

**France And The Francophone Islands:
Implications for Indian Interests**

Arvind Kumar Yadav*

*[*Arvind Kumar Yadav has completed his Ph.D. from the Centre for West Asian and African Studies, School of International Studies, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India.]*

The Indian Ocean, which occupies about 20 per cent of the world's ocean area is over 10,000 kilometers long (north to south) and about 74 million sq. km in area. The third largest of the five oceans, it washes the shores of as many as forty countries inhabited by more than a thousand million people. Its geographical vastness is such that it extends from South Africa and from South East Asia to far off Australia.[1] The Western Indian Ocean may thus be defined as that part of the Indian Ocean that lies between the Cape of Good Hope in South Africa and Kanyakumari in Southern India.[2] There are five francophone African islands in the Western Indian Ocean region. These are Madagascar, Comoros, Reunion, Seychelles and Mauritius. The geographical location of these islands has played an important role in shaping their destiny. Away from the African land mass and placed along the trade routes of the ocean made them strategically important in the eyes of the outside powers. The islands of the Western Indian Ocean occupy a specific position in the Indian Ocean politics. Hence, they came to be almost occupied compulsively by the colonial powers.

France and the Western Indian Ocean: The Historical and Cultural connections

France has historical and cultural links with the islands states. The South-Western part of the Indian Ocean where these islands are located had attracted the attention of traders and pirates long before the colonial era of world history began. Polynesian, Indians and Arabs explored the trade possibilities the islands offered and their location as understood in those days of rudimentary weapons and sailing vessels. Their strategic significance however was of little interest to them.[3] When they came south of the equator it was along the coast of Africa into the Mozambique Channel, and seldom into the cyclone-prone seas to the east of Madagascar that were full of reefs and sand banks. Moreover, the uninhabited islands in those perilous waters had little or no attraction for the merchants.

The first known rulers of the Indian Ocean islands were the Arabs.[4] They were famous traders and mariners. They wanted to spread Islam but subordinated this aim to their trading interests. Not being colonists, they took no interest in physical occupation of the islands even where they had trading centres, as in Madagascar and

Comoros. Not surprisingly, a few of them did settle down and become part of the population.

Subsequently, some European sailors arrived in the 16th century, searching for a sea-route to tap the fabulous riches of the East; it was about two hundred years before Mauritius, the Seychelles, and the Reunion were permanently settled during the long-drawn out war between Britain and France for establishing an empire in India and hegemony over the Indian Ocean. Being a product of European maritime culture they were not colonies like Australia or New Zealand, whose indigenous inhabitants found themselves being 'replaced' by settlers forming replicas of Europe overseas. Having no pre-colonial history because they were uninhabited, these Indian Ocean islands experienced an original form of colonisation. They were 'creolised'. By way of contrast, Madagascar and the Comoros had their own indigenous culture before the imposition of European rule.[5]

In 1616 AD, a French expedition entered the Indian Ocean. Its destination was Java. But since it was a Dutch stronghold, the French had to retreat. In 1638, another French expedition was sent to occupy Mascarene but it too had to retreat because the French found the Dutch in its possession. So they had to be content with the occupation of an island which they called the Island of Bourbon (Reunion). This island, though large and fertile, lacked suitable anchorage facilities. The French also made a serious attempt to establish settlements in the area. Reunion was the original centre of French presence almost from first arrival of Europeans in the Indian Ocean. There is no evidence of any settlement having taken place in Reunion before Richelieu took possession of it in 1642. With the exception of two brief British occupations Reunion has been continuously with French since then. From Reunion the French moved into Mauritius in 1715 after the Dutch, who had occupied it on and off since 1638, had abandoned the island five years earlier, possibly leaving behind a few runaway slaves in the forests.[6] From Mauritius, France established herself in the uninhabited Seychelles. Historically, this island was uninhabited till the French took possession of it in 1736 and renamed it as Seychelles in honour of Vicomte Morean de Seychelles, the then Controller General of Finance in France. Though the Portuguese and the Dutch visited this place during 16th and 17th centuries, there is no evidence of human settlement on the island till the French colonised it in 1768. However, this island came under the British after the Napoleonic War (1809-14).[7]

