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**Abstract:** France and Pakistan have enjoyed amicable relationships since the 1960s and hold high status in the eye of Pakistan for the provision of military technology to Pakistan. It is also one of those major countries where Pakistan exports its products and commodities. However, their relationship suffered a sudden downfall soon after the publishing of the blasphemous cartoons in a French magazine that received an instant backlash from the Muslim community, including Pakistan. Public diplomacy can opt as the top priority for the government to restore the close bond with France in the field of military technology, economy, culture, and politics. In the past, France has been the major contributor to the development of Pakistan's military capabilities. Given a large number of Muslim communities residing in France, Pakistan can never politically disconnect from France, which necessitates coming up with a common ground to take the bilateral ties to the next level.

**Key Words:** Public Diplomacy, Soft Power, People to People Contacts, France- India Relations

## Introduction

In 1947, France was the first non-Muslim state to recognize the Islamic Republic of Pakistan. During the Cold War, France showed a keen interest in Pakistan and turned out to be one of the major suppliers to the Pakistani army, selling it Mirage aircraft and submarines. Nevertheless, India was France's main partner in the region, and Pakistani hopes were disappointed on the question of Kashmir. France and Pakistan established diplomatic relations at the time of Pakistan's independence in 1947. Today, our relations are essentially based on three axes, i.e., Foreign Affairs, Security, Economy. Nevertheless, since Prime Minister Gilani visited Paris in 2011, Pak-France bilateral dialogue has revolved around three joint commissions, corresponding to the three texts signed during this visit:

1. A joint political declaration that recalls the broad outlines of our partnership and provides for regular consultations between the Secretaries-General of the French and Pakistani Ministries of Foreign Affairs.

2. A joint declaration on security cooperation, which provides for annual exchanges within the framework of joint security commissions.
3. A joint declaration of economic and commercial partnership, which allows regular exchanges within the framework of joint commissions co-chaired by the General Directorate of the Treasury. The last one met in Paris in March 2015. In addition, the first visit to Paris, in June 2014, of a delegation of Pakistani business leaders was a great success.

Our economic exchanges sum to approximately one billion euros, and Pakistan is France's second export partner in South Asia. Bearing in mind the fact that France has been importing goods from Pakistan for a long time, it is natural for both countries to realize that public diplomacy should be employed doubly in order to enhance bilateral economic ties. As a vital trading partner of Pakistan, France is included in the list

of those top ten countries of Pakistan where Pakistan exports its merchandise. Therefore, it has now imperative to amplify cooperation in the sector of energy and transport as both countries are already working together in the field of defense [\(Ruslan, 2020\)](#).

Certain inopportune events instigated resentment between France and other Muslim countries, especially Pakistan. Charlie Hebdo magazine of France again published the Last Prophet Mohammad's (SAW) cartoons, which is considered an act of disrespect and blasphemy by the Muslims. For this reason, in 2015, a terror attack was also carried out against them. These cartoons were republished a day before the trial of those 14 people who were suspected of assisting some attackers. It was alleged that these 14 people were facilitating two Islamist attackers who were responsible for the mass shootings on January 7, 2015, which claimed the lives of twelve people. Some famous cartoonists also fell victim to this gun rampage and died. Several days later, a similar attack was carried out, resulting in the killing of five people. Hence, a wave of attacks by Islamists started in the whole country [\(BBC, 2020\)](#). The biggest protest, which later turned into a violent one, was organized all over Pakistan by a rigid Islamist party, Tehreek-e-Labaik Pakistan or TLP, which tried to pressurize the government to force the Ambassador of France to leave Pakistan. The situation aggravated when the President of France, Emmanuel Macron defended the republishing of those cartoons and ruffled the fury of the Muslims all over the world. The government of Pakistan had accepted the demand of TLP to expel the French ambassador. However, the government did not fulfill its promise. The government detained the leader of TLP, Saad Rizvi, using the anti-terrorism act after the protests. His party TLP was also banned by the government. A year later, the government of Prime Minister Imran Khan and TLP signed an agreement, and the government lifted the ban on TLP, provided that TLP would cancel its planned march to Islamabad, the capital of Pakistan. The government stated that it took this decision in the "larger national interest" to restrain the radical

group from committing a violent act in the future [\(dw.com, 2021\)](#).

This paper is divided into four-part. The first part discusses the economic relations between both states. The second part sheds light on Defense relations and the Role of India in Pakistan-France relations. The third part consists of the cultural collaboration between them, and lastly, public diplomacy as a way to strengthen these states will be discussed, which is the main objective of this paper.

