

# EX ORION AND BASTILLE DAY: IMPLICATIONS FOR INDO-FRENCH MILITARY DIPLOMACY

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## ABSTRACT

India and France have close ties. The recent participation by the IAF in EX ORION and later of an Tri Service contingent in the Bastille Day parade reinforce these ties. The Prime Minister being chief guest at Bastille Day further show the political will for ties. India and France both follow Strategic Autonomy in foreign relations. At a Doctrinal level India is keen to deploy the armed forces to engage with friendly foreign countries. France is keen to take the lead in military engagement of Europe with the larger world. India and France have several bilateral military engagements including exercises and supplies. There is also engagement in areas of energy and environment. It is best the two countries continue to engage at military, political and environmental levels for mutual benefit.

India and France share close bilateral ties. This was reinforced by two recent events. While Bastille Day made political headlines, EX ORION took place very quietly and has attracted little attention. However, it can be seen as a watershed moment. This is akin to EX MALABAR in 2020 where Australia participated for the first time after many years (Athreya R. , 2020). More recently India's participation in EX PITCH BLACK along with Australia is seen as a watershed moment (Singh, IAF participation in EX PITCH BLACK 2022, 2022). These also shows the importance of Air Power in Military Diplomacy (Athreya R. , 2021) (Athreya R. , 2023). This paper shall analyse bilateral relations of India and France in the context of these two events.

## BASTILLE DAY

The French National Day, commonly known as Bastille Day is observed on 14 July every year (French Embassy in India, 2023) (France Diplomacy, 2023).

This year the Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi was invited as the Guest of Honour, to mark twenty-five years of Strategic Partnership first commenced in 1998 (French Embassy in India, 2023a). An important part of this event was the participation of 240 Indian soldiers and three Rafale jets at the parade (Ministry of the Armed Forces , 2023), (Ministry of Defence, 2023) (Ministry of External Affairs , 2023).

## **EX ORION**

A couple of months before this event Indian Air Force (IAF) participated in EX ORION along with the French Air and Space Force (FAF) (News Services Division, 2023). EX ORION is the biggest exercise launched by France along with NATO allies (NATO Military Shape, 2023).

There was participation by Belgium, Germany Greece, Spain, the United Kingdom, and the United States to train together during simulated large-scale multi-domain operations aimed at improving joint capabilities and interoperability with Allies and partners for a high intensity engagement. An important aspect of this is integration of three forces along with cyber, and civilian arms of government (NATO Allied Air Command, 2023).

This exercise received little coverage in the media or even on official websites. India's WION Channel reported this exercise in a summary video (WION News, 2023). The Indian Air Force announced it on Twitter (Indian Air Force, 2023). There was a mention on the official page of Indian Government's Press Information Bureau. Here Italy and Netherlands are also mentioned as participants (Ministry of Defence, 2023a).

## **INDIA STRATEGIC POSITION**

**Strategic Autonomy:** India has long had a Realist approach to Strategic Affairs (Ranganathan, 2020). While India may like to profess Strategic Autonomy, it has in recent years not openly opposed the position of the United States of America (Athreya R. , 2021a). It follows from this that it is best for India to not be overly dependent on the USA to counter China. The USA assets in the Indo-Pacific may not necessarily be sufficient to face the Chinese threat (Verma, 2023).

**Doctrines:** The new Doctrine of the Indian Airforce was promulgated in 2022 (Directorate of Operations, 2022). It was released on 24 July 2022, at the first Capstone Seminar of the IAF (Ministry of Defence, 2022). The Joint Doctrine of the Armed Forces has existed since 2017 (Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, 2017). The Air Force Doctrine draws on the Joint Doctrine (Directorate of Operations, 2022, p. 13). The Vision of the Indian Air Force (p. 1):

To be an agile and adaptable air force that provides decisive aerospace power in furtherance of our national interests.

### **Air Strategy: The Doctrine has defined Air Strategy.**

Air strategy is the process of coordinating the development, deployment, and employment of aerospace power assets to achieve National Security Objectives. It flows through the Joint Military Strategy and is laterally interlinked with the land and maritime strategies. Aerospace power when applied under the umbrella of political will and national resolve enables the achievement of national aim most effectively in the entire spectrum of peace, no war no peace and war. The air strategy must be specific to each of these conditions (Directorate of Operations, 2022, p. 33).

Air Strategy is divided into, Wartime Strategy, No War No Peace Strategy, and Peace time Strategy (p. 33). Air Diplomacy is an important part of the second and third elements (pp. 37-40). It is a subset of Defence Diplomacy.