From 1896 to 1960 Madagascar was a French colony. During the colonial era, the French had developed its own culture in Madagascar. The French assured themselves a significant presence on the great island by an assiduous pursuit of the famous assimilationist policy.[8] Like Madagascar, Comoros received several waves of migration from the African coast, and a number of chieftains from Indonesia bearing Bantu titles and established control over Grand Comore and Anjouan until fifteenth century. The settlers arriving from east of Africa and Madagascar went mainly to Mayotte and Moheli. The importance of Comoros as a colony was reduced when it

became part of Madagascar and it was treated as a minor province of the Grand Ile (Madagascar). Through French, the whole island came under one single administration, the effects of which were by no means entirely beneficial. The main aim of the colonial companies or societies was to grab land and consolidate their hold over the territory.

Later, the French colonisers succeeded in mastering the natural environment, and made permanent settlements by importing labour from various parts of Africa and Madagascar. Uprooted as individuals and not as social groups, transported and regimented to work on mid-oceanic islands, these slaves rapidly lost their cultures of origin. Their process of creolisation was modified and differentiated by the change from French to British colonial rule (in all islands, except Reunion) during the Napoleonic wars, by the abolition of slavery, and by the massive immigration of Indians.

The original purpose of occupying the uninhabited islands was the colonial trade between Asia and Europe and the control of the trade through the dominance of the Indian Ocean. Reunion and particularly Mauritius acquired great strategic significance for France during the long Franco-British duel of the eighteenth century when the fortunes of war turned against the French East Indian Company in the Sub-continent. The culmination of French downfall occurred with the British conquest of the islands in 1809–10. Reunion returned to France at the end of the Napoleonic wars but Mauritius, which then included the Seychelles, became a British Crown Colony.[9] The Treaty of Paris in 1814 virtually eliminated all European rivals of the British who were left in control of the Indian Ocean. From then Indian Ocean became a 'British Lake' with the land masses around its shores more or less in British control. For almost 200 years the British exercised predominant military power in the Indian Ocean by establishing base at key choke points and long critical sea-lanes.[10] On the other hand, France was never absent from the Western Indian Ocean region, because of their past connections with the islands as the first European settlers. From Reunion, France maintained contacts with the other islands. During periods of stress a kind of nationalism developed which spread to all classes of creoles, strengthening their allegiance to French culture.

Thus, all the five islands of the Western Indian Ocean region have a long history of colonial subjugation which lasted till the middle of the 20th century. They have passed through the same successive phase of history under similar European influences. These historical influences have widely varying consequences for all the islands and the archipelago. They have all survived many years of colonial rule and awakened only during the post-war world which has largely discredited colonialism. When the winds of nationalism were blowing across the Asian and African continent, four islands such as Mauritius Seychelles, Madagascar and Comoros became independent. It was during the colonial phase that the present contours of their economy and politics were shaped. All of them had been obliged to move from a self-sufficient economy to an

economy based on exportable crops. Plantations were owned by the Europeans, worked first by the slaves and later by workers recruited from abroad. With the iniquitous taxation system and privileges granted to foreign companies and traders the indigenous agriculture population suffered. The farmers were impoverished. They were forced to produce for the market industries based on agriculture produce. These, together with mining, gave rise to a class of indentured labour. Thus we find big plantations and an export crop oriented economy in these islands.

French Overseas Territories in the Western Indian Ocean region

The maritime powers of Portugal, Holland and Britain who had established large colonies in the East completely withdrew from the Indian Ocean. But France continued to maintain her commercial, cultural and military infrastructure in the South West and North West enabling her to lay claim on Indian Ocean.

In the South West, the French image is centered in the Reunion Islands which have been developed into a significant base for the Frenchification of this part of the Indian Ocean.[11] It lies roughly in the centre of the Western region of the Indian Ocean 240 km to the South- West of Mauritius, 960 km east of Malagasy, 2560 km from Diego Garcia, 4640 km from Aden and 2880 km from India.[12] The island is roughly oval in shape, being about 65 km long and upto 50 km wide; total area is 2,507 sq. km (968 sq miles) and population 7,53,600. [13] Its population is over 90 per cent Roman Catholic and has some Muslims of Persian origin and Arab decent.

