

Pivotal States, Global South and India-South Korea Relations

Edited by
Choong Yong Ahn & Jagannath Panda

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Tel. +46-841056953; Fax. +46-86403370

Email: info@isdpeu

Editorial correspondence should be directed to the address provided above (preferably by email).

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Abbreviations

ADMM+	ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting
AEP	Act East Policy
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIIB	Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank
AOIP	ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific
APEC	Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
BIMSTEC	Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation
CEPA	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement
CPTPP	Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership
DPI	Digital Public Infrastructure
EAS	East Asia Summit
ESS	Energy Storage Systems
EU	European Union
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFP	Global Firepower
GPS	Global Pivotal State
HADR	Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief
HSL	Hindustan Shipyard Ltd.
iCET	Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology
IFANS	Institute for Foreign Affairs and National Security
IFC-IOR	Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean region
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IPEF	Indo-Pacific Economic Framework
IPOI	Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative
IPS	Indo-Pacific Strategy

IUU	Illegal-Unreported-Unregulated
KASI	Korean-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative
KIEP	Korea Institute for International Economic Policy
KOTRA	Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency
LDC	Least Developed Country
LEP	Look East Policy
LEP	Look East Policy
MDA	Maritime Domain Awareness
MIKTA	Mexico, Indonesia, the Republic of Korea, Türkiye and Australia
MOU	Memorandum of Understanding
NAM	Non-aligned Movement
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIPF	National Infrastructure Pipeline Fund
NSG	Nuclear Suppliers Group
NSP	New Southern Policy
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PLI	Production-Linked Incentives
RCEP	Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership
ROK	Republic of Korea
SAGAR	Security and Growth for All in the Region
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SCRI	Supply Chain Resilience Initiative
SFPPIP	Strategy for a Free, Peaceful and Prosperous Indo-Pacific
SIDS	Small Island Developing States
SOC	Strategic Outline Case / Security Operations Centre
UAE	United Arab Emirates
UK	United Kingdom
UN	United Nations
UPI	Unified Payments Interface
US	United States
WMD	Weapons of Mass Destruction

List of Contributors

Prof. Choong Yong Ahn is currently a Distinguished Professor at the Graduate School of International Studies, Chung-Ang University. The posts he served include Co-Chair of the Korea-India Strategic Dialogue, Chairman, the Korea Commission for Corporate Partnership, presidentially appointed Foreign Investment Ombudsman, Chairman of the Presidential Regulatory Reform Committee, President of the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy, Chair of the APEC Economic Committee, consultant to World Bank and UNIDO, President of Korea International Economics Association, Korea Econometric Society, visiting professor to Kyoto University. Since receiving his Ph.D. from Ohio State University, Dr. Ahn has published many articles in international journals and monographs. His book, *South Korea and Foreign Direct Investment: Policy Dynamics and Aftercare Ombudsman* is coming soon by Routledge.

Dr. Jeffrey Robertson is an Associate Professor of Diplomatic Studies at Yonsei University. Before academia, he worked for the Australian Government in the field of diplomacy, foreign policy, and North Asia. His research interests include the diplomatic practice and foreign policy of middle powers with a focus on North Asia and the Korean Peninsula. He is currently completing *The North Korea Watchers*, an academic monograph using ethnographic fiction to reconstitute the diverse stories of the North Korea watcher community into a cohesive and engaging study of espionage, foreign policy and folly. He writes and updates research at <https://junotane.substack.com> and on Twitter @junotane.

Mr. Abhishek Kumar Singh is a Ph.D. Candidate in International Relations at Kookmin University, Seoul. He has previously worked as a Research Intern under an Indian Member of Parliament and Research Assistant at Kookmin University. He was honored with the LG scholarship for academic excellence, followed by the Korean Government Scholarship at Yonsei and Kookmin University. He has spoken at South Korea's

National Assembly Hall on the North Korean nuclear threat and Track 1.5 meeting on the India-Korea Indo-Pacific strategy. Moreover, he actively contributes research articles to reputable think tanks. His interest lies in Indo-Pacific, East Asia, South Asia, Terrorism, and Climate Change.

Dr. Dattesh D. Parulekar is an Assistant Professor of International Relations, at the School of International and Area Studies (SIAS), Goa University. Some of his areas of specialization include *India's Foreign Policy, Strategic Maritime Affairs w.r.t. the Indo-Pacific, African Strategic Affairs, Latin American Political Economy, etc.* He is a Visiting Faculty at national defence institutions, viz., Naval War College, College of Defence Management, College of Air Warfare, Defence Services Staff College, Army War College and National Defence College. Besides, he is a Visiting Faculty at the Rashtriya Raksha University (Gujarat), as also a Visiting Faculty at the Indian Institute of Technology, Kanpur, and the Indian Institute of Management, Indore, besides being a Fellow at the Middle East Institute (MEI), New Delhi. He is professionally associated with universities and think tanks in China, and across Europe, Latin America, and South Asia.

