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Modi's visit to France and Europe-India ties

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PANEL

MODERATOR: TANVI MADAN

Senior Fellow and Director, The India Project, Brookings

GARIMA MOHAN

Senior Fellow, Indo-Pacific Program, German Marshall Fund of the United States

CONSTANZE STELZENMÜLLER

Senior Fellow and Director, Center on the United States and Europe

Fritz Stern Chair on Germany and Trans-Atlantic Relations

Brookings

TARA VARMA

Visiting Fellow, Center on the United States and Europe, Brookings

CONSTANTINO XAVIER

Nonresident Fellow, The India Project, Brookings

Fellow, Center for Social and Economic Progress

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**MADAN:** Good morning, good afternoon, good evening, depending on the time zone you're in. I'm Tanvi Madan, senior fellow in the Foreign Policy program at the Brookings Institution. Thank you all for joining us for this virtual discussion on Indian Prime Minister Modi's upcoming trip to France and India-Europe ties more broadly. A few weeks ago, India-U.S. ties were in focus with Prime Minister Modi's visit, a state visit to Washington. This week is Europe week, more broadly with the NATO summit in Vilnius, but even on the Indian foreign policy beat, with Prime Minister Modi's visit later this week to Paris as guest of honor for the Bastille Day parade. Also participating will be a tri-services contingent of the Indian armed forces, as well as a formation of Rafale aircraft that the Indian Air Force acquired from France. While this visit will come [inaudible] 25 years of India-France relations, the strategic partnership, it also comes in the context of increasing interactions over the last few years between India and Europe as a whole, various European subregions, as well as individual European countries. And this increased level of attention in Delhi and various European capitals precedes the Russian invasion of Ukraine. So it does not just and has not just revolved around that issue. We will discuss that too.

To discuss not just that, but these dynamics that I mentioned more broadly, I'm joined from around the world by an all-star panel. From the German Marshall Fund Berlin office, Garima, Dr. Garima Mohan, senior fellow in its Indo-Pacific program. From Washington, D.C., my colleague Constanze Stelzenmüller, the director of our Center on the United States and Europe, also senior fellow and Fritz Stern chair on Germany and trans-Atlantic relations. From Paris, Tara Varma, a visiting fellow at our Center of the U.S. and Europe as well. And from Dhaka, another one of my colleagues, Constantino Xavier, a nonresident fellow with us in the Foreign Policy program and also a fellow at the Center for Social and Economic Progress in New Delhi. I am joining you from Singapore. I'll be moderating this discussion. If you have questions as we're discussing these issues, you can submit questions via email at events at Brookings dot edu or via Twitter with the hashtag India France. I'm going to start this discussion with the panel with Tara to tell us why, why this, what is what is about this moment in India-France relations from the perch you're sitting in in Paris, what is driving France's decision to host Prime Minister Modi to be this guest of honor at this on this important day? What are Paris's expectations from the visit?

**VARMA:** Thanks so much for having me. It's great to be here. I think from Paris, this point of view, it's really clear that there is -- I was going to say an ally, which I would have been misspeaking -- there would be a major partner in Asia that France would want to work with, and that would be India. And as you said, this is not something that started yesterday. We're celebrating the 25th anniversary of the strategic partnership, which has, you know, a nuclear energy component to it, a space component to it, of course, a defense armament component to it. That's going to be much discussed. And there's an expectation that India might announce a \$3 billion deal where India would purchase 26 Rafale for the Indian Air Force and three Scorpène submarines. So this would be the defense element to it is very is is quite central, but I think what France and India are going to say now is that they want the relationship to go well beyond the scope of defense and armaments. It's one of the founding blocks of the relationship, but they're looking at scientific cooperation, as I said, nuclear cooperation, people-to-people exchanges. And I think France wants to work a lot more with India when it comes to biodiversity and fighting climate change. So there is a sense that France has been wanting for a long time to make of India its central partner in the region, also with a very, I would say, shared sense of the idea of what strategic autonomy means. Strategic autonomy is very central to Indian foreign policy, and it's also very central to French foreign policy and France's vision of European foreign policy -- I can get back to that -- but I think there is a sense of shared convergence and the idea that the India-France partnership is also laying ground for actually high-end European engagement in India and high-end Indian engagements in the European Union.

**MADAN:** But we will come back to strategic autonomy and that we could probably have an entire not just an hour's worth of discussion, perhaps a whole conference on different versions of strategic autonomy. But I want to -- and we will come back to that -- but I do want to kind of flip the lens a bit and ask Tino from the perspective of New Delhi, what is motivating India's deepening cooperation with France and what is what is India expecting from this visit?

**XAVIER:** Thank you, Tanvi, for having me. Really nice to be in company of you all to discuss this and preview a little what may happen this week. I just want to reinforce what Tara said on the history of this relationship. I think it weighs very positively on India's mind today that France was among the few, if not the only major power that did not sanction India after it tested, it went into its nuclear tests in 1998, which was pretty much five months after France and India started their strategic partnership in January '98 when President Chirac visited. So that relationship of trust that has been developing since '98 over the last 25 years is accelerating, is deepening today. And overall, it's therefore not surprising that if you look at if you talk to anyone in Delhi today, France is probably, together with Japan, the most uncontroversial, strategic trusted partner, which has a relationship that transcends various, overlaps into various pillars. The relationship with Japan is excellent, for example, but misses a strong defense and security pillar that the France-India relationship has. Their relationship with Germany is an excellent relationship, very strong on the economic sector, but relatively weak on defense and security sector.