In the post war phase, four out of five islands got independence. In the case of Reunion, it became an Overseas Department with the status of a region in 1974. This obviously raises questions: Why was this so? Were there any compulsions which compelled the colonial ruler to take such decisions or was it merely a deliberate attempt on the part of the French to keep themselves in this region in order to play a greater role in regional politics or why did they give the status of Territorial d'Outer-Mer (TOM) to the Comoros while they gave departmental D'Outre-Mer to Reunion. According to H. Mohanty, there are many reasons behind the declaration of a departmentisation policy in Reunion. First, the very background of each of the islands (Comoros and Reunion) such as their politics, society, economy etc. was responsible for their difference in status. The creolization of society, the development of plantation economy and the absence of any indigenous political organisation until the announcement of this policy made Reunion more suitable for this status. Secondly, the French felt greatly isolated after the Napoleonic war, because of their loss of Mauritius and Seychelles to Britain. Though they colonised Madagascar and the Comoros at a later stage, the post second world war situation further increased their isolation. The operation of the decolonization process in Madagascar and Comoros led them to realise that they would have to grant independence to these islands one day. Thirdly, as one of the four old colonies, Reunion has been French since its foundation.[14]

In the post colonial world, departmentalisation of Reunion by France has not gone unchallenged. Various OAU (Organisation of African Union) resolutions have demanded self-determination and independence for Reunion as part of Africa, but France can assume that in the medium term at least, the majority of islanders will regard belonging to it as more of an advantage than a disadvantage.[15]

After departmentalisation of Reunion, France developed a network of modern highways, supply of electricity and water, an airport, public buildings, schools and universities, hospitals etc. Unable to create employment in the island, it provides social security and unemployment benefits. It sent males into the Army for national service. It also provided civil service for some. In order to deal with chronic unemployment it encouraged emigration to France. The people of Reunion voted and were represented in Parliament and other institutions of the state on the same footing as the rest of the people of France. They sent three deputies to the National Assembly in Paris as well as two senators. The political parties in the island were branches of metropolitan parties or were closely allied with them. [16]

Economic condition of Reunion under French sovereignty is better than any other sub-Saharan African neighbours. Reunion's gross national income in 1992 was estimated at 29,200 million French francs, equivalent to about 44,300 Francs per head. In 1990-97, according to World Bank estimates, Reunion's population increased at an average annual rate of 1.7 percent. The population density remained very high, averaging 300.7 inhabitants per sq. km at 1 January 2003. In 1997, Reunion's Gross Domestic Production (GDP) totaled \$ 7,228 million, equivalent to 10, 529 per head. In 2001, according to the UN, Reunion's GDP was US \$ 6,744 million; equivalent to \$9,188 per head. In 1990-2001 the GDP increased in real terms at an average rate of 2.9% per year and in 2001, it was 2.4 per cent.[17]

On the other hand, the position of the island of Mayotte is more complicated. Mayotte was formerly part of the Comoros group of islands and was to be granted independence along with the rest, but this was opposed by it. In 1976, in a referendum conducted by Paris, the population of about 40,000 voted in favour of retaining links with France as a *collectivite special*, an ad-hoc status created by Paris. Mayotte, which was Christian dominated, chose to retain its separate identity and, therefore, it seceded, obviously with French support due to the prospect of Mayotte for a replacement for Diego Suarez and Ivata bases which the French had to give up in Madagascar. [18]

Apart from Reunion and Mayotte, there are four small coral islands and an atoll which is situated in the Western Indian Ocean region. They have no permanent population. Three of the islands, Glorieuses, Juan de Nova and Europa, as well as the Bassas da India Atoll lie in the Mozambique channel west of Madagascar, while the fourth island Tromelin, is about 220 miles east of Madagascar. These islands are still under French occupation. The islands under French sovereignty have been classified as nature reserve. They supported meteorological stations. The station on Tromelin

island in particular provides warning of cyclones threatening Madagascar Reunion or Mauritius. Each of the islands has an airstrip of more than 1,000 meters. Madagascar and Mauritius dispute France's sovereignty over some of the islands.[19]