Ms. Eerishika Pankaj is the Director of the New Delhi based think-tank, the Organisation for Research on China and Asia (ORCA), which focuses on decoding domestic Chinese politics and its impact on Beijing's foreign policymaking. She is also an Editorial and Research Assistant to the Series Editor for Routledge Series on Think Asia; a Young Leader in the 2020 cohort of the Pacific Forum's Young Leaders Program; a Commissioning Editor with E-International Relations for their Political Economy section; a Member of the Indo-Pacific Circle, a Council Member of the WICCI's India-EU Business Council and a Fellow in the Emerging Quad Think Tank Leader's Lead on Demand project by the US State Department.

Dr. Wondeuk Cho is currently an Assistant Professor of the Department of Asian and Pacific Studies, and the Center of ASEAN-Indian Studies at the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security (IFANS), Korea

National Diplomatic Academy (KNDA) and a visiting professor at Yonsei University. His main research topics consist of international relations of the Indo-Pacific region including South Asia and Southeast Asia, and maritime security in the Indo-Pacific region. His academic articles were published in *Defence and Peace Economics*, *Pacific Focus*, and other Korean international relations journals including *National Strategy*, *Journal of Northeast Asia Research*, *Korean Political Science Review*, etc.

Dr. Chiew-Ping Hoo is Senior Lecturer in Strategic Studies and International Relations, National University of Malaysia (UKM). She is concurrently Co-Founder and Co-Convenor of East Asian International Relations (EAIR) Caucus, Adjunct Lecturer at the Malaysian Armed Forces Defence College (MAFDC), and Editorial Board Member of the AUP Politics and IR in Asia Series, Amsterdam University Press. Her main research interests include US-ROK alliance strategy towards North Korean provocations, Southeast Asia-North Korea relations, ASEAN-Korea partnership, and nuclear security in Asia-Pacific. From 2021 until early 2023, Dr. Hoo was a member of Asia Pacific Nuclear Advisory Panel (APNAP), established by the British American Security Information Council (BASIC), a think-tank based in London promoting understanding on nuclear risks and nuclear security. Hoo is the editor of *The New Southern Policy: Catalyst for Deepening ASEAN-ROK Relations* (ISIS Malaysia, 2020), and a forthcoming co-editing book volume (with Shine Choi and Brian Bridges) on Southeast Asia-DPRK relations. She received her PhD in Politics and International Relations from La Trobe University, Australia.

Dr. Stephen Nagy received his PhD in international relations/studies from Waseda University in 2008. His main affiliation is as a professor at the International Christian University, Tokyo. Previously he was a Special Research Associate at Waseda University (2007-2009) and an Assistant Professor at the Department of Japanese Studies at the Chinese University of Hong Kong (2009-2014). Concurrently, he is a fellow at the Canadian Global Affairs Institute (CGAI); a visiting fellow with the Japan Institute for International Affairs (JIIA); a senior fellow at the Macdonald-Laurier

Institute (MLI); and a senior fellow with the East Asia Security Centre (EASC). He also serves as the director of policy studies for the Yokosuka Council of Asia Pacific Studies (YCAPS), spearheading their Indo-Pacific Policy Dialogue series.

Ms. Mahima Duggal is an Associate Fellow at the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) in New Delhi. She is also an Associated Research Fellow at the Stockholm Centre for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA) of the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP) in Sweden, and Editorial Assistant to Series Editor for the Routledge Studies on Think Asia. Ms Duggal's work is focused on the changing balance of power in the Indo-Pacific region, and she has written extensively on Indian foreign policy, India-China ties, East Asian security dynamics, US alliances and partnerships in the Indo-Pacific, and Europe's interest in the Indo-Pacific for both national and international platforms. She is also a former Fellow of the Emerging Leaders' program of the National Institute of Unification Education (Ministry of Unification of South Korea), and the Daniel K Inouye Asia-Pacific Centre for Security Studies (Hawaii).

Dr. Wooyeal Paik is an associate professor at the Department of Political Science and International Studies; deputy director, at Yonsei Institute of North Korean Studies; and Director, of the Center for International Relations, Aerospace Strategy & Technology Institute at Yonsei University, Seoul. He is also a visiting fellow at Institut de recherche stratégique de l'École militaire (IRSEM), Paris and adjunct professor at Vrije Universiteit Brussel, Brussels. Advising diverse Korean ministries, he was on the advisory committee on Korea's New Southern Policy.

Dr. Jagannath Panda is the Head of the Stockholm Center for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs at the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Sweden. He is also a Senior Fellow at The Hague Center for Strategic Studies, The Netherlands, and an International Research Fellow at the Canon Institute for Global Studies in Japan. Dr. Panda has testified to the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission

at the U.S. Congress. He is also the Series Editor for Routledge Studies on Think Asia. As a senior expert on China, East Asia, and Indo-Pacific affairs, Dr. Panda's research focuses primarily on India's relations with Indo-Pacific powers (China, Japan, Korea, USA); China-India Relations, EU-India Relations; and EU's infrastructure, connectivity and maritime initiatives in Indo-Pacific. Dr. Panda is the principal investigator of the Korea Foundation-funded ISDP project "Framing an India-South Korea Connect in Indo-Pacific: Minilateralism to Multilateralism".