### **Pak-France Economic Co-operation**

Since 1966, Pakistan has exported its goods to France than importing. In 2020, Pakistan benefited 40 million dollars from France. Regarding the basic human need to trade and develop economic relations, a theorist in the natural law tradition, Hugo Grotius, wrote the book "War and Peace." In chapter 2 of his book, "Of Things Which Belong to Men in Commerce," he wrote that there is a reason that God had not only blessed the humans with everything that they need to live on this earth, but He distributed them in different parts of this world so that people would be able to develop a social relationship with each other. The people would engage in a social relationship because they would require the assistance of each other. Therefore, commerce becomes an important part of this relationship as it not only fulfills the needs of the people of the different parts of the earth but also leads to a stronger relationship. If there is no commerce, then there would not exist any relationship between the humans living in different parts of the world. Today, all the countries depend on each other, and no one can say that it has everything and does not need the help of products of the other, be it any aspect of human life. Every country needs to buy products or services from other countries. Therefore, it is only natural for Pakistan to reach out to other countries and develop warm relationships, which also includes ties with France. In the beginning, the trade volume between France and Pakistan was less. However, later on, it started to improve [\(Britannica, n.d\)](#).

France has been investing in Pakistan for a long time, and this investment is continued uninterrupted. France has invested substantially in some of Pakistan's main industries. France is also trying to increase the role of interstate advisory organizations. In the energy sector, with the assistance of the French Embassy, the French Development Agency has reached a deal with Pakistan in February 2020. According to this deal, Pakistan's Energy and Infrastructure Council will receive 0.5 million euros which will be used to help this Council with imposing energy tariffs and prepare feasibility reports on energy projects. With the help of this Development Agency, France has been providing funds to Pakistan. This organization also decided in 2016 to provide €700 million to the energy and urban development sectors of Pakistan. One reason behind France's interest in these projects in Pakistan is CPEC (China Pakistan Economic Corridor). In this regard, a French Parliamentary delegation also came to Pakistan to visit Gawadar, Balochistan, in the year 2017. The French agency has also decided to grant Pakistan a €130 million loan to work on a bus project in Peshawar, KPK province, which will help the province in dealing with the issue of urban transport and give the public a better and safer public transport system [\(FATF, 2021\)](#).

The most important aspect of the bilateral trade between France and Pakistan is the export volume of Pakistan to France as compared to France's exports to Pakistan. France is among those top ten countries where Pakistan usually sends its exports. In the year 2018, the exports volume of Pakistan to France was around \$447 million. This export volume is greater than the overall trade volume of Pakistan and Russia as it was only \$320 million in 2017, while the export volume was only \$132 million. Moreover, France has been making a small amount of direct investment in Pakistan. However, the record of the Pakistan Investment Bureau also tells that the economic ties between both countries have dived into France has not been making investments in Pakistan for the last ten years. One reason behind it is the decision of FATF (Financial Action Task Force) as its member countries did not agree to remove Pakistan from the "gray" list, and France

was in favor of that decision. FATF is an international organization that was formed in 1989 to fight money laundering and financial support for organized crimes. [\(FATF, 2021\)](#)

If we closely examine the past relationship of Pakistan and France in the field of trade and another sector, France has always been open towards the idea of assisting Pakistan even in those sectors where other countries never cooperated, for example, the nuclear power sector. In the year 1976, both France and Pakistan reached an agreement according to which France would build a uranium enrichment plant. France backed out of this project due to pressure from the United States and other countries. Later on, in 1993, both countries reached another agreement regarding the provision of scientific and technical cooperation in the nuclear technology sector. At that time, France was not in favor of nuclear proliferation and did not approve of India and Pakistan's nuclear status. Therefore, France also did not provide them with nuclear material. However, France also did not approve of the sanctions against India and Pakistan as they both were purchasing its military and civilian goods. As France could not affect both countries' nuclear programs, hence it decided to just concentrate its efforts on development projects. In 1967, France and Pakistan developed military and technical relations, which is still an important aspect of both countries' economic and trade ties. In 1967, France decided to provide the Pakistan Navy with the first batch of equipment. This bilateral military cooperation has only improved over time. France has continued to provide Pakistan with naval and air equipment. In 2001, when Pakistan became part of the coalition against the Taliban, Pakistan also received military cooperation from France along with the US. France formed a bilateral commission with the purpose of weapons delivery, and Pakistan started to receive the submarines. Pakistan considers this bilateral cooperation in the military-technical field as a prospect of improving its military equipment, which would help Pakistan to have less dependence on the US and China [\(Ruslan, 2020\)](#).