So I think on on what India would ask or would expect from here is just a few things. One is on broadly the relationship not being affected by the Russia-Ukraine war. From India's perspective, it would want to see this visit as a validation of business as usual, that Paris is not going to make, you know, the disagreements between India and France and different assessments about Russia a stumbling issue in their relationship. So in that sense, a hope that this will be a rather tactical irritant in the long strategic convergence between France and India. Second, I think expectation on economic pillars that France will use its political and strategic weight to convince the EU to accelerate its economic relations with India and to find some type of acceptable FTA agreement rather sooner than later. There's an expectation that France has the political capital within the EU and can push European member states and the commission to tone down some of the traditional EU expectations and conditionalities on on that ongoing negotiation towards a trade below. And finally, maybe the last element on on India's radar, which I think would be expected from France, is on tech transfer and the defense reel. The off the shelf purchases that Tara mentioned on the Rafale jets is of course a big announcement. But there are also a variety of discussions on defense tech transfer in terms of jet engines, helicopter engines, and of course the submarines, which I think have around a 60% indigenous component now to in India. So there's a larger discussion actually replicating in many ways the discussions we saw between the U.S. and India a few weeks ago on how the U.S., how France and India can develop a long term defense partnership based on technological transfers.

**VARMA:** And I just jump in very briefly here on the FTA points. I absolutely second everything that Constantino said. I think it's very ironic, again, sitting in Paris for the moment, that France would be the member state pushing the EU to accelerate the free trade agreement between the EU and India because generally France is the EU member state that tends to be the more reluctant member states when it comes to signing FTA. So I think that also points to the importance of the bilateral relationship.

**MADAN:** And it feeds right into kind of the subject that I wanted Garima to broach, which is kind of the broader context of this in terms of India's increasing engagement over the last many years with with Europe. And Garima can tell us maybe also what the turning point was, because while I think especially from a U.S. perspective, this has come on the radar over the last year and a half since the Russian invasion, that this precedes that, this engagement. And if you just track the kind of mileage or travel itineraries of Indian Indian prime ministers and Indian ministers, Europe has has been a frequent destination. Garima, what has been driving the kind of India-Europe relationship from both perspectives, both kind of from New Delhi, but also from the perspective of various European capitals?

**MOHAN:** Thank you, Tanvi, for having us all here. I think it's a great opportunity to speak with my co-panelists on on India-Europe, a topic that's often not covered in depth. But answering your question, what is the turning point and where would I put it in terms of timelines? India and Europe have seen various cycles of engagement ever since Indian independence, so there have

been ebbs and flows. With the different stages of European integration, we've seen different reactions from India in different ways of engagement. The current stage, I would say I would trace it to 2014, from where we've seen an increasing, sort of increasingly dense engagement across the board, not just with Berlin, Paris, London, but also trying a real effort from New Delhi to understand the EU, what are its competencies, where it can be a useful partner, to engage with European subregions, to develop a relationship with the Nordics, for example, with Central and Eastern European countries, working with them on their own merits. Foreign Minister Jaishankar mentioned that this is a more nuanced Indian foreign policy approach towards Europe, moving away from the Cold War ideas of Eastern and Western Europe. I think that's really important because a lot of the way the Indian machinery and setup was constructed was around this idea of Western Europe and Eastern Europe and certain big member states that we understand and we want to work with. And the rest of Europe sort of with one broad brush is sort of painted in one, you know, one frame.

I would say the main driver for that in 2014 was the general idea in Indian foreign policy about diversification of partnerships. But what was the real accelerator for New Delhi was China. As the India-China relationship has seen troubles, has soured over time, I think India has finally found a place for Europe in its foreign policy, think finally we know what we want from European partners. And this is this goes towards building India's national capacities and resilience. And finally, we know what we want from Europe. And I would say it's very evident when you look at every single summit we've had with European countries in the past, whether it's Finland or Denmark or Netherlands, there are four elements that come out in every single declaration, number one is technology and innovation. Number two is trade and investment. Number three is migration and mobility, and number four is security and defense. So I think that's a very clear roadmap of what India expects of its European partners. And of course, France has been one of the key to deliver on this. And I think all four we would see reflected in this visit as well. And the takeaways from this visit, of course, the advanced technology component was very evident in the India-U.S. relationship, but I'm also seeing that come up increasingly in the in the India-Europe one.

And going beyond just, you know, defense and technology, but also in other regions where technology can play an important role. I think from the European side, what drives the interest of engaging with India, here I would differentiate countries like France that have, as Tara mentioned, a very nuanced understanding of India as an important partner in the Indo-Pacific, versus the rest of Europe, that is, I mean, we've seen capitals only now starting to build capacities in India, trying to understand Indian foreign policy a bit better. But really what's driving their engagement with India and the broader Indo-Pacific is again, souring of ties with China. And that's a very clear correlation there. And we had the China strategy of the EU calling it partner-competitor-rival, a few months before that we had a new India strategy; that's not a coincidence. The idea that Europe had a problem with even using the phrase Indo-Pacific and very quickly within a year went to actually adopting various Indo-Pacific strategies -- here too we have France, a great friend and partner to thank -- but also I think it's reflective of the general shifts of debate on China and why it is important to diversify to other partners in the region.

And finally, I think I would like to say on Ukraine, this has been a major stumbling block for the India-Europe partnership. And over time, we've seen a greater understanding of India's position among India watchers in Europe, bureaucrats who work with India, who are familiar with India. But for those who are not familiar with India, the broader constituencies, members of Parliament, the media, general public, this has definitely been a stumbling block and I think one that India would still need to address as we take this relationship forward. But in a way, Ukraine has also been good for the attention towards the Indo-Pacific. And I think Germany's a very interesting case here. We've seen the government draw parallels between wanting to reduce dependencies on Russia and applying the same lessons to China. We've seen an increasing engagement from Foreign Minister Baerbock and Chancellor Scholz, visiting India, visiting Japan, visiting Australia, trying to deepen those ties. And that has really underscored the importance of the Indo-Pacific rather than take attention away from it, as some would have expected. Yes, I think I'll stop here for now. And I do want to also on the question of France and India, mention that the French ambassador to India,

Ambassador Lenain, has really set up high expectations for this visit because he mentioned we can expect a lot. But he does say that Make In India would be an important component and co-production, co-design would be an important component. So let's see what comes out on that end of the relationship as well.

