

## **Pm's Visit to France: Defence & The 2047 Horizon Document**

---

### **Indo- French Ties**

During Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to France on 13 and 14 July, the two countries agreed to further cooperation in sectors such as defence and outlined a roadmap for the next 25 years of India-France ties. The visit marked 25 years of India and France entering into a Strategic Partnership and the PM described the two countries' ties as "Being in excellent shape", and that they are "strong, trusted, consistent."

France has emerged as amongst the largest exporters of defence equipment to India in the last ten years. Last year it accounted for 29% of India's market share of defence imports, which placed it second.<sup>[1]</sup> 36 Rafale fighter jets have already been delivered. A large number of deals including more Rafale jets, submarines, joint development of combat aircraft engines and helicopters are also being negotiated and finalised. Some involve joint production and significant technology transfer. This is crucial for India's defence modernisation, diversification of supplies and 'Make in India' focus. There is also a convergence in security and economic interests in the Indo-Pacific.

### **Horizon 2047**

The Foreign Secretary of India spoke of the outcomes that had been achieved during this visit and said it is for the first time that India has chalked out a Horizon 2047 framework of partnership with any country in the world. He said, "It contains not just aspirations that the two countries think that the relationship can touch, but also has very specific substance to it which this relationship will be filled with".<sup>[2]</sup>

2047 is when India will celebrate the 100th year of its Independence and France and India will celebrate 50 years of Strategic Partnership. There are 63 specific outcomes divided among multiple pillars. It is a comprehensive approach to how India and France would approach their partnership in the space of security and sovereignty. It doesn't look at individual transactions, it doesn't even look at individual segments of it, but it looks at security in the widest possible perspective, reduces it into what specific things could be achieved by the two countries.<sup>[3]</sup>

Next is Indo-Pacific more in terms of providing solutions, not just to the security or strategic challenges, but also the economic challenges. Indo-Pacific, as an area of stability and sustainable development, the third is the domain of space, which is at the centre of our partnership. Fourth, is cooperation in fight against terrorism. Fifth, shared commitment to promote renewed and effective multilateralism. Sixth, and this is one pillar which has several other crucial sub-segments and this is a space relating to science, technology and academic cooperation between research institutions. Then there are also people to people ties and engagements.<sup>[4]</sup>

### **Defence Cooperation**

The document looks at security and sovereignty in a more holistic and a comprehensive manner rather than as a set of individual transaction. The reason for that is because the metrics of defense partnership is not defined by a single acquisition or non-acquisition. The India-France Strategic Partnership, looks at all elements of engagement where the two countries, are committed to cooperating on –"co-development and co-production of advanced defense

technologies”, including for the benefit of third countries. It also talks of India's intent to build its own defense industrial and technological base. [5]

For the last large number of years, the two countries have been undertaking technology partnerships in the field of defence. The defense relationship has been looked at in a very comprehensive manner, listing out the ecosystem of defence engagement between the two countries, a full range of military exercises, military industrial cooperation, research, design, transfer of technology, in some cases, co-production, co-manufacturing, supply chain integration in the manufacturing ecosystem in the field of defence between the two countries. Technology value chain integrations going forward between the two countries, with a lot of these linked into the priority of Atmanirbhar Bharat. Hence, the partnership should be looked at from a frame of reference, which is comprehensive, strategic in nature, and looks ahead on the entire defence ecosystem.

### **Defence Deals**

An MoU between Mazgon Dockyard Ltd. And the Naval Group for the construction of three additional submarines under the P75 programme as well as a roadmap for Cooperation in Advanced Aeronautical Technologies by supporting the Joint Development of a Combat Aircraft Engine between Safran and DRDO for the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) which has the potential to add significantly to the defence relationship.[6] That India will jointly own the IP for a military jet engine which will be a game changer. As per Nitin Gokhale “While this may take up to ten years and billions of dollars in research and development, once achieved, India will become one of the few countries to possess the expertise”.[7]

A Shareholders Agreement between HAL and Safran has been concluded for engine development for the Indian Multi Role Helicopter (IMRH) and that has now got the support of both governments which will make the process faster.[8]

India will also be setting up a Technical Office of the DRDO at its Embassy in Paris to further accelerate the process of high-tech defence collaborations.

However, many analysts were taken by surprise when they found no mention of the 26 Rafale Marine Aircraft in the Joint statement. In fact, before the visit the focus was on the signing of the deal for these aircraft, a follow up order for three Scorpene submarines which are being built at Mazagon Docks, the French participation in the SSN submarines being built under Project 75 and the joint development for the AMCA and the engine for the Multi Role Helicopter.

