of both actors to maximize their respective strategic gains. For India, this cooperation reflects a calculated strategy to enhance its defence capabilities, deter adversaries, and project power regionally and globally. Similarly, France rationally engages India as a lucrative market for its defence technologies. These decisions, based on utility maximization and cost-benefit analysis, intensify the security dilemma for Pakistan. The evolving asymmetries compel Pakistan to reassess its strategic priorities, considering options like expanding its alliances and diversifying its economic and military ties. The dynamics of this partnership demonstrate the interconnectedness of rational decisions in shaping the region's security architecture, with each actor anticipating and reacting to the moves of others.