

Friendship to Partnership

Claude Arpi



The pier was the main point of entry between Pondicherry and France. © Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

TO GRASP THE INTRICACIES OF INDO-FRENCH relations in the field of defence and security, it is necessary to first have a look at some issues which may seem unrelated, but which will help us to understand the historical background and get clearer perspectives on the future.

THE PARTITION

Let us go back for a moment to 1946-47, when the British decided to leave the Jewel in their Crown. They were ready to depart from the subcontinent, but not to lose their influence in Asia. During the previous two centuries, the defence of their empire had been centered on the Indian subcontinent and the Indian Ocean was known as the 'British lake'. The British Empire, born from a trading company, was basically a sea-empire. This has been demonstrated by the historian K.M. Panikkar, in his book, *Asia and the Western Dominance*. At the beginning of the 20th century however, two new factors appeared on the strategic scene: one was aviation (as masterfully demonstrated by the Japanese at Pearl Harbour in 1941); the second, petrol and the resulting importance given to the Middle East.

In 1946, when the British Chiefs of Staff were ordered to submit a report on the strategic consequences of Britain's departure from the subcontinent,¹ the generals agreed that Pakistan was the more important of the two future dominions; first because of the possibility of installing air bases in the north of the country (to control Soviet advances) and second, naval bases could be opened on the Arabian Sea in the South.

As an added bonus, a strong support to Pakistan could have a positive influence on the Muslim states in the Middle East.

On August 15, 1947, the subcontinent was partitioned. The consequences are still today looming over the region. One of the results of the British assessment was that during the first decades after independence, the West most often took Pakistan's side over India, particularly in the



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Kashmir imbroglio. This aggravated the tensions and resulted in Delhi seeing Pakistan as the major (and often only) threat to its security and thus choosing to lean towards the Soviets.

Though the French foreign policy did not tilt so blatantly towards Karachi, Paris remained an ally of the Western nations during the Cold War. French interests were in keeping a more balanced approach between the two former dominions.²

NON-VIOLENCE: THE IDEOLOGICAL FACTOR

Another aspect to take into consideration is the ideological slant of some of the first leaders of Independent India.

The new Indian government, which had championed the principle of non-violence against the British, was keen to show the world that conflicts could be solved without recourse to force. According to many, the Pakistani invasion of Kashmir opened Nehru's eyes; India had to defend itself. Nonetheless, India was still not ready when the Chinese descended the slopes of Thagla ridge on October 20, 1962.

THE COLONIAL FACTOR

Another factor which weighed heavily in the Indo-French relations is the hangover of the

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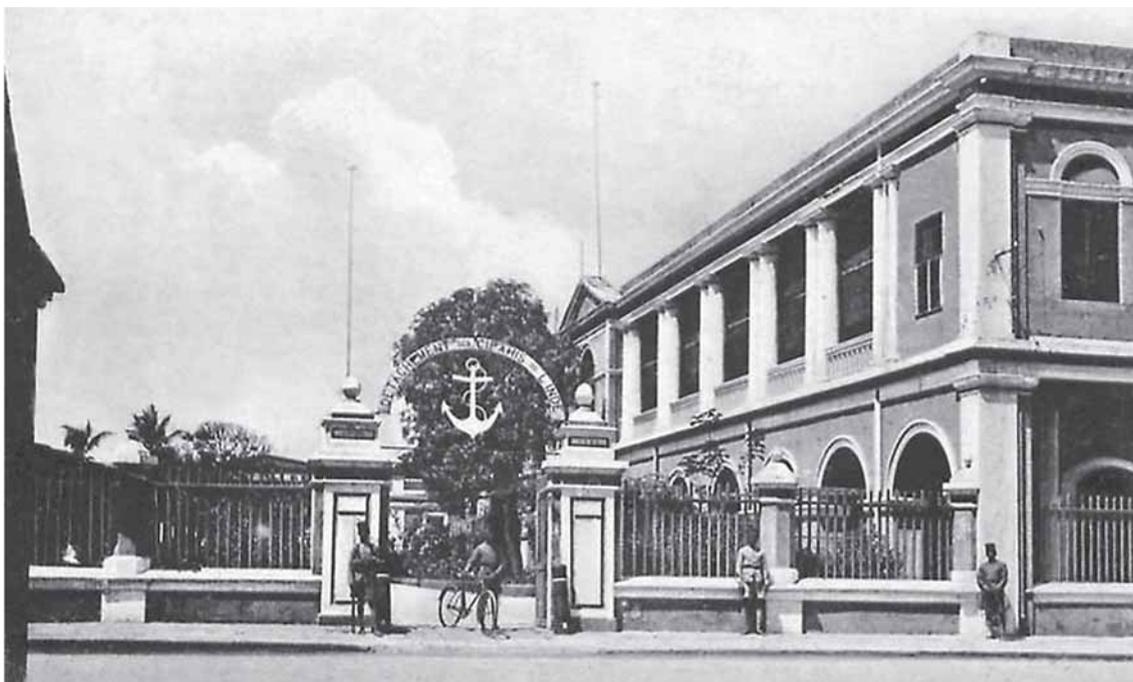
colonial era. The British left the subcontinent in August 1947³, while the French remained present in five tiny establishments. For several reasons,⁴ Paris could not follow the British example at that time, but over the years it became increasingly difficult to come out of the entrenched positions and to find an honourable exit for France to return to India the suzerainty over the French Establishments in India. Only the wisdom and the determination of the French