Further down in the far south – west of the Indian Ocean, in the Sub -Antarctic and the Antarctic region, there is another cluster of islands, grouped together in French Southern and Antarctic Territories (TAAF), which includes Crozet, Saint Paul, island Kerguelen Islands and Amsterdam islands. These islands are under French sovereignty.[20]

Since January 3, 2005 these islands have been administered on behalf of the French state by the senior administrator of the French Southern and Antarctic Territories (*TAAF – les Terres Australes et Antartiques Francaises*), based in Reunion. The Iles Eparses had previously been under the administration of the prefect of Reunion since the independence of Madagascar. France maintains a military garrison on each of the island, in Mozambique channel, which are claimed by Madagascar. The Glorieuses islands are also claimed by the Comoros Republic, while Mauritius claims Tromlin island.

On the basis of above islands in the Western Indian Ocean region, France has consistently emphasised its independent role as an Indian Ocean power, and exercised it especially in its Southern Waters. On the east African coast its attitude is shaped by its own perception of an independent Great Power emphasising its economic and security concern, and willing to adapt to Third World demands. French islands territories are important to it and it maintains a sizeable capability on them.[21]

French Interests in the Western Indian Ocean Region

Though France is a European country, It has developed an overseas department of Reunion and territories in the western Indian Ocean region. France is territorially present in two of the four zones of Indian Ocean (The Persian Gulf, the Eastern African coast and adjoining islands, the Indo -Australian arc and the Antarctic and adjoining islands. Thus France has vital economic and political interests in the whole region.

Economically speaking, the sovereignty over these islands has, however added a large area of Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) to France in the Indian Ocean region. The French 200-mile EEZ in the Indian Ocean (2.5 million km²) is seven times larger than the EEZ of metropolitan France, and also larger than Indian EEZ. More significantly, the Iles Eparses and the Islands of Reunion and Mayotte give France an EEZ of more than one million square kilometers in the Western Indian Ocean.[22] Besides being of military significance, the islands have assumed economic importance following the discovery of manganese nodules in the area in 1979. This zone is situated at the crossroad of three major maritime trading routes such as Persian Gulf/ Atlantic Ocean, Africa/ South East Asia, Africa/Australia. Those possessions are elements of France's

assertion of its world rank and provides justification for its permanent military presence in the Western Indian Ocean region.

Therefore, France has defence needs, sovereignty obligations and economic stakes in the contiguous exclusive economic zone. In addition, the oil traffic, which follows two major routes flowing south bound from the Gulf, is of vital importance for the country's economy. Two thirds of the whole Brent traffic pass in transit through the Indian Ocean and Red Sea. Half of the world's containers and one third of the bulk carrier traffic flows through the Indian Ocean.

As a result of overseas department Reunion, France has become member of the Indian Ocean Commission (IOC), which is an organisation for regional cooperation including France, Mauritius, the Seychelles, Madagascar and the Comoros.

There were several reasons for France to join the IOC. Soon after formation of the IOC, France sought to join the commission through its possession of the Reunion, so that it could legitimise its presence in the Indian Ocean region and thus be able to strengthen its presence through cooperation with regional countries. As a member, France could get raw materials, without export duty. In addition, it could get a chance to exploit and explore the resources, available in the sea-bed of their EEZ as, due to the lack of technical know-how, these islands were not in a position to exploit the zone.

The islands states are dependent on France for their economic development. Obviously more than 40 per cent of annual budget of the IOC is provided by France.[23] Apart from that, France continues to be the most important donor country to the states in the region, i.e., Mauritius- 43 per cent, Malagasy- 35 per cent, Comoros- 32 per cent, and Seychelles-27 per cent.

