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INDO–FRENCH DEFENCE AND SECURITY PARTNERSHIP

*Mukesh Shankar Bharti*¹

The article aims to describe the regional security challenges and major threats for India in South Asia. Since 1947, India has been suffering from external security threats such as, a form of proxy warfare and terrorism from its neighbouring countries. To this purpose, the article also examines recurring issues where India has major border issues with China, in the Himalayan terrain to the eastern region of India. This article looks at the defence cooperation between India and France through the prism of India's security threats in the South Asian region. India's soft power policy reflected in a neo-realist approach and expanded its long-standing defence cooperation with France. Therefore, India has been receiving support from the French government whenever the country needs defence equipment and other assistance. The article uses empirical and discourse analysis methods to answer the questions, and to draw a proper conclusion to the study. Finally, as a result of the study, we can see that India's serious security threats in the South Asian region are pushing the country to purchase defence equipment from France. The relationship between India and France is strengthening the bilateral cooperation at a broader level and shaping a strong strategic partnership by uniting South Asia and the Indo-Pacific as well. Key words: defence cooperation, strategic partnership, geopolitics, India, France, South Asia
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1 INTRODUCTION

War has been deliberately imposed on India since 1947, when the British ended their colonial rule over India. India was divided into two parts, and the new country, Pakistan, was born as an Islamic country and became an enemy to India from birth. Pakistan had invaded India on October 22, 1947 from the northern side of the country. China had attacked India unprovoked, in 1962 which resulted in India losing a portion of its land. Gradually, China and Pakistan became allies, united in their interest against India and began to create problems for India. The Pakistan army has been getting all military

¹ Mukesh Shankar Bharti, Ph.D. Assistant Professor, Amity Institute of International Studies, Amity University, Noida, India, email: msbharti.jnu@gmail.com.  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3693-7247>

equipment and assistance from China. This article critically examines the role of China in the unbalancing of the regional peace and security situation in South Asia. India feels that China is a major cause of instability in the South Asia region. India's key attention is directed towards China's military modernization, the increase of the land border, and the extension of maritime activities in the Indian Ocean. The increase of China's military power and expansion of the economic corridor in its neighbouring countries has created a security dilemma for India in this region. India has been importing 70 per cent of its military and defence assistance from Russia since the era of the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR). When Prime Minister Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, the Bharatiya Janata Party-led (BJP) government immediately started a defence partnership with France. The Indian government pioneered the purchase of Rafale fighter jets from France in flyaway condition. Later, in 2015, both the governments signed an intergovernmental agreement to acquire 36 Rafael fighter jets.

After the Chinese invasion of India, Pakistan also started a war with India both in 1965, and 1971 respectively. The regional balances were disturbed by Pakistan at every juncture in South Asia. During the 1971 war, Pakistan ended up losing eastern Pakistan which later became a newly independent country, Bangladesh. Sri Lanka had also been suffering internal problems since the 1990s, the extremist group called the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) wanted to be separated from Sri Lanka. The Indian government decided to send their troops as peacekeepers to maintain law and order. India always believes in non-violence which is the Gandhian philosophy. In 1999, once again the Pakistani army invaded the Jammu and Kashmir region in Kargil, and it came to be known as the Kargil War between India and Pakistan. At the end of this war, the Indian army won the battleground and Pakistan had to suffer the losses. In 2008, some Pakistan sponsored terrorists attacked different places in Mumbai. Thus, India has been suffering severe security threats in the South Asian region from its own neighbours.

Paper tries to find out which kind of security threat perception India has been suffering in South Asia? To what extent does India make security balances in this region, and how the country is responding to its neighbouring countries? The article also tries to answer how the French government can meet Indian aspirations to modernize the armed forces, and provide modern technological weapons for India? Further, the article discusses how India can manage the regional balance and its security issues? The principal issues are that the Indian government does not achieve the success to manage the regional security threats and the perception of the threats is the reality in South Asia. This research uses both primary and secondary data to identify the core ideas and results.