**Defence Diplomacy:** Diplomacy and Deterrence are often seen as being intertwined. International defence cooperation/diplomacy is seen as part of national security discourse. There is an emerging relationship between defence and political power (Headquarters Integrated Defence Staff, 2017, pp. 22,60). The basic aim of India's defence diplomacy is to promote goodwill towards India overseas (pp. 21-22). The two main objectives are increasing cooperation and signalling intent to rivals (Athreya R. , 2020).

The IAF Doctrine mentions that diplomacy is the first option for both power projection and conflict resolution. Military deterrence gives capacity to effectually exert foreign policy (Directorate of Operations, 2022, p. 76). Air Diplomacy [emphasis added] has been defined by the Doctrine as:

Air diplomacy measures are geopolitical tools used to boost stability and enhance deterrence by influencing behaviour of an adversary. These include air force to air force engagements for training and cooperation, international military sales, and air support infrastructure sharing and development with friendly foreign countries. The location, time, scale, nature of participants and stated objectives of an international exercise can convey powerful geopolitical messages to a common adversary (Directorate of Operations, 2022, p. 40).

The Doctrine uses the word Aerospace [emphasis added] to describe the role of the IAF. It mentions that this can be deployed for Soft Power Projection [emphasis added] including civilian evacuation operations, International Exercises, UN Peace-Keeping operations, air displays, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) (pp. 37, 76-77). The IAF has participated

in training of friendly foreign Air Forces.

**Integrated Defence:** An important part of Air Diplomacy is participating in trans-oceanic bilateral and multilateral exercises. There are also air shows, and displays. Further the doctrine quotes the vision of SAGAR as being aligned to India's Aerospace Power. In geographic terms it covers both continental and maritime spaces to be able to project aerospace power in India's sphere of interest (pp. 76-78). The convergence between Air Force and Maritime Diplomacy has long been noted (Athreya R. , 2023, p. 119).

In this context it is pertinent to note that Maritime Doctrine specifies the objective of the navy's diplomatic role is to favourably shape the maritime environment in the furtherance of national interests, in consonance with the foreign policy and national security objectives (Indian Navy, 2015, p. 151). As part of maritime diplomacy, India has adopted visions of Security and Growth for all in the Region (SAGAR) and Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (Athreya R. , 2020). The aforementioned recent participation in EX ORION and Bastille Day highlights India's Air Diplomacy and Aerospace Power Projection.

## **FRENCH STRATEGIC POSITION**

The latest policy document of France is the National Strategic Review (General Secretariat for Defence and National Security , 2022). It is mentioned that there are dangers from revisionist states, nuclear, terrorism and hybrid threats including cyber, digital and space attacks. It mentions disruptions in air-sea arena. Besides climate change related threats are mentioned (pp. Para 2-4, Para 15).

**Strategic Autonomy:** France has long followed Strategic Autonomy and not wanted to be part of any bloc (Athreya R. , 2023a, p. 259). India and France are seen as coming close given that both want to follow Strategic Autonomy (Droin, Basrur, Blarel, & Mehra, 2022).

There is the use of the term Strategic Autonomy [emphasis added] in official policy documents. The Strategic Update 2021 mentions the need for European Strategic Autonomy [emphasis added]. It mentions the decline in involvement of USA (Ministere Des Armees, 2021, p. 34).

France continues to believe in maintaining their own Strategic Autonomy. At its core are the capacities for autonomous assessment, decision-making and action. Both nuclear and conventional forces are seen as important. Other determinants are national cohesion, economic and industrial independence, security of our supplies, and international influence, including through strong

diplomatic efforts (General Secretariat for Defence and National Security , 2022, pp. Para 60-63).

**Europe:** The latest National Security Review mentions France as a driving force behind European strategic autonomy [emphasis added as Strategic Objective Six (General Secretariat for Defence and National Security , 2022, p. 43). France claims to take a global agenda and be a balancing power. Towards this end it wants to collaborate with the EU and NATO (General Secretariat for Defence and National Security , pp. Para 5-6). France mentions that it wants to align it's strategy to NATO Strategic Concept, that it claims was launched at it's request (p. 1). This reflects a continuation of the aforementioned 2021 position.

**Global Regions:** The document has specific mentions of certain global regions. It mentions China and Russia as major threats (General Secretariat for Defence and National Security , pp. Para 17-23). The Mediterranean, Black Sea, Baltic area, Balkans, North Atlantic, Africa and the Middle East, are seen as potential areas of threat (p. Para 19). It mentions that Australia, India, and Japan are important partners in the Indo-Pacific (p. Para 169). This position can be seen as a continuation of earlier policy (Athreya R. , 2021, pp. 34-35). The USA Army website too mentions EX ORION and states it enhances interoperability among NATO Armies (US Army, 2023).