Naval Deployment of France in the Western Indian Ocean Region

France is the only power which continues to keep sizeable permanent presence in the Indian Ocean region. The loss of the strategically located naval base at Diego Suarez along the northern tip of Malagasy (Madagascar) since mid 1975 was a major blow to France's hope of maintaining a role especially in the Western region of the Indian Ocean. Even in the post Cold war era, France has the second largest naval presence in the Indian Ocean which is of serious concern for the island states. According to the French Defence Minister Mr. Alain Richard:

“It is not widely known nor publicized, but France's permanent naval presence in the Indian Ocean and Pacific is about the size of the entire Malaysian navy which by itself is not an insubstantial force.”[24]

France maintains a continuous military presence in some of its overseas territories and dependencies which are scattered over a wide area along the south-western Indian

Ocean and Eastern coast of Africa. Existing French bases and military facilities are mainly at Reunion, Mayotte, Tromelin, Djibouti and scattered islands of Mozambique channel. The facilities at Djibouti and Reunion give the French Navy the advantage of home port facilities.

As part of a military agreement signed at independence in June 1977, France has its largest military base in Africa in Djibouti, where approximately 2,700 troops are stationed, including a detachment of the foreign legion and the entourage of a Mirage F1 Squadron. Djibouti is a key strategic location situated at the head of the Gulf of Aden, at the mouth of the Red Sea, across the Bab-el Mandeb strait and adjacent to the South West tip of the Arabian Peninsula. It allows France to overlook a major waterway, especially after the reopening of the Suez Canal in 1975, linking the Red Sea and the Western Indian Ocean. Djibouti's contribution to French Indian Ocean naval forces is important because of its docking, replenishment and repair facilities. This unique strategic position is confirmed by the fact that the United States is now actively engaged in setting up its own military installations aimed at bolstering the war against terrorism.[25]

France is concentrating its attention on a chain of small strategic islands around Malagasy as a part of its policy to bolster its presence in the region especially after radical regimes came to power in Malagasy and Mozambique. These islands straddle the main oil traffic lanes between West Asia and Europe. There is, besides, meteorological stations, Isle Amsterdam which has special significance as it lies at the southern most end of the central ridge and midway between south-west Australia and South Africa—a site for a potential staging port. [26]

After its exit from Diego Suarez naval base, France prefers to maintain mobile naval forces capable of operating without logistic support. Since the reopening of the Suez Canal in 1975, the French Navy is keeping a permanent 15-Warship Indian Ocean Fleet in the Red Sea.[27] The fleet comprises command ship La Charante, one floating workshop, six combat vessels (two frigates or escort vessels and four gunboats), three patrol boats and three light transport ships, with a total strength of about 5,000 marines. The fleet is entrusted with the task of safeguarding French interest in the EEZ and communication routes and provides logistic support to the civil and military authorities of Reunion and Djibouti Fleet area, harbour facilities at Djibouti and Saint Denis in the Reunion and sometimes anchors at Dzaoudi in the lagoon of Mayotte.[28]

Reunion is an integral part of France. It holds the headquarters for the French South Indian Ocean armed forces (Forces Armees dans La zone sud de l'Ocean Indien FAZSO), including air naval and land forces (2800 troops). Since France was constrained to close in 1975 its military facilities, notably the naval base at Diego Suarez on the north west tip of Madagascar, military installations in the islands can facilitate the deployment of French troops in the execution of its mission of deterrence or of

external intervention. It is also a major communication transmission centre for French forces operating in the Indian Ocean.

According to the strategic literature of the eighties related to geopolitics of the Indian Ocean:

“the threat perception was largely driven by the super power rivalry, almost leading one to believe that with the subsequent end of the Cold War, the Indian Ocean region would be free. In fact, far from receding, the risk level has increased in the region which has witnessed a number of inter-national crisis, starting with the Gulf War of 1990-91. The presence of the largest energy resources, the fluidity of the terrorist networks, the proliferation of small arms and WMDs, the mobility of organized crimes have not made the Indian Ocean region and its sea lines of communication a safer place than during the East-West confrontation. Whereas some French strategists had once come to consider that the power projection in the region was a costly affair far removed from the NATO’s (North Atlantic Treaty Organization) theatre of operation, the Indian Ocean remains a priority area for the French defence and security policies with, nevertheless, the significant change that forced projection is increasingly bound to be conducted within an inter-allied and preferably European framework”.^[29]

In the Post Cold War World, France’s International commitments with some of the countries bordering on the Indian Ocean, are a good illustration of its involvement in the area; defence agreement with Djibouti and Comoros; military cooperation agreements with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Madagascar, Mauritius etc. As a result of these international commitments France maintains permanently deployed ships, the hard core of the French Indian Ocean Naval Forces, in that region. [30] These are:

- A fleet Ocean patrol boat, operating in the economic zone of the French and Antarctic Territories;
- A surveillance frigate in the South Zone;
- A light frigate in the Northern Zone;
- The light transport and landing ships;
- And two support ships.