The study extensively discusses the research problems through the analysis of qualitative approach. It implies inductive methods to elaborate the key arguments and research questions. Further, the use of empirical and discourse analysis to investigate the results of this research through the study of primary and secondary resources. The bilateral strategic partnership between the French and India has been strengthening deeper

defence cooperation, which can be understood through qualitative comparative analysis. There are reliable scientific data used in this research collected from various Indian and French government public sector websites as primary literature. Moreover, as a primary resource data is also collected from the EU's websites such as Europa.eu, Library Sciences, Think Tanks, online and offline newspapers' articles, speeches of prominent leaders, and online interviews. The study uses secondary literature from books, published journal articles, and archival materials.

2 INDO-FRANCE POLITICAL AND MILITARY COOPERATION

Lawale and Ahmad (2021) highlights India as a resident player in Indo-Pacific Region (IPR) and geopolitical construct has been increased the importance of this region's countries. France has two overseas islands namely Mayotte and La Réunion in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which strengthen the French stronghold in its Asian connectivity. France wants a deeper strategic partnership with India's growing role in Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. Since 1998, India has multiplied strategic partnerships and celebrated 25 golden years of strategic partnership. Since 2014 the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led government is giving importance to and prioritising bilateral economic and trade partnerships with individual EU countries, for example, such as France, Germany and Denmark. France is the only country in Europe which has developed a trustworthy strategic partner with India in the Asian continent. During the Presidency of the EU, France has been playing an important role in India and the EU strategic partnership (Kavalski, 2016).

Buraga (2022) explains the Indian government's focus on sovereignty, peace and prosperity, human rights, non-violence and democratic ethos to include in its bilateral partnerships with European countries European Union as well. India is the largest 'democracy' in the world, joined hands with EU Member States, i.e., France, Germany and other EU countries, which have been spreading the norms of 'liberal democracy' in the world as well. India and France have been cooperating in the area of political, economic, diplomatic, strategic, defence, maritime security and trade, and cultural ties up and science and technology. Apart from these initiatives, the armies, navies and air forces of the two countries regularly organize military exercises to show the joint power of India and France.

Indo-French relationship is based on mutual respect and equality. The Indian government has tried to have healthy and quality cooperation with the French government. Both governments have been shaping their relationship in a strong way, and has developed a defence dialogue free from bitterness. The French government had to make a foreign policy doctrine for India, which would not build any kind of external pressure on the issues of nuclear proliferation and Kashmir (Racine 2010, p. 183). It is apparently in public discourse about the traditional and non-traditional security issues regarding India's concerns in South Asia. The French defence policy uses the military-

industrial factor as the main driver between the two countries in order to influence the regional security balance in South Asia. India needs modern technology-based military equipment from the French side. The Indian government wants to import the fifth-generation fighter jets and allow French aviation companies to invest in India (Karambelkar 2021, p. 92). India's strategic cooperation had started in the Cold War Era. The French defence also supports the changing of the dynamics of India's excessive dependence on Russia. In the South Asian region, India is the only tested and trusted strategic partner to France. For example, during the war between India and Pakistan in 1971, India had the full support of the French government (Barma and Sinha, 2022).

India's defence needs have been fulfilled by France over a long period of time. The defence cooperation between France and India has emerged comprehensively since 1998, when both the governments had agreed on common security issues. In the last decade, all the three services had started mutual regular exercises. The French government has agreed with the Indian government to provide better training facilities for Indian fighter pilots. The defence and military agencies from France have been providing skill-based training to the Indian fighter jet pilots in France for a long time. The Indian air force uses French fighter jets, these are the Mirage 2000, the Jaguar and the new Rafale entrants. The inclusion of Rafale fighter jets in the Indian air force wrote a new chapter in the relationship between India and France. The Rafale deal had deepened the defence ties between India and France. The Indian Navy gained access to French naval facilities on France's Reunion Island and appeared to gain access to French facilities in Djibouti (Peri, 2019). France continues to support India in order to emerge as strong nation to counter any security threat. The French armed forces have been supporting the Indian armed forces and have launched joint training and exercises in France and the Indo-Pacific region. The Naval exercises are a key feature of cooperation between both sides (Roger, 2007).

Historically, India has been maintaining a deep engagement with France for defence cooperation. Thus, there have been robust defence ties between the two countries for a long period of time (Halder 2022, p. 1). The French government contours their defence cooperation and expedites the many defence agreements. And both countries have agreed to the further expansion of strategic cooperation. The four squadrons of Rafael aircraft have been successfully assimilated into the Indian air force during 2020-22. The Indian government appears to have extend the additional deal on fifth-generation fighter jet cooperation with the French government. The French administration also seeks agreement on India's flagship project "Medium Multi-Role Combat Aircraft" (MMRCA) procurement.