Premier Pierre Mendès-France in 1954 saved both nations from a longer and even more unpleasant conflict.⁵

It is also important to note the parallel between the fate of the French Establishments in India and the situation in other French colonies, particularly in Indochina and North Africa. The *de facto* transfer of the French Establishments was linked with the fate of the Geneva Conference on Indochina and the *de jure* transfer was ratified by the Parliament soon after the Evian Agreement on Algeria. These elements, external to the bilateral relations between India and France played an important historical role.

THE DEFENCE RELATIONS FIRST PHASE: 1947-1962

Historians usually consider the period between



Quarters of the French sepoys in Pondicherry (according to the 1814 Treaty between France and Great Britain, France was only allowed a police force in Pondicherry) © INTACH

The French Connection

1947 and 1962 as the first phase of the Indo-French relations. Year 1962 was for France the year it constitutionally departed from the subcontinent and for India, it marked the end of the dream of a Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai relationship.

Though the relations were not too cordial between France and India, as early as January 1947, the French Government asked for a ten-year extension of the 1945 agreement permitting military air ferries to fly across India. Nehru, the Interim Prime Minister noted: "Public opinion in India is very much against the use of force by the French Government against the people of Indochina and anything which we do to facilitate the use of this force is bound to be resented and vigorously criticised." On July 16, 1947 an Agreement on Air Services between India and France was nevertheless signed.

By the end of the year, an interesting development occurred. Nehru was "anxious to help in every way in developing atomic energy in India." He decided to unofficially send Dr. Homi J. Bhabha to enquire about the possibility of collaboration for the peaceful use atomic energy: "In view of the fact that India possesses very large resources of minerals suitable for the generation of atomic power, India is destined to play an important part in research on atomic energy in co-operation with other countries. We would like to welcome this co-operation, more specially in Great Britain, Canada and France." Homi Bhabha had extremely cordial contacts with Frédéric Joliot-Curie and Raoul Dautry, the first heads of the French Atomic Energy Commission (CEA), founded by de Gaulle in 1945. At that time, Joliot-Curie was interested by two materials: beryllium and thorium. Nehru, interested in the program 'Atoms for Peace',



On November 1, 1954, Kewal Singh and Pierre Landy signed an agreement for the de facto transfer of the French Establishments to the Union of India. The agreement could only be ratified in 1962. © Sri Aurobindo Ashram Trust

saw the nuclear collaboration as discriminatory. Why should countries with colonial territories use raw material looted from these colonies for their research, he thought.

'Discrimination' will remain at the core of the Indian position in the decades to come.⁶

The French armament sales during this first phase were relatively large despite the factors mentioned above. Though the Indian Air Force did not directly take part in the conflict with China, 49 *Ouragan* fighter planes (produced by Dassault Aviation), 110 *Mystère* and 12 *Alizée* (of Bréguet Aviation) were in service in 1962. Further, 150 AMX 13 light tanks were sold to India after an agreement signed in 1957. The total arms sales from France between 1950 and 1962 amounted to \$794 million according to the SIPRI database, which made it the second most important after UK (\$4,612 million) and before USSR (\$612 million) and the US (\$248 million).

On September 22, 1962, General de Gaulle received Nehru in Paris. Nehru first congratulated him for the settlement of the Algerian crisis as well as the ratification of the cession of the French Establishments in India. De

Gaule replied that he was happy to see that India had dealt successfully with some of the issues on which the West had doubts at the time of independence. At the end of the meeting, Nehru pointed out at the danger coming from China “which spent most of its resources for preparing the bomb... It is for them a question of prestige,” explained a worried Indian Minister who however did not request the French President for armaments.⁸

Four weeks after the meeting in Paris, the Chinese attack India.

On October 27, Nehru called French Ambassador Jean-Paul Garnier to tell him that it is “an invasion, pure and simple”. On November 30, Ambassador Ali Javar Jung met de Gaulle in Paris to thank him for his support. The French President had written to Nehru a few days earlier: “We can not approve that border claims are settled by military actions which is in any case disproportionate with the proclaimed objectives [of the Chinese]”.