Some smaller ships on station are dedicated to local commitments (Patrol boats of 400 tons in Djibouti and Mayotte, landing ship EDIC class in Djibouti).

Should the need arise, the complementary means may provide reinforcements; an aircraft carrier, mine sweepers, amphibians task group, submariners, etc. For the time

being, the Toulon base permanently detaches a frigate, two light frigates and an "Atlantic maritime" patrol aircraft. In addition to these operational naval resources, two general purpose maintenance ships provide back up.

Mission of French Naval Force

The roughly 15 ships of various importance, which France maintains in the Indian Ocean region, have following three main functions. [31]

- (1) to show the naval presence of France in the region and, if necessary, assist friendly neighboring countries to which it is bound by defence agreements ;
- (2) to protect French strategic and economic interests, especially the flow of national trade; and
- (3) to participate in the defence of the French territories and the operation bases of the French forces.

The daily tasks of these French naval forces follow directly from the above mission or functions statements such as: [32]

- (1) Assuming national responsibilities within French sovereignty zones for instance environmental protection, fishing zone surveillance and sea rescue;
- (2) Controlling the sea approaches to the French territories of the South Indian Ocean;
- (3) Calling in at the neighboring countries to project France's support to their national interests and assets and the regional involvement;
- (4) Visible patrolling of the main sea routes such as the Suez Singapore axis; and the Gulf-The Cape axis.

Since 1991, the French naval forces have conducted a number of internationally commissioned operations in the Indian Ocean region. Firstly, the French naval forces participated in the implementation of the embargo imposed on Iraq as well as to the mine-clearing operations of territorial waters. Secondly, French naval forces were involved in the operations Onusom I & II (1993-94) intended to provide relief to the Somali population during the civil war. Thirdly, it helped in the evacuation of foreign nationals from Aden in 1994. Fourthly, from June 1996 to December 1998, the French navy, participated in "Operation Condor" whose purpose was to monitor the disputed Hanish islands as part of the UN mediation between Eritrea and Yemen. Fifthly, from December to March 2001, "Operation Khor-Angar" was conducted to ensure the security of movement to and from Djibouti during the conflict between Eritrea and Ethiopia. Sixthly, since October 2001, France, under the code name "Operation Heracles", made its contribution to the "Operation Enduring Freedom" conducted by the US in the aftermath of September 11. [33]

Overall, French navy is playing significant security role in the Indian Ocean region. Due to its international commitment in distant areas, the French navy plans to continue operating aircraft carriers in the foreseeable future.

Implications for Indian Interests

India occupies a central position in the Indian Ocean. It has a coastline of 7516.6 kms and two groups of islands, on either side of the peninsula, well away from its shores. It is the longest in the world facing navigable waters and it has a more vulnerable land frontier. The Lakshwadeep archipelago has 474 islands and the Andaman and Nicobar group has 723 islands. Ninety seven per cent of India's trade is carried out on its waters, including between 20-30 mm tons of petroleum product every year. India has a merchant shipping of 800 ships with a gross tonnage of 6.2 mm tons. This meets only 25 to 27 per cent of its total trade volume.[34]

In strategic terms, India is one country that needs no reminder that her fate as a sovereign entity is inextricably woven with the winds that blow from the Indian Ocean. If the Indian Ocean is controlled by a single naval power, it would affect India's security and economic interests as well. That is why India suffered for two centuries and that is why India overthrew external presence, after a long struggle, in Goa in 1961. It is in India's interests not to allow the domination of Indian Ocean by any single power.[35] India has been generally opposed to the extension of big power naval presence in the Indian Ocean and also to the establishment of foreign military bases there. India played a key role in mobilising public opinion in favor of the peace zone proposal.