**MADAN:** I think there's a little bit of competitive wooing there as well, where you see the ambassador kind of also, also kind of, without mentioning the U.S., implicitly comparing or kind of weighing up the expectations of this visit vis-a-vis what came out of the U.S.-India summit recently. Constanze, I want to pick up one of the several themes that we've come back to, including for the reasons that we've got audience questions from them, but this point about the, Garima's penultimate point about the attention that Europe is paying to Asia or not, to the Indo-Pacific, a few years ago we we saw European engagement with India driven by this interest in Asia as a whole, concerns about China, and therefore in the Indo-Pacific more broadly, how has the Russian invasion of Ukraine, which understandably has put the focus for not just the kind of in the trans-Atlantic relationship, but also for Europe, in Europe. What has that meant for Europe's role in Asia, how China is being seen? What what is the current state of thinking about and even coming out of the NATO summit, what is the, how is Asia being seen and what is Europe's role there being seen as?

**STELZENMÜLLER:** Okay. Thank you, Tanvi. It's a pleasure to be on this wavelength with all of you, even if we're all in different places, which is too bad. I mean, as you say, the focus on the summit is very much on the war in Ukraine and its implications for the European security order, right? But the subject of China, Asia, the Indo-Pacific, is never far from people's minds because we have entered a stage of dual strategy, which I have facetiously referred to as as the everything everywhere, all at once phase of of geostrategy. Right? It's not possible to compartmentalize anymore. And it's not possible for for the Europeans, nor is it for the Americans, and I would say for India. You, it's become more complicated for all of us. Now, the, we haven't seen the summit language yet because people are still debating the question of what kind of, if any, promises are going to be made to Ukraine regarding its future membership. We we did have the rather surprising news last night of Turkey finally acceding to Swedish membership, which sort of got one very big obstacle out of the way and sort of made for positive mood music going into the summit. But I expect that the next 36 hours will be mano-a-mano fighting among delegations and with heads of state doing their own negotiations. Some of you will have seen the pictures of Olaf Scholz arriving with his briefcase that he's never without, and and it seems to have something of the function of Margaret Thatcher's handbag with him. I hope there will be no reports of him hitting people over the head with it. Sorry, jokes aside, I don't expect significant language on Asia or China to come out of the summit communiqués. I think it'll be fairly sort of anodyne, but I think it is important, particularly for listeners in Asia and in India, to understand again, that all of this, all of what we're discussing at the NATO summit in Vilnius is connected to European attitudes towards Asia for two reasons. Garima has already gone into into detail about European attitudes to China and India.

The other issue here, of course, that we haven't mentioned about yet, talked about yet is America, and that there are two drivers for Europeans' urge to diversify politically. One of those is the fact or the two facts that Russia is waging a new imperial war of aggression on the European continent that threatens to upend the European security order. And the other one is, is is China's aggressive interference in European affairs, right? Its attempts to to divide and rule within Europe, its challenges to the international order, it's the way it sort of reconfigures institutional and international institutions. It wants, it takes on a leading role, though I don't know whether any of you have read the reports about Chinese leadership in the FAO that that is deeply concerning to Europeans. But the other side of this, of course, is that they're profoundly worried about a potential flip back to a Trumpian form of of American engagement or disengagement with the world after the elections in 2024. And so the, at the same time, I think the the Europeans, in other words, I think the I think the the the change in language, which is very notable, some of it, Garima already referred to, the downplaying of sort of Western-style democracy language and its substitution with references to foundational principles of international coexistence, sovereignty, noninterference in each other's affairs. That is a much more traditional language that is liable to be a lot more popular

in Delhi than the reference to Western, Western style democracy. I think a de-emphasis on Western-centric narratives in general, and at least in Germany, a playing out of terms like multipolarity, I personally have mixed feelings about that, particularly since the term multipolarity is known to be used quite regularly in Kremlin talking points, I find that less than helpful when the German National Security Strategy does it, but it is a notable facet of the shift in language. There is also, I think, increasingly an avoidance of terms like the Global South, which is seen as an unhelpful sort of gluing together of countries with very different interests, etc., etc.. And all of you will have seen the increase in diplomacy in Germany alone. We've seen the chancellor going to Delhi in February, the defense minister going to Mumbai in the spring, the submarine deal. We are sending warships to the Indo-Pacific and ground troops to Australian exercises. This all of this was unimaginable, say, say two or three years ago. And I do think the Russian war has had a significant role in this. There are, however, also obstacles, and I think that is important to note here, and I think where we haven't really done that yet. And those two are India's continuing relationship with Russia, its balancing between its Western partners and on Russia, and then, of course, domestic tendencies in India as well, the sort of tendencies towards autocratic Hindu nationalism, repression of free media and free speech, that kind of thing, I think is if it increases or remains a significant factor, I think is also capable of being a not insignificant occipital obstacle to closer relations. And I'll stop there.

**MADAN:** Thanks, Constanze. Tara, I actually want to pick up on the Russia factor that has got mentioned. France and particularly President Macron, but also Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, when he was in office, and Prime Minister Modi had all shared this view of the need to engage, cooperate with Russia in part to either keep it from deepening ties with China or to even try to create a wedge between China and Russia. That is obviously a very different discussion today. But how is India's position on Russia being seen in France, which has historically not tended to press India, at least very publicly, on various relationships? Has, how much of that and how is it seen and is it an obstacle in in the relationship?