## Pakistan and France Military Relations

The first operational fighter jet that was produced by the European countries was Mirage III which was

flown in 1956 for the first time. During the 1967 Arab-Israeli war, the Israeli Air Force also flew Mirage III to destroy the Arab Air Force. This success granted Mirage III a distinctive position. Pakistan started the procurement of Mirage III and Mirage V in the late 1960s. Due to sanctions in the 1990s, the purchase of F-16 from the US was not allowed. Pakistan started the procurement of Mirage III and Mirage V in the late 1960s. Due to sanctions in the 1990s, the purchase of F-16 from the US was not allowed. Pakistan had to buy already used Mirage III and Mirage V from different countries such as France, Lebanon, and Australia. A program was also started by the Pakistan Air Force in the 1990s to improve the capabilities of the Mirage Fleet, which were referred to as the "Retrofit of Strike Element (ROSE). Another purpose of this program was to increase the ground-attack capabilities of the Mirage Fleet. In February 2019, when India allegedly carried out its Blakot airstrike, Mirage aircraft was flown by the Pakistan Air Force to respond to it and carry out an attack on an Indian base in the Kashmir Valley (TheWeek, 2021).

At present, due to the tense relations between France and Pakistan, France did not agree to the up-gradation of Mirage jets. One reason behind it is India. Another reason is possibly the fact that Imran Khan, the Prime Minister of Pakistan, has criticized Emmanuel Macron, the President of France, as the French President has justified the use of satirical content against religion. According to a Hindustan Times report, after this condemnation by the Pakistani Prime Minister, the government of France chose not to assist Pakistan regarding the up-gradation of its Mirage Fleet, air defense system of Pakistan, and Agosta 90B class submarines. Due to the India-Pakistan rivalry, the government of France has also not allowed the Qatar government to permit Pakistani technicians to work on the Rafale Fighter jets that Qatar has procured from France. The reason

behind it is to not allow Pakistan to get any information regarding Rafale jets as these jets are used by India. According to the same report, when the foreign secretary of India, Harsh Vardhan Shringla visited France, the government of France told him about its refusal to help Pakistan regarding the up-gradation of its Mirage Fleet as the French government was also concerned about India's security issues with Pakistan. Therefore, the French government did not allow the Qatar authorities to let any Pakistani technician work its Rafale Jets. The report also said that this action by France regarding the up-gradation of Mirage III and Mirage V would negatively affect the Air Force of Pakistan. Pakistan has purchased 150 Mirage fighter jets from France over the years, which have been produced by a French Firm named DassaultAviation. Only half among them are operative and usable. Another reason is that while other countries have stopped using Mirage jets, Pakistan has been procuring them for a long time and restoring them for its use. Therefore, this French decision against Pakistan's request for up-gradation will negatively impact the Pakistan Air Force (moneycontrolnews, 2020).

## Cultural, Scientific and Technical Cooperation

Through bilateral cooperation and the French Development Agency or AFD or Agence Française de Développement, France assists Pakistan in various fields. France provides aid to Pakistan to show support to the academic policy of the government of Pakistan and increase the power of France in different other sectors such as governance, culture, archaeology, social sciences, and language. Both France and Pakistan cooperate in the academic sector through scholarships to France at higher academic levels, such as Masters, doctoral or post-doctoral. In this regard, the Pakistan-France Alumni Network plays a vital role. It promotes and helps the French Embassy carry out its activities in this field. Both countries also cooperate in scientific and technological fields to provide support to joint projects. One such example is a joint project between the research laboratories of France and Pakistan or "Péridot" Hubert Curien

Partnerships" which was started in September 2014. Both countries are also improving their relationship by focusing on entrepreneurship. France has established its three Alliance Française branches in three different cities of Pakistan, namely Islamabad, Karachi, and Lahore. Its purpose is to promote the thought, language, and culture of France (Ministere de l'europe et des affaires etrangeres, n.d).

### **Public Diplomacy and its Relevance in Pakistan-France Relations**

To increase its cooperation with France in various fields, Pakistan must develop a long-term and a medium-term policy. These policies will help Pakistan in improving its relations in the fields of culture, economy, diplomacy, and politics. The long-term policy of Pakistan must also include building Pakistan's positive image at the international level by using soft power. Lots of events have resulted in the negative image of Pakistan in the eyes of the political elite in France, such as terrorism, violence, and poor relations with western countries. One such tragic event took place in 2003 when some French engineers were killed, which landed Pakistan in an unpleasant situation with regard to relations with France. Due to these reasons, the French public thinks of Pakistan as "Taliban." Therefore, Pakistan must develop a ten-year policy for various sectors such as culture, politics, and economy to improve its image worldwide (Ackhzai, 2021). There are some steps that Pakistan can take immediately:

- Pakistan can attract the French public through Art exhibitions of its Buddhist heritage in French art galleries.
- An exhibition regarding Pakistani dresses can also be arranged in France as Pakistani dresses are loved by the French public. This step can also show Pakistan's soft side and earn Pakistan some good revenue.
- Pakistani weddings can be an interesting event for the French people.
- Pakistan must show its films and arrange festivals to portray its positive image and promote its narrative.