During the cold war era, India opposed the presence of French troops in Western Indian Ocean region. But French attitude towards Indian Ocean politics was totally different from the other powers. It has always supported the idea of peace zone proposal. In the post colonial world, France consistently emphasised its independent role as an ocean power. Its strategy is shaped by its own perception of an independent "Great Power" based on its economic and security concerns that include protection of its island territories in the western Indian Ocean.

Bilateral Issues

India and France, both, (through Reunion) are Indian Ocean littoral countries. The implications of this fact are that the two countries share many problems and in the solution of which they can mutually cooperate.

(a) Diaspora Factor

These days Indian diaspora has become very important for India and there has been a renewed enthusiasm to maintain cultural and economic links with the peoples of Indian

origin in distant lands. Religion and cultural ties play a considerable part in the politics of most if not all these islands. Thus, for example, Mauritius, with its Hindu majority, has tended since independence to keep its foreign policy broadly in harmony with New Delhi. Recently, on the island of Reunion, which remains part of Metropolitan France, the Tamil factor has become increasingly vexatious for the French authorities. It has a substantial population of 220,000 people of Indian origin (PIO) in the island. [36]

PIO form over 30 per cent of the island population. Most of them are Tamils or of Tamil descent. Considering that Reunion is the base for 3,000 French paratroopers of the French Indian Ocean intervention force, it is understandable that France should be wary of this growing Indian political influence in their island.

In fact, the people of Indian origin have been showing signs of becoming restive. They are becoming aware of their Indian identity and have been demanding a greater political voice in the administration of the island. This emerging factor seems to cause concern to both the French and the Creoles. The way the Tamils are asserting their presence in Reunion, many analysts conclude that the political future of Reunion may well depend the Tamils in the coming days. If they prefer a closer association with India then France may indeed have much cause for worry over its future. [37]

(b) Military equipment to Pakistan

In South Asia, France has, of late, developed military relationship with Pakistan. During the Nineties, Pakistan was among the top four clients of France along with United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Saudi Arabia. However, towards the end of the decade, India's orders exceeded Pakistani purchases. Earlier, in 1994, the Pakistan and DCN of France had concluded a contract for the construction of three Agosta 90B submarines for the Pakistan Navy at a total cost of the US \$ 940 million.

According to the contract, the first submarine *Khalid*, was to be constructed in France. The second Vessel, *Saad* was to be assembled in the Pakistan Naval Dockyard under the transfer of technology agreement and the third. *Hamza*, was to be built in Pakistan.

This has raised a serious concern for India's security. In 2003, it was reported that the then foreign secretary, Shri K. Raghunath, made a trip to Paris at the end of June to convey India's concerns regarding arms delivery to Pakistan at a critical time. [38]

(c) Security of Sea-Lanes in the Indian Ocean

Today, the Indian Ocean is perhaps one of the most unstable and volatile regions of the world. Its sea routes are very important not only for littoral countries but also for hinterland countries.

The importance of the sea-lanes also arises from the fact that the geographical position of the Indian Ocean and its strategic waterways provides the shortest and the most economical lines of communication between the Atlantic and Pacific Ocean. As pointed out earlier, the Indian Ocean accounts for the transportation of highest tonnage of goods in the world.

The vast majority of this trade is extra-regional by nature, with 20 per cent of the total Indian Ocean trade.[39] Both India and France make enormous use of the waterways through the Indian Ocean for their trade. Both the countries also depend on sea-lanes through the Indian ocean for the regular and uninterrupted supply of oil from the West Asian countries. It is therefore, in the interest of both the countries to ensure the security of the sea-lanes in order to safeguard their foreign trade. In this context Admiral Mahan had said in 1890:

“Whoever controls the Indian Ocean will dominate Asia ... in the 21st century, the destiny of the world would be decided on its waters”.[40]

Thus, it is imperative for both India and France, to cooperate with each other to ensure the security of the sea-lanes so that there is no disruption of their trade which is virtually the life line of their economies.