**VARMA:** So, you know, I mean, there are really good French scholars in China, but -- in India, sorry -- but India rarely makes the headlines in France. So people were really taken aback, I would say the general public. But even the government, when India didn't side in quotes with the Western view, and I was a bit baffled with that reaction because I was thinking, well, you know, for people following India a little bit, I wouldn't see a scenario where India would have condemned the Russian aggression as such, initially. I think it did, actually, its position, I would say, has evolved quite a bit in the past 17 months, but the sense of disbelief in Paris and other capitals about India's reaction or lack thereof, initially, in the days and weeks following Russia's invasion of Ukraine was a bit, it was hard to imagine. And that was really an idea in France's mind, but because France was so invested in India and in the strategic partnership that it would be obvious in the blatant face of Russia's invasion of Ukraine that India could do nothing else but to condemn it. And it took a while and it took a lot of discussions with with officials to, you know, to realize that, first of all, having this level of expectation would mean only being disappointed because, you know, saying it publicly and actually not seeing any change, immediate change, I would say in Indian reaction and Indian declarations only put more pressure on the French and the Europeans. And you're right to say that they were close. So in 2019, Emmanuel Macron invited Vladimir Putin to play golf in the south of France and subsequently gave his annual speech to the ambassadors, where he said it is not in Europe's interest for Russia and China to be close, so we need to drive a wedge between the two. When you look at the reality, the reality now, which is that Emmanuel Macron went to China three months ago and basically told President Xi Jinping, it's not in your interest to be close to Russia and we're trying to drive a wedge between China and Russia. It's a totally reverse situation. And I know that it also led to a lot of questions from people in Delhi thinking, well, you know, what is France's relationship with China? What does this mean? Where are we going? Is France talking in the name of Europe? Is it talking in the name of itself? If it wants a form of rapprochement with China, what does that entail for our own relationship, which, as I said, you know, for whom defense is one of the founding blocs and it is defense in preparation potentially for a confrontation with China. So there are many questions here. And if you look at how the French are framing the meeting on July 14, it is about preparing the next 25 years of the partnership in a context where, as

we said, there's the war in Ukraine, Russia has invaded Ukraine, so there is a blatant violation of international law, and where China's role in the international system has fundamentally changed as well. China is deemed to be a systemic rival by the European Union. It seems to be a systemic rival by the US as well. And because Macron also made very ambiguous or controversial comments again three months ago saying that, you know, maybe finding ourselves in the midst of a confrontation between China and the US for Taiwan was not in the European's interest. It also sparked another set of questions of, first of all, what was what did what did this declaration means and what will the Europeans do if there is a deterioration of the situation in the Indo-Pacific? And we don't have clear answers to that right now. So I think many questions about the ambiguity of the French position, not all of them, so I would say this is also a point of convergence, by the way, for India and France. I think maintaining a form of ambiguity and trying to diversify portfolios on many levels is something that they they do share.

**MADAN:** I think it also brings up this point that, you know, you said, kind of, France needs to think about and Europe needs to think about the Indo-Pacific. Also, the fact that we often think about Taiwan as the key contingency and crisis because of the stakes, the sheer stakes that that would involve. But there are other contingencies, including potentially potentially another flare up at the China-India border. And German Foreign Minister Baerbock, of course, acknowledged that, you know, maybe Germany should have taken, spoken out more on that front at the time. So, you know, despite these differences and we've seen this on Russia, we've seen this in the India-U.S. case, where there were some who perhaps didn't know kind of India and the U.S. that well last year calling, saying this would be the death knell for India-U.S. relations. We saw some similar chatter on the kind of India-Europe side. So despite these differences, we've none this in less seen a very productive year in Europe-India and India-France ties. What do you think explains that?

**XAVIER:** Yeah, Tanvi I was about to say that I actually look at it slightly from a different view. I think it's these challenges and disagreements that are tests to relationships and actually what could have been and what could have been a derailing of the convergence and of the relationship with Europe, different European actors, the EU and France in this case in particular, actually did not happen. So it's a case of the dog that didn't bark, of something that could have really derailed the relationship. And we heard those voices predicting that early mid-last year. And here we are in July '23. And we have, as Tara mentioned, two countries coming together despite having fundamental, fundamental disagreement on a major critical issue of world order and Eurasian order, but saying that we will keep converging and we're going to develop a path of strategic convergence for the next few years and decades. So I actually find that interesting.

And and to your question, Tanvi, of why, I mean, let me let me speculate, but I can think of three pillars that anchor this this larger convergence, three solid foundations of how Paris and Delhi look at the world. One is that you need to diversify relations, but you also need strategic autonomy. And it, strategic autonomy also manifests in a deepening closer relationship with the United States of America. Both France and India have that relationship, but that does mean that does not mean a relationship of dependance towards the U.S. and reliance or overreliance. So I think that's point number one, which both Paris and Delhi agree. And to do that, there is therefore a requirement to diversify relations with other major middle powers, particularly in Asia. Second pillar of strong foundational convergence in terms of the outlook on on the changing order, that China is the only potential challenger to the current order. And to maybe not contain China, Paris and Delhi are seeking to constrain China. More than talking about a global multipolarity, that any idea of multipolarity and balance of power at the global level hinges on multipolarity and the distribution of power within Asia. And therefore the concept of the Indo-Pacific being so, so important about an open, free, balanced in the case of China and India, also an inclusive Indo-Pacific, but one that does not rely excessively on China's centrality and and capabilities within that region. Third element that Paris and Delhi share in this, and that is sustaining this convergence despite fundamental differences on on Russia, is that you require a dual strategy in the Indo-Pacific to achieve one and two. That dual strategy in the Pacific is one of denial, constraining China, working with like-minded partners - the U.S., Australia, Japan, European partners - for example, on maritime security with France and India, pioneering coordination efforts in terms of maritime

security in the Indian Ocean region. But the second part of the dual Indo-Pacific strategy that India and France agree on is also a positive one of delivery. And let me give you one example we don't talk much about, but the International Solar Alliance, for example, that Paris and Delhi co-led in terms of renewable energies and solar solar energy to equip developing countries in the Indo-Pacific and the global South for the ongoing climate transition. So these three pillars, I think, sustain that relationship and give a bit of an answer maybe Tanvi to this sort of puzzle of why, why, why did things not collapse last year or really slow down the way many had expected them to?

