

Reshaping Indo-Pacific

The expansive prospect for India's strategic partnership with France unveiled in Delhi on Saturday by Prime Minister [Narendra Modi](#) and the visiting President, Emmanuel Macron, underlines the growing importance of middle power coalitions that transcend the traditional alliance frameworks and new geopolitical fault lines. Amidst America's uncertain external orientation and China's effort to reshape the global order, second-tier powers like India and France seek a greater say in world affairs through more intensive collaboration. In that process, they are breaking down the old stereotypes of East versus West and North versus South. In taking the lead on mitigating climate change, through the International Solar Alliance, India and France are demonstrating their potential for shared global leadership. France, a long standing military ally of the United States, is also looking beyond NATO to forge security partnerships with Asian democracies like India. Delhi, in turn, appreciates that its quest for a larger role in the world can't be founded in exclusive security partnerships with either Russia or America. Nor does it want to cede Asia and the world to the rigidity of a new bipolar framework between the US and China. By taking more responsibilities in partnership with each other, Delhi and Paris improve their relative national positions in a changing world.

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the new arena for cooperation between Delhi and Paris. Although India's strategic partnership with France is the oldest and dates back to the late 1990s, it lacked a regional anchor. The focus was mainly on expanding bilateral defence and high technological cooperation. With their long standing national advantages in the Indo-Pacific threatened by the global power shift, they have chosen to band together. Their shared maritime vision seeks to uphold the law of the sea in the Indian Ocean, prevent the kind of military unilateralism that has come to grip the Western Pacific, secure the sea lines of communication, respond to humanitarian disasters and promote sustainable blue economy. To pursue these objectives, Delhi and Paris have agreed on greater political coordination in the region, mutual logistical support and seamless interoperability between their security forces. This cooperation will not be exclusive but will include engagement with other partners — big and small — in the littoral.

Beyond their effort to influence the high politics of the Indo-Pacific, Delhi and Paris have agreed to address a huge gap in the bilateral relationship — the limited contact among the peoples of the two countries. Macron has promised to make France a major destination for Indian students, engineers, scientists and artists. At a time when borders are closing elsewhere in the world, this is a huge opportunity for the new generation of globalising Indians. Macron's unbridled enthusiasm for India connects with his effort to rejuvenate France and revitalise Europe. It is upto Delhi to make the best of this moment.

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