France has changed the dynamics of the Indian strategic partnership to transfer the armaments for the Indian air force and Navy. As India had been dependent on Russian defence equipment, it has now changed the scenario of Russia being the ultimate strategic ally of India. At the moment, India has 36 modern 4.5 generation Rafale aircraft which

had been supplied by the French aviation company Dassault to India. The Rafale jets have an upper hand on the Russian fighter jets Sukhoi 30 MKI, India currently has more than 270 Sukhoi 30 MKI fighter jets. The Indian Navy uses the six Scorpene-class submarines which are made by French companies in India with the transfer of technology (Das 2019, p. 58). In 2018, the French President Emmanuel Macron and the Indian Prime Minister Modi had signed an agreement in the defence sector, on the provision of reciprocal logistic support for the Armed Forces of both sides. The mutually logistic support on reciprocal access to needed facilities for French and Indian armed forces (Prime Minister's Office, 2018).

France initiated a cohesive political framework toward the Indo-Pacific region and supported India in South Asia. The increasing nexus of China in South Asia is a major threat to India. Through the Belt Road Initiative (BRI), China's policy in South Asia is to connect all the surrounding countries of India. China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) is passing through the Pakistan occupied Kashmir. The Indian administration has critically opposed the Chinese project which has been crossing the occupied region. And France wants a better strategic cooperation with India in the Indo-Pacific. This is an opportunity for India to expedite a defence cooperation with France (Meijer 2021, p. 1).

In 1998, many countries had opposed India, when it had successfully tested nuclear weapons in Pokhran. But India had gotten the support of France, who had critically opposed the US sanctions against India. Since then, France has gradually approached India as a European country. India's foreign policy had been based non-aligned since the era of the Cold War. But Pakistan was getting Chinese support to run the nuclear plan behind the curtains. The Chinese government did not want India to be a regional power in South Asia. The emerging ties between China and Pakistan had been creating challenges for India. That was why India had stated an indigenous nuclear testing plan. It became reality in 1998 when the Indian Prime Minister announced that India was a nuclear power, and thus became the 6th nation in the world to become a nuclear power. During this critical time, India got full support from the French government at the international level. Thus, the Indian defence staff moved forward toward France to deepen the collaboration in the naval, space, and military equipments for the Indian army (Howorth, 2016, pp. 392-393). In recent years India's security dilemma has only increased from the recurring standoff happening at the Himalayan frontier border. Since the 1962 war, borderline is not decided, it is called the Line Actual Control (LAC). The latent power, and the increasing number of Chinese soldiers has been causing anxiety on the Indian side. The incident had happened between the Indian and the Chinese forces at Galvan Valley. Many army personnel from both the sides had lost their lives during this standoff in 2020. Third insecurity feeling, created because of border issues is one of the causes, but China's expansion through its maritime politics is also another cause that is creating a major security threat to India. Furthermore, the Chinese policy is continuously

working against India and igniting neighbouring countries like Pakistan, Nepal, and Afghanistan (Joshi and Mukherjee, 2018, p. 4).

China's economic strength had created anxiety among the Indian strategists, decision-makers, and military think tanks. This situation has created a panic that China will use to modernise its forces. The Chinese administration is strengthening its army, navy, and air force according to a hidden military doctrine and is gaining charm over India. There is an increasing gap between India and China in the context of political, economic, and military strength. The Indian side also joined hands with France, the USA, and the European Union as well to strengthen the strategic cooperation. The Indian and French governments mutually accelerated the strategic cooperation, and agreed to expedite their comprehensive, substantive and mutually beneficial security and defence relationship (Ministry of Defence, 2018).