**MADAN:** And in some ways you saw that even in the India-U.S. case where kind of strategic convergence on on China incentivized the two countries to manage differences on Russia as well as other issues, kind of, you know, the differences beyond that as well. But one of the things that, you know, does come up in terms of where perhaps this kind of looking at India-U.S. and India-France relations are different is, well, perhaps pulling in the same direction. There is a level of like-mindedness on concerns about China that is deeper in the India-U.S. case than India-France, perhaps. And I think the Delhi is okay with that. But that, you know, that does bring up this question of France's perception and approach to China, as well as that of the kind of Europe more broadly. Garima and Constanze, I want to bring you in here, which is, Garima, how have, how are kind of whether from kind of the Indian point of view, Indian point of view in particular, whether vis-a-vis France's attitude towards China or that of European countries more broadly, how are these being seen? Is there understanding and appreciation for the differences amongst European countries' views? And is this more of a glue in the relationship or more of a sticky subject and an obstacle sometimes, or at least something that is that will prevent it from getting even closer in some spaces?

**MOHAN:** I was frankly surprised at the lack of reaction from New Delhi after President Macron's trip to China. I think there were so many reactions from across European capitals and D.C., and frankly, it was surprising to not hear anything from from New Delhi, where we do see the commentariat take very strong positions. Any time, you know, there is even a hint of engagement or softening from the U.S. side or from Germany, for example, that often comes under fire for its China policy in Delhi. So it was interesting to see how this didn't ruffle many feathers. And I think on the one hand, of course, it is testament to the the strength of the partnership and the strategic trust build between Delhi and Paris over time. But I think it is also reflective of what Indian expectations are from Europe and China. And while, of course, India is under fire for having an ambiguous position on Russia and the invasion of Ukraine, we've seen Europe time and again take an ambiguous positions on China and on crises in the Indo-Pacific. So I think that the the expectation from the Indian side is that, of course, all relationships that New Delhi is looking at is through a China lens, as you've said before, Tanvi. And we and we are evaluating our partnerships in terms of who can help build capacities, help compete with China. And that is certainly an expectation from Europe as well. But there's also a lot of realism in it. How much can Europe deliver? There are a few areas where India and Europe converge on the China question, but there are a lot of other areas where they don't. Frankly, the debate on China and Europe is so complicated right now. There are several China strategies emerging. We hear of de-risking. What is de-risking mean? Everyone is interpreting it differently. So perhaps India is taking some time to wait and see where the chips fall. And is it the von der Leyen version of competing with China that triumphs or is it, I don't know, the Macron-slash-other versions? I know that he doesn't reflect the general view in Paris and consensus, and he was briefed to say different things but went his own way. But of course, that, you know, leads to a lot of mixed signals for your partners abroad. And I think it certainly does help when European leaders go to India and have frank conversations on China.

**MADAN:** Constanze, I'm going to bring you, I want to hear your view of this very complicated subject. What is the state of the debate from your perspective on China in in Europe?

**STELZENMÜLLER:** Well, I mean, Garima is completely right. I would have every sympathy for anybody sitting in an Asian capital saying, you know, this is all too much for me. I'm going to sit



back and wait until they find any kind of agreement, in which case you'd probably be waiting for quite a long time. I mean, Garima's completely right. Macron in Paris was at odds visibly, not just with von der Leyen, but also, I think, with his own security bureaucracy. And I think it's important to see that visit in the context of his later speech in Bratislava, which although it was about France and Russia and Eastern Europe, I think also represented something of an alignment or rather self-correction by Macron. Add to that the Macron's sudden espousal of Ukrainian NATO membership, right, which we could also spend an hour talking about. But in other words, you see these things within the country and that enough, is confusing enough.

Similar things are happening in Germany, where I mean, I remind you that when the Chancellery wanted to give its approval for the sale of the 35% stake in a Hamburg port operator, which is of crucial importance to China's Europe-wide infrastructure strategy, I think six domestic agencies, including the Foreign Ministry and the External Intelligence Service, put in written notes of protest. Right? And the Chancellery was forced to say, we will only accept a 24.9% stake sale so that the Chinese don't get a controlling interest in this port operator. I'm just saying that by way of illustrating with one example just how confusing the tensions within an important national actor could be in Europe. And then you've had, I mean, I think I mentioned we're still waiting for the German China strategy, which was actually due out last week. And and meanwhile, Olaf Scholz has somewhat bizarrely said that de-risking is a matter for business and not for the government to get involved with. That is probably not a take shared, by Ursula von der Leyen, or in fact a lot of the China specialists in the traffic light government and in the Foreign Ministry.