During this encounter with the Indian Ambassador, the General conveyed to him what would be the core of the French position for several decades. He told Jung: “France is the friend of India, not its ally and therefore will not provide any [military] support which in any case, has not been requested by India.” Paris was prepared to provide some military supplies to Delhi (and this in consultation with the US), but was not ready to intervene. For India, the war marked (at least temporarily) a U-turn in its foreign policy. The Indian Ambassador admitted to de Gaulle: “it throws the entire non-aligned policy of India back into question”.

In the years to come, Delhi would remain ‘non-aligned’ while in fact leaning towards the Soviet Union. The responsibility lies partly with the US and the UK. When India was down and bleeding, Averell Harriman, the US Assistant Secretary of State and Duncan Sandys, the British Secretary for Commonwealth Relations, visited India. They arrived two days after Beijing had unilaterally declared a ceasefire. They “made clear their governments’ willingness to provide military assistance to India, but pointed out the related need for negotiations to resolve the Kashmir dispute.”

Six rounds of talks on Kashmir between Pakistan and India followed the US and UK Envoys’ visit. The Western governments discovered that not only had the exercise failed, but Ayub Khan had already begun a dangerous flirtation with China.⁹ By that time, de Gaulle had started looking eastward; he sent one of his ministers, Edgar Faure to visit the Middle Kingdom.

PHASE 2: 1963-1971

On January 31, 1964, General de Gaulle stated: “China, a great people, the most populous of the planet, a race patient, industrious, hard-working... a State more ancient than history, steadfast and proud of its ageless continuity; that is China of the age.” He had decided to recognize the People’s Republic of China. France had found a new friend.

The Americans were deeply unhappy. Chester Bowles, the new US Ambassador in Delhi told the Secretary of State: “Recognition is primarily [an] act demonstrating French independence of American control in foreign affairs.” And he added: “No concession or bribe of any kind will affect de Gaulle’s attitude or policies. He would regard any such gesture on our part as confirmation of the correctness of his views.”

This ‘independent’ attitude of the French government was in many ways similar to the one advocated by Nehru, minus of course, the *Force de frappe*.¹⁰ Unfortunately for the two nations, this did not translate into a significant improvement in the Indo-French relations.

After the October-November 1962 debacle, India turned its energies towards self-reliance. Nehru had to build up the nation’s defence against an enemy that the Prime Minister had thought to be a brother. During the four-week long India-China war, Delhi had looked westward for support. Paradoxically, though Moscow’s stance had been ambiguous during the conflict, during the following decades Delhi increasingly relied on the Soviet Union for its arms supply.

France remained a friend, not an ally. Arms supplies from France nevertheless reached \$ 323 million between 1963 and 1971, while the tally of the Soviet Union touched \$ 7,100 million (and \$ 76 million for the US). Paris’s approach was

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businesslike and restricted to arms sales.¹¹ During the period between 1962 and 1971, the French sales mainly pertained to *Alizé* aircrafts, *AS-30* air-to-surface missiles, *Entac* and *SS-11/AS-11* anti-tank missiles.

In the following years, the increase in American armament deliveries to Pakistan worsened the situation in South Asia (Pakistan was supplied \$ 285 million between 1963 and 1965, while India received \$ 75 million only). This probably emboldened Pakistan to start *Operation Gibraltar*,¹² which triggered a new conflict between India and Pakistan in September 1965. During the short war, France followed the US's leadership and imposed an arm embargo against the belligerents. Paris however continued to send spare parts for French aircrafts. The embargo was lifted in March 1966.

The 'commercial' attitude of the French government was not always appreciated by its Western allies, but it enhanced France's image in Delhi who probably considered France as the most reliable Western 'friend'.

PHASE 2: 1971-1990

The Office of the Historian of the US State Department which has recently released the declassified documents of the Nixon Administration terms the policy of the US President as "The Tilt". While Washington tilted heavily towards Karachi during the Bangladesh Liberation War, Paris' position was more balanced.

During the debate in the UN Security Council, the French Representative declared: "We appreciate the fact that India cannot feel satisfied with a superficial solution when it has millions of refugees under its care". The Indian Official Report of the 1971 war stated that although the UK and France were both allies of the United States, "they did not toe the American line".

During this period, France remained India's 'friend'. This translated into moderate arms sales during the next twenty years. From 1971 till its collapse in 1989, the Soviet Union supplied \$ 33,622 million dollars of armament to India, while France was only the third exporter with \$ 2,113

Year 1991 witnessed a new birth for India. After more than 40 years of planned economy patterned on the Soviet model, Narasimha Rao, the Prime Minister had the courage to open up the economy with the results witnessed by everyone today. It was as if the genius of the Indian race, bottled up for all those decades, had suddenly sprung forth.

million (after the United Kingdom \$ 7,001 million).¹³ One thousand short range air-to-air missiles *R-550 Magic-1* and 40 *PA-6* diesel engines for offshore patrol vessels were ordered in 1979 as well as thousands of *Milan* anti-tank missiles in 1981.