The government invited foreign investors to set up the arms and weapon industry under the Make in India. Thus, the Indian government is focused on the Indianisation of defence-related production. The Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) got an order from the Indian Air Force (IAF) for the production of 83 Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) – Tejas. It is a fully indigenous fighter jet that has been developed by the DRDO. The government aims to achieve self-dependency through the transformation of the indigenous production line in India. The French government is providing technical support to the Indian defence institutes. The Indian defence institutions have deeper agreements with many Russian companies to make several missile projects and fighter jets under the technology transferred in India (Rossiter and Cannon, 2019, p. 353). On May 4, 2022, French President Emmanuel Macron hosted the Prime Minister of India, Shri Narendra Modi during his official tour to France. Both leaders agreed to strengthen the defence partnership and face new global challenges together after the post-COVID-19 in the Indo-Pacific and South Asia as well, respectively (Ministry of External Affairs, 2022).

3 SOUTH ASIA AS A REGION OF SECURITY ISSUES

South Asia is a strategically important part of Asia. The Bay of Bengal and the Indian Ocean surround the South Asia region and are relevant for maritime politics and are gaining the key attention for blue economics. India has been living under severe security threats for decades. The nature of threats is conventional and nuclear as well in this region. Nowadays India has suffered from sub-conventional threats such as the form of insurgency and terrorism. Apart from this, there are also land frontiers with China and Pakistan that create a security threat to India. The thousands of kilometres of the land border were disputed with both Pakistan and China. The unmarked boundary with China is identified as the Line of Actual Control (LAC) and the de facto boundary with Pakistan is called the Line of Control (LoC). Furthermore, over the last two decades, China-Pakistan strategic cooperation has been increasing the security challenge to New Delhi.

The two countries have agreed on several areas such as the port of Gwadar, where China has been establishing strategic shipping routes in the Indian Ocean, and expanding to the Arabian Sea. The Chinese agency is developing the port of Gwadar for use in a broader concept, where the Chinese navy can use the port against India to launch operational planning and cover military doctrine (Pant and Bommakanti 2019, p. 837).

The CPEC projects of China are creating a skeptical situation for India in South Asia. It has changed the dynamics of geopolitics in this region. India has observed the CPEC project which has passed from the occupied region of the Gilgit-Baltistan region. India has criticised this kind of act which has been envisaged by the China and Pakistan regional cooperation. The Indian government claimed that Gilgit-Baltistan is a disputed area of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir. India refused to take part in this project when Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited China in June 2015. The Indian think tanks and policymakers are drawing alternative projects to restrict the Chinese initiatives in South Asia. India has been starting a talk with the Oceanic countries in recent years. The Indian Prime Minister had travelled to Mauritius, Seychelles, and other island countries to promote geoeconomic cooperation. Thus, India has triggered alternative geopolitics and wider connections with its neighbouring countries. And India understands that China's intention is different from the reality of the economic development of Pakistan. It is creating security issues in the region rather than focusing on the economic development of Pakistan (Ali 2020, p. 108).

Pakistan has been easily accessing Chinese support to promote the nuclear and missile programme. China supports Pakistan to build a high level of military equipment which would be used against India, and terrorists can access these military weapons. The defence cooperation between China and Pakistan is troubling the Indian policymakers to initiate the major security cooperation in the world. That is why India has decided to purchase military weapons from France and USA. Since 1990, India has been suffering cross-border terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Thousands of people died from counter-terrorism and insurgency. India is joining the hand with France and USA in the areas of defence cooperation to balance the regional security in South Asia. In recent years, China and Pakistan are producing military equipment as a part of joint ventures in Pakistan. China continuously supports Pakistan in building fighter aircrafts and missiles (Garver 2002, p. 118).

According to Hans Morgenthau, a state always tries to gain much power and wants to become superior in the area of power. The global nations are thus eager to gain maximum strength and balance of power, and seem to achieve maximum power among nations (Morgenthau, 1960, p. 240). In the case of South Asia, India is geographically bigger than the other neighbouring countries and wants to cooperate. But Pakistan always wants to restrict the Indian approaches in this region. Furthermore, Pakistan always indulged to help the Chinese activities in this region. The South Asian Association for Regional Development (SAARC) is not functioning in a proper way since Pulwama was

attacked in Jammu and Kashmir. After Pulwama was attacked, the Indian Air Forces launched an operation inside Pakistan and destroyed the terror camps in 2019. The situation deteriorated when Pakistan Airforce entered the Indian territory.