- The western public likes Kowali, so Pakistan sends its singers abroad for that purpose to attract an international audience.
- Pakistani diplomats must learn the French language to directly communicate in high-level meetings and to also attract the general French Public towards the positive activities of the Pakistani embassy.
- Both countries can start student exchange programs to eliminate the distrust between both countries. HEC scholarship program was beneficial in this regard. The French government can also start a scholarship program for the Pakistani youth. This step will not only let the French public know about Pakistani society but also allow the Pakistani public to get to know the French society and culture. This type of relationship can deepen and strengthen the ties between both countries.
- Pakistani diplomats must use social media and start engaging with the French public in their festivals and important events. Engagement and communication with the French public will help Pakistan build its soft image and attract the French public towards Pakistan.
- Pakistan must announce attractive tour packages for foreigners, especially for the French people, to show them that Pakistan is not a country plagued by terrorism and bad law and order situations. Pakistan must show its beautiful side to the foreigners and even make arrangements for their pleasant stay in Pakistan.
- Working in joint projects with the French showbiz industry can also boost the ties between both countries and help Pakistan create its positive image in the eyes of the French public and politicians.
- Through French and Urdu language courses, Pakistan can also offer the language learning students to visit France or Pakistan for a few days and get to know the native culture and language and visit places. Pakistan must publicize such activities on electronic, print, and social

media to not only attract people towards such programs but also portray Pakistan positively.

It is the need of the hour to improve terms with France, and new areas of interaction must be explored and used for that purpose. Pakistan must send excellent representatives to France who are articulate and possess the best communication skills and policies to interact with the French public and government officials. According to a French Think Tank, those politicians who only possess constituency skills in Pakistan cause more harm when they are sent to France. Hence Pakistan should avoid sending such people as its country's representatives [\(Ackhzai, 2021\)](#). France also needs to be mindful of certain facts. While everyone appreciates the fact that France is in favor of freedom of speech and opinion, however, it does not mean that this freedom must be used to offend other people. Every right has a limitation, and the same goes for the right to opinion and speech. While everyone is entitled to his or her opinion, this should not mean that people must be allowed to disrespect the religious figures of other religions, especially Islam, which is one of the biggest religions in the world. If France allows such things to happen in its country, then it will lead France towards conflict with other countries concerning religion and civilization. History suggests that in the past, France has been cooperating with the Muslim Rulers to counter the dangers posed by the Europeans. Therefore, France must remember this golden tradition from its past and avoid indulging in activities that may offend the people of other religions [\(Dar, 2013\)](#). Both France and Pakistan must use cultural diplomacy to improve their ties. Cultural diplomacy refers to a set of actions that involves exchanging opinions, moral values, traditions, and cultural values. The public sector, private sector, and civil society together can use cultural diplomacy to enhance the cooperation between the two nations and strengthen bilateral ties. Pakistan must also use cultural diplomacy to improve its image at the international level. Due to Pakistan's bad foreign policy and the hateful propaganda by its rivals, Pakistan is negatively viewed on the world stage.

Hence, cultural diplomacy is one of the best courses of action that Pakistan can adopt to create a positive and strong image of itself at the international level. This step will further lead to improvement in the bilateral relations of Pakistan and France [\(Syed, Ahmad, & Bhutta, 2019\)](#).

## **Conclusion**

The recent maladroitness statement by President Macron saying that "Islam is in crisis" has put the republic's Islamic in a delicate position with France. Still, not only this, it had indeed conducted a massive economic boycott of French products around the Muslim world and civilization. The anger of the civil society is still present, and France has tarnished its reputation, credibility, and image. France and Pakistan have always been allies since the second war. Challenges are multiple in the region: Iran/Iraq/Afghanistan/ Syria/ India/Azerbaijan/. Today we need to open a new diplomatic page for both countries. There are some areas of interest for both countries that can be used to bring the two countries together. Combating terrorism is one such area where both countries can work together and collaborate. ISIS poses a great threat to not just France but also other Muslim countries such as Pakistan, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, especially after the defeat of ISIS in Syria and Iraq. Pakistan has gained experience in tackling such terror outfits and now possess a skill which Pakistan can share with France and other countries to not only improve its relations with other countries but to also show that Pakistan is not an extremist or a terrorist country and by sharing useful intelligence to show Pakistan's actions and efforts to eradicate terrorism from the world. Pakistan must have a strong narrative and arguments as well to show its sincerity and efforts for the end of terrorism in different parts of the world. If Pakistan successfully builds its narrative regarding the rebellion in Afghanistan and Kashmir and convinces the international community that they are not sponsored by Pakistan rather they are home-grown insurgencies, then Pakistan will be able to not only put an end to propaganda against its country but also build its positive image in the world