Although the purchase of 150 Mirages, 2000 was announced in December 1981 to counter the American F16s ordered by Pakistan, the final agreement was for 40 planes only. A preferential credit rate of 9.25 percent was offered to India.¹⁴ Since India needed the fighter aircraft quickly, the first part of an initial batch of 26 single-seaters and 4 two-seaters was shipped in 1985.¹⁵

The second part of this initial batch consisted of 10 more single-seaters with the M53-P2 engine, with these aircraft designated Mirage 2000H. A second batch of six Mirage 2000H single-seaters and three Mirage 2000TH two-seaters was shipped in 1987-1988. In 1986, 9 more planes were ordered.¹⁶

By the end of 1982¹⁷, India received its first *Milans*, the reputed Franco-German anti-tank guided missile. The Bharat Dynamics Limited started manufacturing them in January 1985 under a French license.¹⁸

Before President Mitterrand's visit in February 1989, France concluded a contract for the feasibility study of the construction of an aircraft-carrier in the dockyards of Cochin for the Indian Navy; this project never fructified.

It is necessary to mention some events which (directly or indirectly) played a role in the Indo-French relations during these two decades. The contacts between India and France could be said to be cloudless (except for Paris' propensity to equate Delhi and Islamabad), but lacking dynamism (some watchers called them 'lethargic').

- In May 1974, India tested a plutonium bomb in Pokhran in the desert of Rajasthan. During the following eight years, French collaboration for civilian use of the atom was discontinued.
- In the mid-seventies, Indian and French intelligence had a very friendly rapport. It is

said that the R&AW Chief, RN Kao traveled to Paris to meet his counterpart, Alexandre de Marenches to set up a tripartite collaboration between the R&AW, the SDECE and the Iranian SAVAC.

- The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan reinforced the position of Pakistan as the favourite partner of the United States in the region, creating at a same time an arms race in the region. It was difficult to convince Delhi that the US supplies were against the Russian presence in Afghanistan only. In these circumstances, Paris could have been an alternative to the Soviet Union in defence collaboration with India. It did not fructify.
- In 1982, an India-France Defence Memorandum of Understanding was signed.¹⁹ Later the creation of an armament committee and an Indo-French Defence Cooperation Working Group helped to start institutionalising the relations in the field of defence, in fact mainly in armament transfer.
- With India spending more than 3% of its GDP on defence expenditure, Delhi became the world's largest importer of armaments. For the period between 1972 and 1991, France's share remained below 5 percent of the total import bill, while the Soviet Union cornered 72 percent.
- A few months after Indira Gandhi was assassinated in October 1984, a "spy scandal,"²⁰ the most serious ever, as per Rajiv Gandhi, made the front page of the media. French intelligence officers used to visit the PMO, select thousands of documents and take photocopies of whatever files interested them. The French Ambassador was eventually declared *persona non grata* and given 48 hours to leave the country. The *Hindustan Times* wrote that the extent of the scam "staggered the imagination of investigating officials... The security system and our vital papers have been stripped clean." This did not hamper India's collaboration with France (particularly for the Mirage deal). *Le Monde* in an article before the State visit of President Mitterrand

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in 1989 stated that Rajiv Gandhi 'had forgiven' France.

- In 1984, the Siachen became the highest battlefield in the world. Though the high altitude forbids the use of heavy weapons, small equipment became in demand. One should point out the extraordinary service of the Cheetah and the Chetak (ex-Allouette) helicopters.
- Another scam which had indirect ramifications for France is the Bofors arms deal which has remained in the news for the past twenty years. After his retirement, the former Army Chief General K. Sundarji affirmed: "In 1982, talks were going on with the French government for 300-odd pieces of Sofma self-propelled guns. I then suggested the French gun because the army decided that the performance and trials held in India could be the basis of selection. And the Sofma fitted into the category." The rest of the story is known.
- What India considered as one of the most damaging aspect for the bilateral relations was Paris' ambivalent relation with Pakistan. France keeping equidistance between India and Pakistan will remain a serious bone of contention between Delhi and Paris during the two decades.²¹

These are some of the events which influenced, in one way or another, the bilateral relations in the field of defence between the 2 nations during this period.

PHASE 1991-2007: INDIA BECOMES A POWER TO RECKON

It is obviously arbitrary to divide the bilateral rapport in phases which may correspond to important stages in one of the country's history, but not automatically the other.