The theory of power transition assesses international politics has been divided into hierarchical systems. The various countries themselves understand the dominant nation, the great power state, the superpower state, and the small powers. There is a situation that occurred in global politics, where between two states the possibility of war seems to be happening. The prospects of crisis can increase during the power balance among the nations and this political crisis can be converted into a full-fledged war between the two states. The challenging country can claim, and is eager to assume that its decision is the correct one. And also, it shows that their role at the global level is legitimate, and responds to long-standing grievances. Thus, the South Asian countries have been associated with India to cooperate in several development areas but Pakistan interrupts every initiative of regional developments. The Pakistani authorities always relied on China's indication, and understood the Chinese conspiracy theory against India. That is why SAARC is becoming a failed regional organisation in the South Asian region. The Chinese policy worked to restrict the Indian influences in South Asia, and Pakistan always seconded every movement of China which are against India. This implies that the Chinese policy is based on its dominance in South Asia and makes a strong power position in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) as well. Through the CPEC and Gwadar port, the Chinese initiative is creating a challenge for India on the western side of the Arabian sea (Tammen, 2008, p. 326).

There is a security dilemma in South Asia and also in the Indo-Pacific region. According to Organski (1968), the collaboration of many countries creates a balance of power situation and struggles for the establishment of peace in the world. There is a need to maintain equilibrium among the nations through the sharing of power, but many countries unanimously declared it as the supreme leader. The rivalry between China and US in the Indo-Pacific and the South China Sea is creating severe problems. American policy is close to India to support its maritime policy (Hornat 2016, p. 393). The Chinese policy is incorporating the approach of the string of pearls which is a concerning strategy for India. The construction of a port in the Indian Ocean that China can use in the future against India for the deployment of the People's Liberation Army and Navy. The Sri Lankan port of Hambantota has also been taken over by China on a lease basis. Thus, the Chinese policy is based on restricting India in the South Asian region through the Belt Road Initiatives and island chains. In the future, China can accommodate the People's Liberation Army (PLA) at these ports (Lou 2012, p. 631).

Although the Sri Lankan government had invited India to build the Hambantota port, the Indian government refused Sri Lanka's proposal to rebuild the port. In later days, China intervened in this Sri Lankan project, now the port of Hambantota is being fully operated by China. Now the Indian authority is anxious about the Chinese intervention in

Sri Lanka. Through this port, China can operate various future projects and restrict the Indian possibilities (Mohan 2010, p. 9). Despite the Chinese project in Pakistan, China wants better collaboration with India. Because India is the biggest market to export, which is why China has tried to have a better economic engagement with India. After the Doklam standoff, India had banned the many Chinese Apps and has applied restrictions on many initiatives. In the maritime business, India had started to cooperate with the US in the Indian Ocean. India is scared of the Chinese intervention in South Asia and always got support from Pakistan. This is the reason behind India nurturing its geoeconomic ties with France, Australia, Japan and the US in maritime politics (Jacob 2018, p. 117).

India is claiming at the international forum for the situation of terrorism which is a threat to humanity worldwide. The Indian policy discusses that China has to assure the Indian policymaker that Pakistan would restrict all terrorist activities against India. In contrast, China has used the veto power to declare some terrorists from Pakistan. This has created a problematic situation for India to make better geoeconomic cooperation with China in South Asia and Indo-Pacific as well. India wants assurance from China to put pressure on Pakistan to cooperate with India and solve the border problem. Non-state actors (NSAs) are facilitated by state-sponsored support in Pakistan, which caused the India-Pakistan relationship to deteriorate since the 1990s. The terrorist organisation is getting support from the Pakistan military against India in Jammu and Kashmir. And Pakistan is getting an international shield from China in United Nations (UN). There are several facts that show Masood Azhar's link with the terrorist organisations. Despite this fact, China refuses to acknowledge the ties between Al-Qaeda and Masood Azhar. This is a big threat to India at an International level. India has been providing all facts to the international communities, while China has been continuously refusing the Indian dossier against the terrorist organisations and some renowned terrorists (Verma, 2020, p. 3).