## INDIA FRANCE DEFENCE RELATIONS

As noted, India and France have long term relations. To mark the 25th anniversary of the Franco-Indian partnership, both countries agreed to adopt a roadmap to set the course for the bilateral relationship up to 2047, which will celebrate the centenary of India's independence, the centenary of the diplomatic relations between the two countries and 50 years of the strategic partnership (French Embassy in India, 2023b) (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023).

An important element of the bilateral relations is the Annual Defence Dialogue (Ministry of Defence, 2022a). The National Security Adviser of India Shri Ajit Doval and France Monsieur Emmanuel Bonne also held a dialogue on 5 January 2023 (Singh, Indo-French NSA level Meet and Strategic Implications, 2023). This can be seen as a continuation of the hitherto close ties between India and France (Athreya R. , 2021).

**India-France Other Joint Exercises:** Besides the recently held EX ORION, all three Armed Forces of India and France have long undertaken joint exercises in the past year. There has long been trilateral cooperation of India-

UAE-France (Athreya R. , 2021, p. 35). The Indian Air Force participated in EX DESERT FLAG VIII along with UAE, France, Kuwait, Australia, UK, Bahrain, Morocco, Spain, Republic of Korea, and USA, held from 27 February to 17 March 2023 (Ministry of Defence , 2023).

EX FRINJEX-2023 a joint amphibious exercise was conducted by the Indian and French Armies at Thiruvananthapuram from 6-9 March 2023 (Ministry of Defence, 2023c). This exercise is part of the French Armed Forces mission JEANNE D'ARC 23 (French Embassy in India, 2023a). As part of this mission there were also meeting between the Indian and French Navies (Ministry of Defence, 2023d).

The bilateral EX GARUDA VII Indian Air Force (IAF) and French Air and Space Force (FASF) was conducted from 26 October to 12 November 2022 at Air Force Station Jodhpur. In this exercise, FASF participated with four Rafale fighter aircraft, one A-330 Multi Role Tanker Transport aircraft and a contingent of 220 personnel. The IAF deployed the Su-30 MKI, Rafale, LCA Tejas and Jaguar fighter aircraft, as well as the Light Combat Helicopter (LCH) and Mi-17 helicopters. The IAF contingent included Combat Enabling Assets like Flight Refuelling Aircraft, AWACS and AEW&C. This joint exercise provided a platform for both the countries to enhance operational capability and interoperability, while also sharing best practices (Ministry of Defence, 2022b). An important elements was the participation by the Chief the IAF and FASF in the exercise (Ministry of Defence, 2022c).

**Defence Supplies:** An important part of the bilateral relations is defence supplies. This is both in the maritime and aerospace sectors (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023). In Nov 2022, the French Minister for the Armed Forces, Monsieur Sebastien Lecornu visited the Headquarters, Southern Naval Command and India's first indigenous aircraft carrier INS Vikrant (Ministry of Defence, 2022a).

The Defence Acquisition Council of the Government of India 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 also granted the AoN for procurement of three additional Scorpene submarines under Buy (Indian) category which will be constructed by Mazagon Dock Shipbuilders Limited (MDL).

The procurement of additional submarines, with higher indigenous content, will not only help in maintaining required force level and operational readiness of the Indian Navy, but also create significant employment opportunities in the

domestic sector. It will also help the MDL in further enhancing its capability and expertise in submarine construction. (Ministry of Defence, 2023d).

## INDIA FRANCE ENERGY COOPERATION

There have been agreements on Institutional Cooperation, and Cooperation in Space, Science, Political and Strategic Areas, Sustainable Development, and, People-to-People Exchanges and Welfare (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023a). India and France have cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. The latest roadmap confirms existing cooperation. It also adds areas of climate change, and biodiversity (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023d). India and France will offer sustainable development solutions to the countries of the region through multilateral and third country initiatives, including the Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership, International Solar Alliance, and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) to protect marine and terrestrial biodiversity (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023).

**SDG 7:** India and France have a Partnership for the planet. India and France are cooperating on transition to a low carbon economy. This is related to India's increasing Energy Security [capitalisation and emphasis added], and achieving the Sustainable Development Goal 7, and Paris Climate Agreement objectives. There is also a belief in the importance of nuclear energy (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023). These are significant since India has long had concerns around Energy Security (Chaturvedi, 2023).

The IEA defines energy security as the uninterrupted availability of energy sources at an affordable price. Energy security has many aspects: long-term energy security mainly deals with timely investments to supply energy in line with economic developments and environmental needs. On the other hand, short-term energy security focuses on the ability of the energy system to react promptly to sudden changes in the supply-demand balance (International Energy Agency, 2023).