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to open up the economy with the results witnessed by everyone today. It was as if the genius of the Indian race, bottled up for all those decades, had suddenly sprung again forth. On the international stage, this period corresponded to the collapse of the Soviet Union and the chaos in Afghanistan, which eventually led to the advent of the Taliban regime.

The French Connection

Despite the disappearance of the Soviet Union and the world turning unipolar, the Russian Republic remained India's main armament supplier during the period 1992–2006 with \$ 13,751 dollars. France was fifth (\$ 797 million) after the Netherlands (\$ 1,004 million), UK (\$ 801 million) and Germany (\$ 898 million). With the economic liberalization in India, all efforts were focused to make the local economy vibrant; the percentage of defence expenditure came down from a maximum of 4% in the 1980's to less than 3% in the nineties (2.6% in 1996 and 2004).

The most interesting aspect of the 90's was the tremendous boost in bilateral relations given by the visits of President Chirac in January 1998 and Prime Minister Vajpayee's trip to Paris later in the year.

The most striking feature was the setting up of a framework for a strategic partnership. Before reaching Delhi, the French President had declared that he was keen on an "ambitious partnership". Using a de Gaulle-like language, Jacques Chirac

saluted India, "a nation which has affirmed its personality on the world stage". He said that he had come to show that "France wanted to accompany India in its potent march [towards the future]."

Inaugurating a seminar in Vigyan Bhavan, the French President elaborated on the nuclear deal. Reminding that "certain conditions are to be met",²² he however suggested to: "reflect, together with those of our partners involved, on the ways to reconcile our common will to co-operate and the necessary respect for the rules the international community has set itself". Nine years later, a similar language could be used by President Sarkozy when he visits Delhi in January 2008.

Chirac's words were not mere political niceties. When India conducted its nuclear tests in Pokhran in May, France was one of the few countries which did not condemn Delhi (or impose sanction). This was greatly appreciated in Delhi and when Prime Minister Vajpayee returned Chirac's visit in October, the new strategic dialogue could take its first concrete steps.²³



These events set in motion a closer collaboration. From the friendship mentioned by de Gaulle, the relation had become a partnership. By putting proper structures in place, the dialogue was institutionalized:

- A *Strategic Dialogue* at the level of National Security Advisors provides both sides an opportunity to review the evolution of the overall global security situation and emerging challenges in various parts of the world (17 rounds have been held so far).
- A *High Level Committee for Defence* at the level of Defence Secretaries, works through its three specialized sub-committees, dealing with issues related to defence co-operation.
- A *Joint Working Group on Terrorism* has been established to co-operate in the fight against terrorism.
- Annual consultations between the two foreign ministries are held at the level of Foreign Secretaries.
- A Joint Committee for Economic and Technical Cooperation at the level of Ministers of Commerce

The bilateral relations have benefited in several ways:

- Increase in the number of high-level civilian and defence personnel visits. Just a glimpse at the website of the French Embassy in India²⁴ will show the drastic improvement in this field. Mr. Bernard Kouchner, the French Foreign Minister visited Delhi on December 20 and 21. The regular reciprocal visits of a large number of senior serving defence officers have enabled a deeper sharing of views and experience.²⁵
- *Defence Personnel Exchanges*
Exchanges have not been too successful so far. According to General Alain Lamballe (Retd), a former military attaché and expert in the Indo-French relations: "Both nations have not sufficiently explored the possibility to send young officers for training. It is the only guarantee to have a good reciprocal knowledge in the long term. India hesitates to put its officers in contact with foreigners, fearing compromises."²⁶ If trust between the armed forces of the two countries

After September 11, 2001, it became even more obvious that India and Pakistan could not be equated.

increases, one can hope that there will be an improvement in this field.

- *Joint Naval Exercises*
In 2006, the Indian Navy called these exercises: "A Significant Indicator". Explaining the background of the successful *Varuna* joint naval exercises, the Indian Ministry of Defence said: "In recent times the Indian Navy laid great emphasis on enhancing bilateral ties and interoperability with navies of developed countries through professional and operational interactions." *Varuna 07*, a sea and air military exercise was held from the September 11 to 19, 2007, off the Somali coasts and in the Gulf of Aden in continuation of the exercises organized in March and April 2006 off the coast of Goa. The French contribution was then centered on the aircraft carrier *Charles De Gaulle*.
- *Aerial Exercises*
From 12 to 23 February 2007, the French and Indian Air Forces carried out the third edition of the *Garuda* series of air force exercises. Organised for the second time in India, this year exercise took place at Kalaikunda Air Force Station. The French Air Force participated with one Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) aircraft, four Mirage 2000-D Air-to-Ground fighters and four Mirage 2000-5 Air-Defence fighters. It was the first time that a French AWACS Aircraft came to India.
- *Joint Research and Development*
One of the many examples which could be given is the Defence Research and Development Laboratory (DRDL), a missile research laboratory under the Defence Research Development Organisation (DRDO) and the leading European company, MBDA Missile Systems, planning to jointly develop a new-generation low-level, quick-reaction missile (LLQRM). The \$500 million project is aimed at developing the 35-kilometer *Maitri* quick-reaction missile, a blend of the French Mica and DRDO *Trishul*. MBDA will develop an active homing head, thrust-vector controls and missiles. DRDL will handle software, command-and-control, and integration.