In essence, the Chinese policy is approaching the physical presence across South Asia and the Indian Ocean. China's geo-economics engagements in the IOR depends on the terms of defensive security rather than a direct threat to India. The presence of the US military in the IOR is decreasing the expansion of China's possibilities. The construction and development of the Gwadar port will be helpful for China in the future course to use against India. That is the main security challenge faced by the Indian authorities. The geo-positioning balance in the South Asian region, Pakistan helping the Chinese engagement in building the port to emerge as regional strong holder in this region (Bharti, 2022). The nexus of Pakistan and China is weakening the Indian position in South Asia to gain the power balance among the neighbouring states. The Chinese government has refused that our policy is aimed at encircling India in South Asian politics. There are suspicions in India that China extended a supply line, thousands of kilometres long to the southern naval base on Hainan Island. In contrast, it is understood that China's People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) does not act as the rival of the Indian navy in the IOR. The purpose

of building the port in the Ocean is to extend the business route, through which China hopes to attempt to establish the commercial activities in the IOR (Garlick 2018, p. 523).

The Indian government is responding to China-Pakistan through the development of the Chahbahar port in Iran. Which is only seventy kilometres away from the Gwadar port of Pakistan. Both governments agreed to the development of the Chahbahar port to access the business route toward Central Asia. Thus, India can reach Afghanistan and other central Asian countries which will help the Indian investment in central Asia. And India and Iran together is working on the construction of a highway project to link the Chahbahar port. India is using the encirclement theory to expedite regional development. It is for the betterment of the central Asian countries and India as well. India is eyeing central Asia for economic cooperation. (Daniels 2013, p. 96). The Indian authorities are working to mitigate security threats on India from China and Pakistan in the South Asia region. Because India has security threats from these countries in both conventional and non-conventional forms.

South Asia is a geoeconomically an important region in Asia. China's increasing presence and domination in this region is creating a challenge for India in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region. China's growing power in South Asian countries lays the groundwork for India's balancing strategy towards Beijing (Pant, 2016). India is driving its own approach in South Asia, the Pacific and the Indian Ocean region with the assistance of France. Simultaneously China has a vision for these regions as well, and China wants to dominate the other power groups through the Belt and Road Initiatives (BRI), the Maritime Silk Road (MSRI), and the Digital Silk Road projects. The Chinese concept of "Strings of Pearls" is to encircle India in the South Asia region. The actual challenge to India is how to tackle these issues (Barua, 2020).

4 DISCUSSION

Geopolitically, the Chinese seem to increase belligerence in South Asia and the Pacific region. China has been expanding cooperation with the littoral states of the Indian Ocean region and as well in South Asian countries. India is located in the heart of the Indian Ocean region. India is sharing a long land border with China, which is around 3490 km. This presents India with many challenges and opportunities in this region, that have been pivotal to the geopolitical importance in the region (Kamal and Sahni, 2022).

In the South Asian region, India is the biggest country in the sense of geography and population as well. But the country has been facing severe security threats from Pakistan and China. India's security and defence policy are fully based on maintaining the regional security threats in South Asia. History has forced India to adopt the modernisation of the Indian defence system. Both China and Pakistan have indulged the creation of problems for India both internally and externally. This is the reason behind India's strong defence cooperation with France. China is providing all kinds of military support to Pakistan, and before 9/11, the US had also supported Pakistan in the defence

sector (Budania 2003, p. 88). The Indian defence policy had adopted the modernisation of its services since 1990. There are several reasons behind why India has been forced to adopt the military doctrine, and import military equipment from the French government. The following are some of the key factors: (1) The aggression from China and Pakistan (2) The incongruity between India and her neighbouring states (3) The testing of nuclear weapons and the acquisition of fatal military arms by Pakistan (4) The weapons export and sales policy of China and the US. Thus, the Indian defence policy had decided to purchase modern fifth-generation fighter jets from France, and both countries had agreed to develop the submarine in India. The issue of Kashmir, the arms race, and the nuclear doctrine of China and Pakistan was emphasised by India. During the 1990s, the US and China played a vital role in the South Asian region where Pakistan had been easily getting the modern technological military weapons. India was receiving support from the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) and France. India had faced great security challenges from Pakistan because the United States and China are very supportive of Pakistan. Today, India seems to be aware of the military cooperation between China and Pakistan.