So. I do want to say, though, I want I mean, I understand I understand French and Indian sort of assessments of the need for agency and autonomy, I do think the facts otherwise, right? We in Europe are still very much dependent on the U.S. and on China. It and it makes it makes charting an independent course both extremely important and very, very difficult. But and I think it's also important that while we do that, we we all sense the pressure growing on us, particularly from Chinese actions in in the European space. But I think that as we do that, it's important not to lose sight of not just our interests, but our values and what we stand for. Not not every, shall we say, I think we, I think we at some point also have to say to partners in the non-Western world what we are not prepared to do, what we are not prepared to countenance or to condone. And I think that may also be a reason that Delhi senses that, and that may also be a reason for its holding back.

**MADAN:** I think the issue is rarely not taking up subjects. It's when it's done publicly that, you know, you can see hackles, you could actually almost physically see, you know, hackles being raised on that subject. One subject that does kind of raise hackles in Delhi in the U.S. case, and Tara, I want to ask you about this, Constanze mentioned it as well is, you know, questions about that come up about the state of Indian democracy, particularly actually it's more about liberalism. And India often says, you know, this is our business, nobody else's. Does this come up in France, whether at the government level or at the elite or public level? Is this shaping the debate on India at all? And does it matter if it's not the government that thinks about these issues then?

**VARMA:** This is a major issue, and I'm looking at some of the coverage in Paris right now, most of the coverage is going to be about whether the question of human rights and liberalism is going to be raised by the government with Prime Minister Modi. And I would say that's with the general public and also the elites right now. I, we were in Washington during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Washington, and I liked, I thought it was very cunning to actually, not for Biden not to tackle Modi with with these questions publicly, but to insist on doing a public press conference, which Modi hadn't done in nine years. And I thought it was a very subtle way of saying, actually, we're pushing on values and principles, but we're doing it in a different way, which is not going to be a name and shame, which, as we've said repeatedly now in our conversation, doesn't work with India.

And so I'm you know, I think the officials here are thinking about how to tackle this, because actually most of the scholarly work on India and France right now raises the illiberalism issue and

the autocratic tendencies as well, the nationalist temptation. And what we see, I think we're all trying to reconcile this vision of really complicated domestic policy in India right now and a new form of Indian ambition, which we haven't seen, to be more present on the international stage, to represent this so-called global South, which none of us like as an expression, but the idea that actually India is ideally placed to be one of the focal points of more representative discussions of the general equilibrium in the world are today. And I think there is really something there is something that India can play right now. It didn't want to play this role. It seems that it's changing a little bit. And so if it wants to be this, you know, this place where there are there is representation of a lot of views in the world and not just the Western view, then it will have to resist the nationalist temptation. And so there is going to be a discussion about how to do this. I don't think I don't see Macron tackling this very directly with Modi. I think he, everyone has been briefed, I don't think it is helpful in any way. But I'm pretty sure the issue will be raised somehow somewhere, because it is very important and it is something that is going to be I'm expecting most of the op-eds on the visit to be about the fact that, you know, it's not okay for France to be hosting Modi right now. There is a domestic trajectory in India that that is not helpful for France.

And as we said, as we are setting the path for the next 25 years of the strategic partnership, there are many questions about what will happen to the India that we're building this partnership with. Indian elections next year. It's not improbable that Modi will win a third mandate. What happens after Modi? Is it a comeback of the Congress? Is it still the BJP? If it's still the BJP, then who is going to take over? Is it going to be worsening tendencies or something that's getting a bit better? So I think there is it is absolutely important to raise this. You know, it's a national domestic political issue for India. But as we are clearly placing our hopes and in a way, our bets on India, there's also a stake for us here in making sure that we're putting these issues on the table, even if it's a secret table in a way.

**MADAN:** And it's interesting, you know, we got a few questions from Indian viewers about saying, you know, if you're bringing up issues in India, let's talk about the kind of riots in France. And there's a whole kind of that, Tara, I know you've done some commentary perhaps on this, and I'd recommend that people go on our website and look at it, that there is kind of a discussion to be had. Often the issue is, you know, people say, yes, you should comment about our internal affairs and you're not going to get the kind of reaction sometimes that you do. But it is I think, you know, it is something that now you see kind of not just the Indian government, but parts of the Indian public say as well, okay, we're you know, we want to know more about this as well. So, you know, I want to pick up on something that Tara mentioned, which is kind of India playing a larger role. But it's not just globally. We've seen India also wanting to do more with partners, very specifically, including France, other European countries in its kind of extended neighborhood, whether in the Indian Ocean, in Africa. What do you think the scope for that cooperation is with India and European countries in the Indian Ocean or in Africa? You've worked on kind of South Asia as well. What's the scope for collaboration there?

**XAVIER:** Thanks, Tanvi I was just reminded we were speaking about high expectations and the French ambassador's point about what's coming up. And I was just, remember, I mean, it's not only a French high expectation, I think, of Prime Minister Modi using the a- word "alliance" in 2019. I think the only time ever maybe a prime minister actually recently said, you know, we have an infra-alliance, India-France alliance. That's a pretty high expectation for two countries that have avoided or had difficult relationships with this with this word for a long time and have preferred the other a-word, "autonomy." I think we we need to be careful about confusing declarations, policies, I mean, with behavior and activity. Because if we go by policies and by strategy documents, the European Union would be the superpower by now on all accounts, right? I mean, the number of documents on Indo-Pacific, the China policy that Constanze mentioned that is in the works as we speak in Berlin, these are all phenomenal and beautiful documents. But if you go to the Indian side, they're not too many documents, white papers, strategies, declarations. In fact there's pin drop silence on most things in terms of human rights or democracy, Taiwan, etc.. So I think, Tanvi, we need to do a lot of inference. You do it on on China in your work. That doesn't mean India doesn't have its preoccupations and concerns, but we shouldn't confuse the chatter, whether it's a

governmental chatter, which, with all due respect to documents and policies or the non-governmental chatter, which of course is huge and loud in India and is often completely divergent from what's actually animating and driving decisionmakers in Delhi about Europe, and as Garima mentioned, actually low expectations on China.