Though President Chirac's visit to India in February 2006 was marred by the *Clémenceau*

controversy, it further cemented the close relations between the two nations. On the eve of the visit, France's ambassador Dominique Girard had summed up the relations: "Our two nations, now more than ever before, have a major responsibility in relation to the rest of the international community and the promotion of peace and development. The strategic partnership that they have forged with one another must be based on sound and co-ordinated defence systems".

OBSTACLES INDO-FRENCH RELATIONS

At the outset, it is necessary to point out that today no major political differences darken the sky between Paris and Delhi except, of course, the unexpected cancellation of the order for the Fenec Eurocopter choppers. France has constantly been supportive of India, particularly for a permanent seat for India in the UN Security Council and has shown its comprehension in the nuclear domain. The collaboration could however be more meaningful. The strategic partnership instituted in 1998 has in the recent years been devalued by the multiplication of such accords with all and sundry. There is no doubt that further innovative steps need to be taken to sustain the 1998 momentum.

1- FROM INDIA'S SIDE

It is interesting to look at what are the main hurdles to be overcome if progress has to be made in this direction.

The blame for the relative stagnation of the relations between France and India cannot be laid on one side only. There is also no point going back into the past as most of the subjects which have divided Delhi and Paris, whether it is the colonial hangover, India's so-called non-alignment or France's adherence to the Western position on the Kashmir issue, do not exist anymore.

In India, one of the hurdles (at least in the field of defence) seems today to be the bureaucratic

frame of mind which is not compatible with the speedy modernisation of the armed forces. In the recent months, India had to suffer the cancellation of several important armament deals.²⁷ It has not only a negative impact on the defence forces preparedness—and the Indian nation will ultimately pay the price—but India's image also takes a beating. "It is impossible to do business with India" is a motto often heard.

As Ajai Shukla, a journalist with an Army background put it in an article in the *Business Standard*: "The cancelled purchase from Eurocopter had taken six years to fructify. Whether another selection procedure will end in a perfectly objective decision is already well known: it will not". It is true for all the other deals. Many foreign suppliers are now asking: will the same fate await the 126 fighter planes?

Shukla also reveals that India is the only major country that plans its defence one year at a time. India is supposed to have a 15-year Long-Term Integrated Procurement Plan (LTIPP), but it has never taken a concrete shape.

Another issue which seems to hamper the development of a deeper partnership with Paris is Delhi's sudden closeness with the Bush Administration, to the exclusion of other partnerships. There would be nothing wrong in this proximity if it did not get in the way of Delhi's relations with other countries. It is unfortunately a fact that many Indian leaders today believe that the solution to all problems can come from the United States only, while another category of politicians sees only devilish influences emanating from the US. As a result, nothing moves.

Let us not forget that the US boycotted India and slammed heavy sanctions on its economy while Paris stood by Delhi. This seems to be forgotten as





soon as an Indian leader receives a pat on the shoulder from the US President.

Another factor is China. Washington needs to contain the 'rise' of the Middle Kingdom. A couple of years ago, a Pentagon report on China's military advised Washington planners to 'take more seriously the possibility that China might emerge as a strategic rival to the US.'

The report was released when Dr Manmohan Singh arrived in the US in July 2005.²⁸ Pundits deduced that Washington was keen to develop a new partnership with Delhi to counter Beijing. During the last two or three years, Washington appears keen to use Delhi for its own interests. France has no place in such schemes.

2- FROM FRANCE'S SIDE

In the past, France's India policy has been dependant of many external factors: French colonial past in Indochina and Africa, General de Gaulle's 'discovery' of China, Paris' alliance with other Western powers, etc.; but since 1998, Paris has turned a page. The policy of equidistance between Delhi and Islamabad which did hamper the 'friendship' between Paris and Delhi, is no more. After September 11, 2001, it became even more obvious that India and Pakistan could not be equated²⁹.

Ali Yavar Jung, the Indian Ambassador in France had told de Gaulle in November 1962 that France "had the advantage, in India's eyes, to be economically and financially strong and at the same time, had level-headed policies, and can not

be a compromising power like the Soviet Union and the US."