India has the strength to tackle the Pakistani stance against the strategic balance. India has also developed the nuclear deterrent as a presumption to counter the Chinese approach in South Asia. India's nuclear capability creates anxiety for the neighbouring countries. Right now, India has the ability to strike around five thousand kilometres through the Agni-5 missile. Further, India is developing a broad range attack nuclear missile. And on the other hand, the Chinese policy is supporting Pakistan's stance on the issue of Kashmir at the international forum. China's Kashmir policy has been changed many times since 1975. Now China has adopted a view that the Kashmir issue is a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan. After the Doklam confrontation between India and China in 2020, India believes that China is creating long-term security challenges for India in the South Asian region. According to Barry Buzan, India's military and defence transformation is related to its status as a great power and does not offset its rivalry with China. India can achieve its goal with the cooperation of neighbouring countries as well (Buzan, 2002).

Terrorism is a severe threat to human life and it is an anti-social element that has been destroying people's lives across the globe. The international community is now in favour of restricting the terrorist act, after the emergence of international consensus on terrorism at the international level. This has brought positive news for India in the South Asian region where it has been suffering from terrorism. Since the issue of Kashmir, India had been receiving several terrorist activities inside the country. There have been many cities that had been bombarded by terrorism, even the Indian Parliament in December 2001. In 1999, an Indian Airline passenger aircraft had been hijacked from Kathmandu by the Taliban terrorist group. After 9/11, the world order tremendously changed, and the international organisation unitedly opposed the terrorist activities. Moreover, many

western countries made laws on the terrorist act and seized the economic roots of these terrorist organisations. And India got international support against Pakistan. Because Pakistan is indulging the support the non-state actors against India and supporting the counter-terrorism in Kashmir (Bharti and Singh, 2023).

The Indian government has established a higher defence body called Defence Staff of the Indian Armed Forces in 2020. This institution is directly associated with deciding the procurement of military equipment. Because India has lots of security issues which has emerged in the recent years from China and Pakistan. These security threats are both military and non-military. India has procured lots of military weapons from France in the recent years but India's strategic balance in South Asia is unfavourable. In Afghanistan, last year the Taliban has come back to the country and has replaced the government but the Indian stance on this was not clear (Bharti, 2022). The relationship between India and Nepal is not being maintained in a good manner since 2016. Despite this reality, the Modi government has no interest in the SAARC meeting that should be held for regional cooperation. Through the regional organisational policy, India can pressurise Pakistan to stop counter-terrorism against India. India's policy is running under the idea of bilateral cooperation and talk. India wants to solve the border issues with China and Pakistan through talk and bilateral agreements. Furthermore, Indian diplomacy is always relying on the diplomatic ways and accelerating it to build a peace process and eradicate border and other issues (Bharti, 2020).

The Indian National Security Advisor Ajit Doval-Bonne's meeting resulted in a significant security partnership with France. This meeting resulted, in both countries' enhanced mutual cooperation on security and defence in the areas of expanding military drills, bolstering mutual capabilities, pursuing initiatives in maritime, information sharing, cyber domains, and space cooperation. India and France have a common agenda on the changing dynamics of global security, and both the countries are aware of the enormous challenges in the Indo-pacific, Africa, Southeast Asia, Afghanistan and West Asia. Similarly, threats seem to have cyber and space zone, threats in maritime, and challenges of terrorism. Most importantly, the French President Emmanuel Macron has been supporting the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visions of self-dependent (Atmanirbhar Bharat) and defence modernisation. The French government has expressed its commitment to India, in order to incorporate the joint technology development in India. Thus, the Indian policy is to modernise the defence industrialisation for self-dependent (Pradhan, 2021).

Beijing is now expanding its extensive presence across the Pacific and the Indian Ocean region. It is a common geostrategic and maritime challenge for Australia, Japan, India, and the US. Thus, India is preparing to face these challenges in the Pacific and South Asia. New Delhi has been strengthening the strategic partnership with Paris and basically focusing on the defence sector to face the challenge of the Chinese aggression in this area. India has been accepting the challenge from China, and supporting the

European Union strategy in the Indo-Pacific, and boosting securities areas with western partners (Barua, 2020). India has been shaping the multipurpose strategic partnership with France including the key trade routes in the land and water. There are links between East Asian economies and the natural resources of Africa and West Asia. New security challenges have been emerging, and India's importance is growing, and it is crucial to note that China has been increasing its assertiveness in this region (Pardo and Leveringhaus, 2022). India has the two largest neighbours China and Pakistan, and has been facing tough relationships with both of them for a long time. Since its independence, India has had a top priority toward China and Pakistan for a rational relationship. India wants extensive cooperation in either development and economic growth, or in enlarging its towards vis-a-vis Pakistan and China (Kamal and Sahni, 2022).