The field of maritime surveillance may offer many opportunities for cooperation between India and France in the context of Western Indian Ocean region. Pooling the maritime patrol resources for common defined purposes of tracking developments at sea would be of benefit to India and France both. This would involve sharing of data accruing from maritime surveillance. Appropriate communication linkages and procedures need to be charted out to maximise the advantages of such cooperation for the benefit of India and France.

Indo -French Naval Cooperation

Apart from the various issues between India and France, the bilateral naval cooperation has been going on in the Indian Ocean region. France considers India as an emerging naval power in the Indian Ocean Region and Indo-French naval cooperation is part of the overall Indo-French relationship that is based on understanding and appreciation of aspirations.

The bilateral naval cooperation includes ship visits, passage exercises, International Fleet Review, joint naval exercises (Varuna Series) and exchanges of naval delegations and trainees in defence institutions. Joint exercises between the countries (Navies) provide the impetus for the growing Indo-French naval cooperation.

Between 1989 and 2000, the Indian navy has conducted forty five naval exercise with at least twenty countries. Indo - French joint naval exercises were held in 1993, 1996, 1999 and two exercises in 2000. In the past, the two countries held passage exercises as and when opportunity was available. In 2000, a flotilla of six French warships, including aircraft carrier FNS Foch, (Now Sold to Brazil) operated with the Indian Navy of the Goa Coast as part of the passage exercise. The French naval participation during the international fleet review at Mumbai in February 2001 further contributed to the growing naval cooperation between the two countries. [41]

In the post cold war scenario, the growing number of naval exercises are intended to contribute to the stability of the Indian Ocean through more transparency in establishing common procedures to log down identical safety regulations and to ensure proper inter-operability for the communication systems.

The message addressed to the Indian partner is that the French navy is bound in the future to operate within a growing integrated European approach to the region. It notably means a coordination between the fleets of EU member states in 'out of zone' areas where you may have 'national ships' operating under European Command.[42] This maritime dimension is part of the Indo-French strategic dialogue in regard to the naval cooperation between India and France.

Conclusion

In view of the foregoing, it may be concluded that Reunion is an integral part of France and that France has had historical and cultural connections with the western Indian Ocean islands. Due to Reunion, France has vital strategic and economic interests in the Indian Ocean. France encouraged Reunion to participate in regional inter-island cooperation. France has also territorial disputes with the Western India Ocean islands but she defuses her territorial disputes with islands and encourages them to come together with Reunion to form a viable Indian Ocean Community.

France has also become member of the IOC through the Reunion and wanted to become member of the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation. Economically speaking, the island states are dependent on France for aid. However, the dream of the founder members of the IOC of demilitarising their region has failed as they had to accept the dominant French military presence in the Western Indian Ocean.

In the post cold war era, France has maintained a sizeable naval presence in some of its territories in the western Indian Ocean region. This is a serious concern for the island states in the region. The French presence in the Indian Ocean has to contend with the feeling in the littoral countries that western naval forces provide an element of a global strategy which seeks through coercive diplomacy, and as a last resort,

deployment of military forces, to influence events in third world countries to preserve the West's dominance and interests.

On the other hand, India is a growing naval power among the Indian Ocean littoral countries. It has vital stakes in the Indian Ocean. India's security considerations are intimately linked to her economic interests in the Indian Ocean. It is obvious that India can exploit the economic resources of the Indian Ocean and pursue its commercial relations with the countries of the region only under peaceful conditions prevailing in the Indian Ocean.

Thus, it would be in India's interests that it should have good and friendly relations with the powers that dominate the Indian Ocean because they can interrupt and harm India's maritime interests. India's approach to the problem of security in the Indian Ocean has been to try to realize security largely through promoting peaceful regional cooperation among the littoral and hinterland states to prevent the militarization of the Indian Ocean. India and France both are important maritime powers in the Indian Ocean and have been encouraging bilateral naval exercises and have initiated several strategic dialogues that cover a wide spectrum of relations.

There is no major clash between India and France in the context of the Indian Ocean politics. Both countries are established naval powers in the Indian Ocean. There could be clash in terms of naval supremacy in the western Indian Ocean region. Western Indian Ocean islands are situated closer both to France and India. Both have strategic and economic relations with them. Both the countries should work towards establishing a lasting policy towards Indian Ocean.

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