Today, while maintaining 'privileged' relations, Delhi and Paris stay short of engaging further. There is a French word which characterises perfectly the French attitude: *frilosité*. While the dictionary translates it as 'overcautiousness' or 'sensibility to cold', it can also be translated by 'the absence of boldness', a quality supposedly engrained in the French character. Before the 1989 Mitterrand visit, *Le Monde's* title was "Absence of disagreement, but lethargic co-operation". Though tremendous changes have occurred since then, one sometimes has the feeling that this *frilosité* does not allow the relations to go a step further. The same article quoted an Indian business man dealing with France: "You are able to demonstrate true solidarity [with India]; sometime strike great commercial 'coups', but between these sudden initiatives, you don't work, you let the links loosen. This is the quality and the flaw of the French. It is true in the economic field and also on the politic one. Friendship or partnership, you have to look after it. Our relations are not bad, they are lethargic."

It seems a correct judgment, 19 years after it was written and nine years after Chirac's historic visit of 1998.

It is regrettable that the 2006 visit was not prepared with enough seriousness. Otherwise how could the French MoD send the Clemenceau to Gujarat less than 2 months before the State visit?³⁰



The forthcoming visit of the new President of the French Republic seems to have been better prepared with the trips of the French Army and Naval Chiefs and the Foreign Affairs Minister. President Sarkozy, very popular in India for his dynamism, should further boost the relations. Will a further step be taken on Republic Day, with the French President as the Chief Guest? Hopefully it will.

France has many cards in her hand: one is her strong stand in favour of India for a permanent seat in the UN Security Council. Another considerable advantage of a closer Indo-French collaboration (particularly in the nuclear field) would be that it could have the broad agreement of the entire political spectrum in India which is today deeply divided into pro-US and anti-US.

Indo-French relations in the years to come will probably take a new qualitative turn, even if it does not always translate into direct arms sales.³¹ Apart from a collaboration for the civilian use of the atomic energy³² which has gone a long way from the days of Homi Bhabha and Joliot-Curie, the area which is the most likely to expend is the field of joint-ventures and delocalization.³³ Already in 2005, the Director (Exports) of the Paris based MBDA missiles systems told the *Financial Express*: “India with its skill base and projected economic growth is the preferred partner nation for MBDA due to its unique potential of becoming a defence industrial hub in the region. As such, there are extensive opportunities for collaboration with Indian industry, combining the company’s technology

and skills base in weapons design, testing and integration developed over the last 50 years.”³⁴

When President Chirac arrived in Mumbai in 1998, he declared: “In India, France is not at the level where it should be.” Ten years later, it is still true. France has a role to play in India, but will Paris will be bold enough to seize the occasion?

NOTES

1. See Dasgupta, C., *War and Diplomacy* (New Delhi, Sage Publications, 2002).
2. In January 1948 before a UN debate on Kashmir, French Foreign Minister George Bidault in a letter to his Representative in the UN, made the French position clear: “Concerning Hindustan, you are aware that we have particularly difficult negotiations on the status of our Establishments in India with the authorities in Delhi. We are trying our best to go slow on the Hindus’ susceptibilities; we have done this during the last sessions of the UN General Assembly. I will add that the necessity to maintain essential contacts between France and our expeditionary army in Indochina puts us in the obligation to ask for permission for our planes to fly over India. These are the reasons which should not be forgotten during our intervention in the [Kashmir] debate.”
3. However both dominions of India and Pakistan kept British Commanders-in-Chief for some time; both newly-born nations remained in the Commonwealth; India kept a British Governor-General for nearly one year. The British left behind the best (or the worst) of their political, administrative and judicial systems as well as their language. All this had a tremendous influence on the defence relations with the United Kingdom (and France).
4. Mendes-France decided to return the French Establishments to India the day after the successful conclusion of the Geneva Conference on Indochina (July 20, 1954). See: Arpi Claude, *La politique française de Nehru – 1947-1954* (Collection des Pavillons, Auroville, 2001)
5. Though de Gaulle said later that India used an “unacceptable brutality” to get the French out!