Tanvi, on the global role, just two points. I think India and France today are doing two very interesting things, as you mentioned, that are not unique to India-France, but also India-UK are doing this, India and Germany are beginning to this, India-U.S. have been doing this, India-Japan have been doing this, which is trilateral cooperation to equip countries, small states, developing states, the global South, which is of course under stress after the Russia-Ukraine war, to do a variety of transitions: the climate transition, financial governance and capacity-building transitions, demographic transitions - these countries are growing very rapidly and have huge stress in terms of economic growth needs - infrastructure transitions, in terms of upgrading that and developing alternatives to the Belt and Road Initiative, and also democratic transitions. Many of these countries are what we sometimes call fringe democracies. I would avoid the binary of someone, of different countries being on declining and rising trajectories, I think it's far too simplistic, especially with a country like India. Actually, in many ways, I think India is a formidably deepening democracy these days. But India and France, for example, have been doing on the Indian Ocean things like the India-France-Australia, trilateral partnerships on maritime connectivity and security. Garima's done some work on that. So that's a very interesting trilateral that we could have only dreamt of or thought of ten or 15 years ago. And another other example is the French development agency AfD now is actively doing trilateral development projects in Africa and Indian Ocean region together with Indian companies and Indian Development Corporation. So a lot of that those trilateral development partnerships are showing and India is keen to work with other countries in the global North, if I may use that term, to equip and support the global South.

**MADAN:** Garima, we got a, you know, one of the countries that hasn't we might have been mentioned briefly about somebody but hasn't been mentioned so far is the UK, which was the other member of the directorate that when Britain was still in Europe would be kind of a key member state that India dealt with. We also got some a couple of questions, one on the EU-India FTA, but there's also a UK-India FTA in discussion. Another question about whether Pakistan is a constraint in India-Europe, and I'm also going to put that in the India-UK box because it particularly comes up there. Can you just you know, we were I want to ask you all one final question, but kind of briefly, just, you know, what does India-UK relations look like post-Brexit?

**MOHAN:** There was, there was a lot of rediscovery between India-UK post-Brexit for India to learn what role do they want now? What kind of partnership do they want with the UK now that that is not one of the voices it would use when dealing with the European Union. And similarly for the UK to to sort of reconfigure the kind of relationship global Britain wants with the rest of the world. I think we've seen some tensions. The UK-India FTA started with very high hopes that the Bali deadline and now we are at the 10th round of negotiations, the 11th one starting soon. Minister Piyush Goyal is in London currently to to talk about this. I think this is true for both the UK-India and the EU-India FTA. The hope was the UK-India would pass quickly, would sort of create some expectations and some answers for the EU-India one and help with that too. But frankly, the deadline before 2024 elections in India was always unreasonable. Certainly for the EU case, and it looks like this will also be the case for the UK. I mean, it would have been a really good get after the interim agreement between India and Australia to have a developed economy and and sort of a formalized FTA there, but it seems like it has run into troubles.

And on the question of Pakistan and I think the question of diaspora politics, I think that's again a very special, very different case with the UK as compared to other European countries. I think we've seen this with India-UK relationship with India-Canada, that diaspora and people-to-people ties are a source of strength but often they're also a source of discord and disagreement on on politics. And I think in that sense the other European actors fare much better where we've seen, you know, more recent immigration and the questions are around migration, mobility more prominently rather than their role in politics. So I think I think one thing to look forward to in the

India-UK relationship from my perspective, would be as the UK develops on the Indo-Pacific tilt, I think that was a very good document, good indication of the road map they want to follow with India, particularly on the broader strategic partnership security defense. They're now elaborating that into a whole new strategy. As Tino said documents abound on the Indo-Pacific, but I think the India chapter would be interesting to see, I think sort of a rediscovery in the sense of what can we do in terms of security in the Indo-Pacific, trilateral cooperation, as Tino mentioned, in the region. Those those things, I think, would be less controversial, more low hanging fruit for cooperation in the region rather than, you know, the quagmires that we see on a lot of the other issues.

**MADAN:** Tara, and I'm going to ask a question that I'd like all of you to perhaps answer, but also, Tara, if you do want to respond to the question about, you know, questions from kind of Indian Indian viewers on, you know, you ask us about treatment of minorities in India and internet shutdowns in India. What about France? Feel free to respond to that. But also the question I want to ask all of you as we wrap up is we have an audience member who's asked a question, What factors have made France more able to court India than other Western countries like the U.S. or UK or others? What lessons can other Western countries draw from France's successful relationship with with with India? So Tara, Tino, Garima, I'm going to flip that for Constanze, are there things that you think India should be learning or should be thinking about Europe, and if you want the US differently than it has? So we'll kind of do a round robin. Tara?

**VARMA:** So very briefly on the protest in France. Last week, there was supposed to be a state visit by President Macron to Germany, the first official state visit in 25 years. It was canceled because there were a lot of protests, riots happening in France's suburbs. I've spoken about it a bit. And so this is a very different situation than the protests that were happening in March-April around the pension reforms and also very different protest than those happening under the Yellow Vest four or five years ago. Last time there were these types of protest in the suburbs was 20 years ago. Also shows that very little has changed in terms of how France deals with these protests. A bit of police violence, but also more generally, a total lack of representation, political representation, economic representation of these banlieue, so the suburbs, in France is a political, sociological, a demographic problem that we will have to address. And so I think it's been spoken about quite a bit, but it is something that needs to be tackled. And if you look, this has hampered Macron's international and European agenda, which is absolutely central to his mandate. And so if you look at the fact that, of course, he's maintained his visits and participation in the NATO summit in Vilnius right now, will be back to host Prime Minister Modi in two days, I think it shows how central also all these initiatives are for him and for his international agenda.