The trusted and long-standing strategic partnership between France and India is shaping geopolitical trends in South Asia and the Indi-Pacific region. There is a close relationship with France that makes it a more reliable partner for India. France has been supporting India in the area of defence. Thus, India aspires to build a military presence to cooperate at a global level through its closer partnership in the Indo-Pacific, which is the key geographical region for trade and business (Rajagopalan, 2022). Beyond diplomatic relations, France wants to stop the Chinese aggression in the Indo-Pacific, and India has encountered China's aggression in the Galwan Valley border clash and the Doklam standoff. India is opposing the Chinese domination and military aggression in its northern Himalayan border region.

India and China have had the world's largest disputed border since when the Chinese Armies' aggression in India in 1962. The Indian and Chinese border is called the Line of Actual Control (LAC) because the border is yet to be decided between both countries. The People's Liberation Army (PLA) and the Indian Army has clashed many times in this disputed border area. China has been constructing roads, and new airports in frontier areas and vice versa India is initiated to build roads and other connectivity in border areas. These are the main causes of the tense border between both countries. China is dominating India because of its military powers, in the contrast, India is modernising Armies and purchasing modern military equipment from France. The French support for India is making a power balance in South Asia and India is gaining defence power against the aggressor country (BBC, 2021).

5 CONCLUSION

The article has come to a conclusion: the relationship between India and France is getting stronger year by year. The successful inclusion of 36 Rafale fighter jets in the Indian Air Force has created a history for India. India's security and defence cooperation has been achieving the new landmark. Thus, the Rafale aircraft is one that strengthens the Indian Air Force, as it is a 4.5 generation modern fighter aircraft. Naval support to India from French defence agencies is also steadily increasing. India is in a strong position to

counter the opponent in the air. After the inclusion of the Rafale fighter jets, China and Pakistan has begun to fear the Indian Air Force. In the South Asian region, India now has a dominant role in achieving regional security balance. India is also receiving a huge amount of support in the Indo-Pacific region to restrict Chinese aggression. France is transferring submarine technology to India and French companies are moving to India and building a modern Scorpene-class submarine for the Indian Navy. Now India hopes to purchase more Rafael aircraft from the French Company Dassault.

Despite the Chinese aggression and encircling India, this article has seen that India is in a commanding position in South Asia. The Indian government is not scared of the Chinese and Pakistani military nexus. The power of the Indian Army is shown during the Doklam standoff where the Chinese aggression was restricted by the Indian armed forces. The Indian Air Force launched an airstrike inside Pakistan at Balakot with Mirage 2000 fighter jets, which are also French fighter aircrafts. Pakistan has always threatened India with a nuclear attack inside the country, whenever India had tried to attack or launch military operations in Pakistan. After the air attack on Balakot, Pakistan by the Indian Air Force, Pakistan took no action against India. Whereas China still supports Pakistan in this incident. The article concludes that despite the China and Pakistan nexus which creates an imbalance in the regional security in South Asia, The Indian government and associated agencies are responding in a better manner against all kinds of regional security threats to India. Finally, the Indian Army is capable of responding to any type of military threat to India. The article further suggested that there is a scope of empirical work on the regional security threats and balance in South Asia and that the western power is relevant to restrict the expansionism politics of China in the South Asian region.

Furthermore, this article assesses the French and Indian governments jointly working in the maritime domain to get a deeper involvement in security and the economy. India has been supporting the EU presence in the Indo-Pacific region in several key areas of cooperation and France herself supports the EU's extensive cooperation between pacific countries. By and large, India is very keen to establish stronger cooperations with France apart from the security issues. The recent visit of the Indian Prime Minister to Paris has paved the way for the "Parks Partnership" in the Indo-Pacific region. Both countries are eager to develop cooperation in the area of the blue economy. This could help in the creation of jobs and new settlements of industries to explore the vast maritime resources.

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