6. Today 'discrimination' is still a major issue in the nuclear negotiations between the West and Delhi
7. See <http://www.sipri.org/contents/armstrad>
8. During a meeting at the White House on November 19, 1962. President Kennedy wanted to discuss the US's military support to India. Robert McNamara, the US Defence Secretary told the President that "he doubted that the Indians were asking for enough [armament]". He requested the US President to send a delegation for an on the spot appraisal. Harriman left for India three days later.
9. It took concrete shape with Pakistan offering Beijing a large chunk of Kashmir territory in 1963.
10. 'Strike Force' in French, for dissuasion or deterrence.
11. Some French technicians are said to have visited India soon after the conflict to improve the efficiency of the engines of the AMX 13 tanks in high altitude. The war was an excellent occasion for French engineers to test the limits of their material in such tough terrain.
12. Code name of the plan launched in August 1965 by Pakistan to infiltrate the State of Jammu and Kashmir to foment an insurgency in the Valley.
13. The Franco-British *Jaguar* aircrafts purchased in 1979 is part of the British tally.
14. ISNARD Jacques, (La France s'est engagée à livrer quarante Mirage-2000 à l'Inde), *Le Monde* 17 avril 1982.
15. As a bonus, Indian engineers received a six-month training in France with Dassault and Dassault-Systems. In 1984, they were the core group who started the Aeronautical Development Agency (ADA) in Bangalore. The ADA was to oversee the development of India's Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) program.
16. On 17th March 1998 an agreement was concluded between HAL and Dassault Aviation authorizing HAL to offer over-hauling facilities for Mirage and global customers.
In 2000, Delhi gave its green light to purchase 10 more Mirage 2000H for the IAF. The contract represented an amount of 378 million Euros. It was considered as an extension of the 1986 delivery (the IAF having lost 3 planes during training flights).
17. *Le Monde*, 22 décembre 1982
18. *Indian Milan under way*, Jane's Defence Weekly, Londres, 22 mars 1986, page 503.
19. Roger Constance, *Indo-French Defence Cooperation — Friends in Need or Friends Indeed*, IPCS Research Papers (New Delhi, March 2007).
20. Known as the Coomar Narain Case in India.
21. On February 20, 1989 *Le Monde's* correspondent wrote: "Paris is trying to keep a certain balance in its relations between Islamabad and New Delhi, though India, in view of its size and influence, has long been privileged by the French diplomacy. Still today, our regional policy is a sensitive issue due to the exacerbated susceptibilities between India and Pakistan. The visit [to Pakistan] of Mr. Mitterrand will be examined in Delhi with a magnifier..."
22. In a 1998 article titled *Returns from the French connection*, the *Indian Express* commented: "Chirac during his visit made clear that France is willing to work at a reinterpretation of the requirements of the NPT. Without breaching its NPT commitments, France is willing to show flexibility on safeguards, provided India displays a certain amount of 'give' on the kind of controls it is willing to accept."
23. The Indian Prime Minister told the press: "President Chirac and I have decided to initiate a strategic dialogue between the two countries. Both countries share a perspective that the new world order has to be a genuine multi-polar world order. Our bilateral relationship is poised to grow in the coming months in a multi-faceted manner."
24. See http://www.france-in-india.org/en/rubrique.php3?id_rubrique=35
25. The latest being the visit of General Bruno Cuche, the French Chief of Army Staff, from 26 to 30 November, 2007 and Admiral Alain Oudot de Dainville, the Chief of Naval Staff in December.
26. General Alain Lamballe, *Les relations entre l'Inde et la France de 1947 à 2000 dans le domaine de la sécurité et de la Défense*, in *Les relations entre la France et l'Inde de 1673 à nos jours*, (Collection Les Indes Savantes, Paris, 2002).
27. Not only with France.
28. To sign the now famous nuclear deal.
29. Benazir Bhutto's assassination makes it all the more evident.
30. To make things worst, a French senior minister made some remarks on 'Indians' wanting to purchase Arcelor a few weeks before Chirac's arrival.
31. The arms business remains important: according to SIPRI, nations around the world spent \$ 1,204 billion in the year 2006 on military expenditure. This is equivalent to \$ 184 of the per capita. SIPRI's year book recorded an increase of 3.5 percent in real terms in 2005 and 37% during the decade 1997-2006. As per Year Book 2007, five countries with the highest military expenditure in 2006 in market exchange rate terms were USA, UK, France, China and Japan. In purchasing power parity terms, the top five spenders were USA, China, India, Russia and UK. As per SIPRI Year Book 2007, defence spending per capita of India in 2006 was \$ 21 as against estimated per capita expenditure of \$ 37 in respect of China.
32. During his recent visit to India (December 20, 2007) Bernard Kouchner, the French Foreign Minister declared that India and France were working on a civil nuclear accord though its finalization would have to wait till India gets the nod from the International Atomic Energy Agency.
33. This is a general trend, present also in the civilian field. When President Sarkozy visited to China in October 2007, the *New York Times* reported about the Airbus manufacturing partnership with China: "the company [has] opened a design center in Beijing. In June 2006, Airbus agreed to set up an A320 assembly line in Tianjin. That line, which is still under construction, is expected to make about four planes a month by 2011."
34. Mati Hindrekus, the MBDA spokesman commented: "On one hand, we will benefit from Indian software skills and the country's lower cost base. On the other India will gain access to the world's most advanced guided missile technology, which will give the nation a much greater degree of autonomy in developing its current and long term defence capabilities."

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The French Connection