In terms of what France has done, as we've discussed already, France didn't sanction India after the nuclear test. It didn't, very early on, during the negotiations of the U.S.- India nuclear deal, it wanted to be one of the participants of the more global deal and I think positioned itself quite strategically. And even if you look at when the first deal was negotiated 12 years ago, a bit more than 12 years ago, between 12 and 15 years ago, there were already discussions about offset, indigenization of production in India, it was not "Make in India," but it was, you know, the premise of "Make in India." I think France was already involved in thinking about transfers of technology. I'm not saying that it absolutely wanted to do it, but a conversation was happening in France about doing that with India at a time where it was not happening with other European partners. And so I think France, by way of chance and maybe with a vision of India, which is very positive also at the time, kind of position has positioned itself a bit differently. And so a lot of the topics that we're discussing now for this summit, they're not completely new. I would say they're a continuation of and maybe a strengthening and and a deepening of what has been discussed in the past.

**MADAN:** Tino.

**XAVIER:** Two things, Tanvi. One is, I think the fact that explains France's relative success in this relationship is that unlike the U.S., UK, Canada, Germany, probably a few other European countries, you've hardly ever seen France commenting on the internal affairs of India and actually

not mentioning the values part too much, leaving it out there, but refraining from that. I think that that has been appreciated on the Indian side. Second point and last point is one thing I'd like to see movement on on the Indian side. And judging by French ambassador's comments recently when when he said that's something we're still discussing, it seems that that's not going very, very well - that was yesterday - is the nuclear cooperation part. The French should be now years of trying to develop what could be the largest nuclear set of reactors, eight in Jaitapur at 10,000 megawatts. That would be the world's largest nuclear power plant. And, of course, India's 2010 civil nuclear liability law has hindered a lot of that. So hopefully there'll be some movement there on the Indian side.

**MADAN:** Something the U.S. will be very glad about too if it happens because that opens up the space for the U.S. as well. Garima.

**MOHAN:** Yeah. I would just echo what Tara and Tino have said. I think a certain pragmatism when dealing with India, which has been a factor historically in France-India ties, whether it is with the, you know, the, the whole question around defense security partnership or the values that Tino mentioned. Although when you speak to folks in in the government and the bureaucrats in Paris, they would say that there on certain things cooperation has been slow moving. I mean, getting the India-Australia-France trilateral off the ground was was very difficult. I mean, that's different that France then torpedoed it later. But initially it was it was quite difficult to get that off the ground and there's been some sort of inertia. So I do think that in that sense the partnership is similar to the ones that we've seen and has similar challenges and upsides of sort of working, working with New Delhi.

**MADAN:** Constanze. What's should India be doing differently with Europe?

**STELZENMÜLLER:** Well, I just want to perhaps, if I may begin by saying I didn't want to give the impression that Europe or Germany has anything to lecture India about. Tara mentioned the strikes in France. We have a truly shocking rise of the hard right in Germany. I think what the point I was trying to make was that for all of us, this, our domestic state of affairs of democratic and institutional constitutional resilience has become the factor in the effectiveness and legitimacy of our foreign policy. That is something we can talk about, I think, and where we share, where we share an interest as opposed to the to be real hard autocrats, right, both within our systems and outside. And that is perhaps something that would be worth trying and finding a conversation about. I would just end by saying that I think that compared to its size, brainpower, and economic power, India bats below its its capability, it seems to me. And the question to me is, why? I think that India could play a much larger role in its relations with Europe. And the question is, what is stopping it? Why? Why isn't that happening? I don't really have an answer to that. And since we're near the end of our conversation, that may be something we want to discuss another time. But that strikes me as I think that's one of the most striking parts of this relationship.

**MADAN:** You know, and I think that is also perhaps a subject of a future discussion and linking kind of these questions about Europe and Asia, but also kind of Europe and India. I will say just on the you know, the point, Constanze, you made, that that's true of the U.S. as well. And I think all democracies, you know, as effective abroad as you are, kind of united at home and effective at home, and this goes to President Biden's point on democracies needing to show they can deliver. I will say just to end one point, because, you know, we're, at least at Brookings is based in D.C.. Constanze is there. I'm not currently there. But you know how this might be, this Modi visit to France will be seen in the U.S., and I think this question has come up, I'll just briefly say, I think it really depends on who you ask in Washington. If your if your interest is in an India that is capable, that is prosperous, that is less dependent on Russia, then you are looking at, you know, this relationship as as not a bad thing, as a good thing. In fact, you might even say, oh, maybe India will bring France along on China, in some ways that the U.S. might not be able to. But there will be you know, there'll be some competitive dimensions where you will see perhaps American companies who, you know, have lost out on fighter aircraft deals, not be being too thrilled. But if you care about Indian military readiness from a policy perspective, you just want

India to be capable and ready. And you are much, far more glad that this is coming from France rather than, rather than Russia. And then I think finally there will be some, you know, comparing of the deals that will be signed, something somebody said, "is this a copy and paste visit" when they heard there's not just going to be a jet engine technology deal or or a defense procurement deal, but also a defense industrial roadmap. And so somebody joked, "what is this copy and paste?" But I think, you know, it will, we'll have some questions about, you know, who got what when. But I think the kind of broader thing of this is all pulling in the same direction from a strategic perspective. And so I would just say, you know, that's that's the thing to focus on. Hopefully, we will discuss this and more in in future future discussions.

Thank you to all of you, Garima, Tara, Constantino, and Constanze. And thank you to all of you for joining us and for sending in your questions. With that, thank you very much and look forward to seeing you all on a future event.