Sustainable Development Goal 7 is to Ensure Affordable, Reliable, Sustainable and Modern Energy for All (Department of Social and Economic Affairs, 2015). The Paris Agreement is a legally binding international treaty on climate change. It was adopted by 196 Parties at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP21) in Paris, France, on 12 December 2015. It entered into force on 4 November 2016 (United Nations Climate Change, 2015).

**I3P:** The Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership or I3P aims to build capacities in the Indo-Pacific region in terms of sustainable management of protected areas, by gathering and sharing the experiences and expertise that exist in



the Region. The partnership aims to bring together key Indo-Pacific public and private natural park managers to unlock knowledge, to share best practices and to highlight the innovative experiences which can further ensure a more sustainable, inclusive, and efficient natural resources preservation (France Diplomacy, 2022).

**ISA:** The International Solar Alliance (ISA) is an action-oriented, member-driven, collaborative platform for increased deployment of solar energy technologies as a means for bringing energy access, ensuring energy security, and driving energy transition in its member countries. It was conceived as a joint effort by India and France to mobilize efforts against climate change through deployment of solar energy solutions (International Solar Alliance, 2018).

**CDRI:** India and France will develop their cooperation in anticipating and responding to natural hazards and climate change related disasters by strengthening the links between their civil security organisations, and by sharing their knowledge, expertise, and seed financing particularly within the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructures (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023). This is in keeping with existing Indian foreign and defence policy (Athreya R. , 2023).

**Nuclear Energy:** Another common area of collaboration is nuclear energy. There are plans for French energy company EDF to transfer technology and training to the Jaitapur Nuclear Power Project (JNPP) (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023).

## CONCLUSION

This article started by mentioning two recent events where there was interaction between the Indian and French Armed Forces. EX ORION a joint exercise headed by France along with several NATO members saw participation by the Indian Air Force. This is an integrated exercise with participation of all three services along with civilian institutions. The continued cooperation between India and France has been scrutinised.

The role of the Indian Air Force has been analysed in this paper. There is effective Air Strategy and use of aerospace assets between India and France to face situations of peace. Air Diplomacy has been used to boost stability and enhance deterrence. In keeping with the provisions of the Doctrine, EX ORION has been located in France that sends a message of close bilateral ties with India. The other participants being NATO countries signals that India is capable of cooperation and joint deployment if necessary.



The prior existing joint exercises between India and France too indicate ties between all three forces. There are exercises between the Armies and Air Forces of both countries. Participations by the Air Chiefs on both sides shows a willingness to rise it to a higher level.

France at a basic level wants to maintain Strategic Autonomy. It also wants to be a leader among EU and NATO countries. France sees China and Russia as adversaries. India continues to be an important partner for France. In pursuance of this policy, France invited India to join EX ORION, that is essentially has participation by NATO countries.

Bastille Day gives message of political and military cooperation between India and France. At one level there is political symbolism in terms of the Prime Minister's visit. At another level the participation of tri service troops in the parade and of Air assets in the flypast show the willingness to project cooperation at all levels. There have long been close ties at the head of government levels. In addition, the two National Security Advisers are holding dialogues.

Defence supplies are another important arena of cooperation. There is collaboration both with the Navy and Air Force in production. This supports moves to boost production in India. The visit by the French Minister shows political commitment to continued collaboration.

Cooperation in nontraditional security is an emerging arena in Indo-French relations. United Nations Sustainable Development Goals are reflected in current collaboration between the two countries. Solar Energy is an important common ground, as demonstrated by the International Solar Alliance. Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructures is a natural extension of existing cooperation on HADR. Indo-Pacific Parks Partnership aims to create increased interface around natural resources. Nuclear Energy has long been a common area between the two countries.

The two countries need to continue their bilateral cooperation. The varied diplomatic, military, energy and environmental sectors will continue to be relevant.

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Rishi Athreya: He is Head of Research Strategic Studies at Indus International Research Foundation. Mr Athreya is an alumnus of Flinders University, Adelaide and University of Leeds, wherein he acquired advanced degrees in International Relations and Development Studies. He holds a Certificate in Consulting from the United Kingdom's Chartered Management Institute. He has worked in academic research within the public sector, as also international organisations, in the fields of consulting and risk analysis. He has served in the Governance Division of the Commonwealth Secretariat, where he worked on Public Sector Reform, and Democracy. He has rendered yeoman service in the areas of development assistance and technical cooperation. Mr Athreya is a widely published author and has written on various topics related to governance, security and diplomacy. He has also been the editor of several publications published by international organisations, think-tanks, and legislatures. His co-authors have included, amongst others, civil servants, officers of the defence services, and diplomats. He is co editor of the books *Securing India's Maritime Neighbourhood: Challenges and Opportunities*, and of the *IIRF Strategic Yearbook 2022-23*.