On 13 July the Defence Acquisition Council (DAC), had granted Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) for procurement of “26 Rafale Marine aircraft along with associated ancillary equipment, weapons, simulator, spares, documentation, crew training and logistic support for the Indian Navy from the French Government based on Inter-Governmental Agreement (IGA)”. The DAC had also granted the AoN for the procurement of three additional Scorpene submarines under the Buy (Indian) category, to be constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL).[9]

The company statement said: “Following an international competition launched by the Indian authorities, this decision comes after a successful trial campaign held in India, during which the Navy Rafale demonstrated that it fully met the Indian Navy’s operational requirements and was perfectly suited to the specificities of its aircraft carrier. The Indian Navy’s 26 Rafale will eventually join the 36 Rafale already in service, which are giving full satisfaction to the Indian Air Force, making India the first country to make the same military choice as France by operating

both versions of the aircraft to help consolidate its superiority in the air and on the seas and guarantee its sovereignty”.[10]

However, this is only one step in the procurement process, the price and other terms of purchase need to be negotiated with the French Government after taking into account all relevant aspects. There will be detailed deliberations and discussions to sort out the finer details before the final announcement. Further, this deal needs to be cleared by the Cabinet Committee of Security (CCS).

There is no doubt that the relationship has evolved over the years from a buyer – seller relationship, from partial to full technology transfer, joint production and now co development.

## **Conclusion**

The Indo-Pacific region where India is already a member of the QUAD remains an area of common concern to India and France; hence, the roadmap of India-France cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is important. Both countries share a common vision on this crucial region. Given the interests of both countries in this region, they are also joining hands with other like-minded nations.

This is a period of transformational change in the global order, with growing uncertainty about the future. Relations between India and France have stood the test of time, with France supporting India’s stand on issues ranging from Kashmir to nuclear power. France was also the first country with veto power to support India’s permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council.

The strategic partnership between the two countries gained momentum in the last decade and both countries have shown a willingness to drive this partnership forward. There is a strategic convergence on many global issues while at the same time both countries attach importance to strategic autonomy and France’s defence industry has demonstrated a commitment to contribute to Atmanirbhar Bharat. There is a high level of mutual trust and shared commitment visible in this relationship cemented to a large degree by their defence ties.

---

[1] Dinakar Peri, India remains biggest arms importer between 2018-22 despite drop in overall imports, The Hindu, 13 March 2023, <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-remains-biggest-arms-importer-between-2018-22-despite-drop-in-overall-imports/article66614120.ece>

[2] Transcript of Special Briefing by Foreign Secretary on Prime Minister’s visit to France, Ministry of External Affairs, July 14, 2023 <https://mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/36815/Transcript+of+Special+Briefing+by+Foreign+Secretary+on+Prime+Ministers+visit+to+France+July+14+2023>

[3] Horizon 2047: 25th Anniversary of the India-France Strategic Partnership, Towards A Century of India-France Relations, Ministry of External Affairs, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1939800>

[4] Ibid

[5] Aysuhi Agarwal, 'Bilateral roadmap is to open areas of cooperation, not to enumerate contracts': Sources on Rafale deal missing in India-France joint statement, ANI, 18 July 2023

<https://www.aninews.in/news/world/asia/bilateral-roadmap-is-to-open-areas-of-cooperation-not-to-enumerate-contracts-sources-on-rafale-deal-missing-in-india-france-joint-statement20230718161558/>

[6] Back Naval Group welcomes MoU with Mazgon for construction of three Scorpene submarines, Livemint, 16 July 2023 <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/naval-group-welcomes-mou-with-mazgon-for-construction-of-three-scorpene-submarines-11689471199179.html>

[7] Nitin A. Gokhale, India-France Defence Partnership Set to Scale New Heights, Bharat Shakti, July 15, 2023 <https://bharatshakti.in/india-france-defence-partnership-set-to-scale-new-heights/>

[8] Dalip Singh, India, France announce co-development of combat aircraft engine, The Hindu Business line, 15 July 2023 <https://www.thehindubusinessline.com/news/india-france-announce-co-development-of-combat-aircraft-engine/article67082991.ece>

[9] PIB, DAC approves proposals for procurement of 26 Rafale Marine aircraft from France to boost Indian Navy's operational capabilities, Ministry of Defence <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1939178>

[10] Rajib Chaudhari, Dassault Aviation: India selects Navy Rafale Deccan Chronicle, <https://www.deccanchronicle.com/nation/in-other-news/150723/dassault-aviation-india-selects-navy-rafale.html>

**Major General Jagatbir Singh, VSM (Retd)** is a Distinguished Fellow at the USI of India. Commissioned in 1981 into the 18 Cavalry, he has held various important command and Staff appointments including command of an Armoured Division.

**Uploaded on 28-7-2023**

**Disclaimer :** The views expressed are those of the author and do not necessarily represent the views of the organisation that he/she belongs to or of the USI of India.