(Ackhzai, 2021). Pak- France relations are disturbed on account of India-France better relations too, Recently France has become the President of EU till June 2022. India was taking full advantage of its good relations with France and claimed that Pakistan is not only supporting the terrorist groups but can also give China some sensitive technological information. India is also trying to convince the EU through France that under these circumstances, a weapons sales ban must be imposed on Pakistan by the EU. Due to the trust and close relationship between France and India as well as the bilateral cooperation, France has been in favor of India's opinion regarding China and the terrorists working inside the Pakistani territory. ET had reported that France promised India as well that it will not give Pakistan weapons and defense systems when India requested France during a meeting which was arranged in December 2021 in New Delhi between the Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh and French Defense Minister Florence Parly\_(TFIPOST, 2022). The tense relationship between India and Pakistan is the reason behind the close strategic relationship between India and France, while it has led to a weak relationship between France and Pakistan. Both India and France seem to be following the notion that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, which better explains their close ties nowadays. During the meeting of Indian Defense Minister Rajnath

Singh with the French Defense Minister Florence Parly in December 2021, it was agreed by both parties to cooperate in the field of aerospace and increase bilateral military cooperation. After the meeting, the Indian Defense Minister also tweeted and expressed his happiness over the strategic partnership between France and India (Bhalla, 2021).

The governments often use public diplomacy to interact with the people of other countries to work in their greater national interests, to achieve their goals, create a positive and strengthen the bilateral ties between the two countries. Pakistan is one of those countries that have gained a bad image at the international level due to terrorism and the low-graded law and order situation in the country. Though Pakistan has successfully defeated terrorism, however, Pakistan still needs to win the war of perception. Therefore, Pakistan must use public diplomacy to not only create a positive image of itself but also improve its ties with France. Bilateral relations with France can prove to be beneficial for Pakistan in the long run. Pakistan's embassy in France must play a role in promoting the government narrative and form ties with the French officials to present Pakistan's stance. Additional secretaries having work experience in the field of trade must also be sent to work in the embassy so that they can also play their part in improving the economic ties.

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## Appendix

### High-level Bilateral Visits and Contacts between France and Pakistan

- March 2014: a meeting between the President of the Republic and Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif in The Hague
- December 2012: visit Paris by President Zardari
- May 2011: visit France by Mr. Youssouf Gilani, Prime Minister, and Mrs. Hina Rabbani Khar, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Pakistan
- August 2010: visit to Paris by President Zardari
- September 2010: meeting in Paris of Mr. Abdul Hafeez Sheikh, Minister of Finance, with Mr. Bernard Kouchner
- January 2010: visit to Paris by Mrs. Rabbani Khar, Secretary of State for Finance and Economic Affairs
- December 2009: visit to Paris by the President of the National Assembly
- July 2009: visit to Pakistan of Anne-Marie Idrac, Secretary of State for Foreign Trade
- July 2009: visit to Paris by Mr. Rehman Malik, Minister of the Interior
- May 2009: visits to Paris by President Zardari and General Kayani (May 18)
- November 2008: visit of the Secretary of State for Defense and Veterans Affairs in Karachi, Mr. Jean-Marie Bockel
- June 2008: meeting in Paris of the Pakistani Minister for Foreign Affairs, Shah Mahmood Qureshi, with the Minister
- January 2008: visit to France by President Pervez Musharraf
- January 2008: visit to Pakistan by the Minister of Foreign and European Affairs, Bernard Kouchner. Interview with the President, Pervez Musharraf, Prime Minister Soomro and his counterpart, Inamul-Haque
- July 2006: visit of the Pakistani Minister of Foreign Affairs, Khurshid Kasuri
- November 2005: visit by the Minister of Foreign Affairs, Philippe Douste-Blazy. Participation in Islamabad in the conference on the reconstruction of areas affected by the earthquake of October 8, 2005
- February 2004: visit of the Minister of Foreign Affairs, M. de Villepin