



GROWING INDIAN-FRENCH MARITIME RELATIONS

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



On October 24, 2017, French Defense Minister Florence Parly travelled to India for a two-day visit and held bilateral talks with her counterpart Nirmala Sitharaman. This meeting was in continuation of a series of interactions between the two countries on defense related matters. The trip was also aimed at laying the road map for an upcoming visit of French President Emmanuel Macron to India in December 2017.¹

France and India have maintained very close ties on economic and strategic relations. In 2016, India had signed a \$9 billion deal with France for supply of 36 Rafale jets, and the Indian Air Force (IAF) is pitching for procuring another fleet of 36 Rafale jets.² However, this visit was building upon the Technical Arrangement on Exchange of White Shipping information signed earlier in 2017.

According to a statement release by the Indian Defense Ministry, "Recognizing the growing significance of maritime security in the Indo-Pacific and the need for greater maritime domain awareness, India and France will further expand information sharing arrangements."³ India already enjoys a sound maritime partnership with France and conducts joint navy exercise titled *Varuna*

¹ "France, India to enhance maritime security" *The Economic Times*, 24 October 2017 <https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/france-india-to-enhance-maritime-security/articleshow/61193197.cms>

² "It's Official: India and France Sign \$8.7 Billion Deal for 36 Rafale Fighters" *The Diplomat*, 23 September, 2016, <https://thediplomat.com/2016/09/its-official-india-and-france-sign-8-7-billion-deal-for-36-rafale-fighters/>

³ "India, France to boost defence ties" *The Hindu*, 28 October 2017 <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/india-france-to-boost-defence-ties/article19935775.ece>

which literally means the God of Oceans. This exercise began in 2001 and since then has been carried out on annual basis. The exercise is held either in the Indian Ocean or in the Mediterranean Sea. The next exercise in 2018 will take place in the Indian Ocean. The two ministers held discussions on expanding the scope of this exercise.⁴

According to the French Minister, Ms. Parly, France is also willing to extend support to India in the submarine field as India is now operating with ageing submarines. This is also an indication towards transfer of technology as this was statement was made at the foundation stone laying ceremony of the Dassault Reliance Aerospace Limited (DRAL) manufacturing facility in Nagpur.⁵ The Indian-French collaboration on the maritime front is an indication that the western countries want India to play a major role in controlling the Indian Ocean. India already has strong maritime linkages with Japan, and Australia has also shown interest in developing maritime ties with the South Asian country.⁶ This Indo-Australia linkage would also allow India to maneuver in the South China Sea.

. Pakistan till date has not faced any major maritime incident in the waters it controls. The Pakistani Navy is fully capable to address the current challenges. However, things are now changing at the global chessboard. The Indians are flexing their diplomatic muscles and trying to bring on board as many partners as possible to counter the growing Chinese influence in the Indian Ocean. China maintains the largest navy in Asia and is a close ally of Pakistan. Yet, Pakistan cannot rely on China when it comes to securing its own maritime interests.

Traditionally, Pakistan has maintained an inwards approach when it comes to maritime security. Pakistan should take the lead from the international collaborations of India and build upon its own capabilities. Instead of looking inwards, Pakistan needs to explore its options in the Indian Ocean. It is no secret that Pakistan's geostrategic importance is much more than that of India.

Allowing India to police Indian Ocean with the help of International players would greatly impact Pakistan. To counter this, Pakistan must take solid measures to not only secure its interests but also maintain the balance of power in the region.

⁴ "India, France decide to boost cooperation in Indo-Pacific region" *The Times of India* 27 October 2017 <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/india-france-decide-to-boost-cooperation-in-indo-pacific-region/articleshow/61277234.cms>

⁵ "France ready for 'further cooperation in submarine field' with India" *Economic Times*, 28 October 2017 http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/articleshow/61279926.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst

⁶ "India- Japan Maritime Cooperation: Implications for Pakistan" *Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad*, 26 September 2017, http://issi.org.pk/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/IB_Abbas_dated_26-9-2017.pdf