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Executive Summary

Choong Yong Ahn and Jagannath Panda

- In recent years, the term “Global South”—largely spanning countries in Africa, Central and Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean—has gained tremendous geopolitical currency. One of the most salient drivers of this reclamation of the so-called emerging and developing world as a symbolic power has been India’s rising strategic and diplomatic prominence.
- As a vocal member of the community of diverse states, India has refocused its efforts to place the South and its concerns center stage by coalescing with “like-minded” partners, which was effectively reflected during the 2023 G20 presidency. South Korea is an integral aspect of this global aim.
- Notwithstanding South Korea’s lack of an official endorsement of the term Global South, South Korea’s commitment in policy to foster a prosperous global community through shared global development certainly envisages an inclusive vision. Its current ambition to become a “global pivotal state” has only ensured the advancement of this developmental goal.
- Moreover, as a former aid recipient and today’s advanced economy, it has also become an exemplary global economic and social development model. Thus, South Korea’s voice is pivotal in matters related to the Global South.
- Together, South Korea and India can help forge a more equitable global governance system by working together to minimize differences; promoting the interests of the Global South; and advocating for reforms, particularly in multilateral forums, that would make these forums more equitable and democratic.

- In South Korea's quest to be a global pivotal state in the new Indo-Pacific construct, India has emerged as a key strategic partner in providing a new impetus to Korea's geopolitical and economic ambitions on a global scale. Both India and South Korea can play an important role in the Indo-Pacific construct based on their common strong security relationship with the United States and owing to shared democratic values in realizing their sustainable development agenda through minilateral and multilateral frameworks.
- At the same time, it is also important to examine the rationale of the Yoon government's "global pivotal state" rhetoric, particularly in the context of taking a longer-term approach to building South Korea-India relations. South Korea needs to build a domestic constituency that supports the India-Korea bilateral relationship in the longer term. To do this, it needs to go beyond the rhetoric.
- Notwithstanding this ambitious goal, South Korea's absence from key minilateral groups has led to questions regarding the country's actual influence and importance in global affairs. Yoon's steps have also led to South Korea's stronger alignment with Western liberal democracies, which comes with potential risks. In addition, South Korea's geopolitical turn has not been bold enough: Seoul is still engrossed with Pyongyang's nuclear threat, whereas other issues of the Indo-Pacific remain marginal.
- South Korea must not overlook that its middle power status is vulnerable, and so must actively seek to broaden its global engagements to bolster its international political influence and ensure a secure future. Embracing a more proactive and inclusive diplomatic approach will be crucial for South Korea to navigate the evolving global landscape and to effectively address the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead.
- For example, South Korea can utilize its robust economy to elevate its diplomatic standing by actively cooperating in areas like green growth, blue economy initiatives, digital trade, and increasing Official Development Assistance to support countries in need and its partner

nations. Such actions will contribute to elevating South Korea's diplomatic influence and international reputation.

- In terms of the India-Korea bilateral, despite figuring within the top ten economies in global sweepstakes, their economic engagement and interchange is arguably slender and relatively tepid. Seoul's underwhelming footprint within India's infrastructure building is in stark contrast to Japan, which has a robust presence in financially and logistically underwriting some of India's iconic infrastructure projects. South Korea also needs to leverage its broad spectrum of multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional competencies in capacity-building and capability-enhancement initiatives in developing societies.
- Nevertheless, Korea's embrace of the Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific marks an inflection point of sorts in tandem with the ideation of a global pivotal state, carrying refreshing dimensions that could be enterprisingly productive. If India and South Korea shed mutual inhibitions and endeavor to purposefully translate complementarities into operative synergies, they can deepen their natural convergence.
- Beyond the bilateral, an area of multilateral connect is South Korea's potential role within the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) Plus framework, particularly in supply chain diversification for aiding global growth via the influence of the Korea Inc. By leveraging its diplomatic acumen, economic strength, and technological advancements, South Korea can contribute to international problem-solving and bridge the gap between developed and developing nations.
- At the heart of South Korea's ascent to a potential global pivotal state lies the collective force of "Korea Inc," which can leverage its global economic influence, technological innovation, and extensive supply chain networks. Its diversified operations across industries and international markets align with the "Quad Plus" objectives of fostering stability, resilience, and sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.
- Importantly, it provides an opportunity to diversify some of the most

important supply chains away from unipolar sources such as China, especially as many of these *chaebols* have already implemented such efforts. At the same time, despite their criticality for South Korea, questions remain whether the chaebols will be able to adapt to the changing economic landscape and maintain their dominance in the South Korean economy.

- Moreover, South Korea and India need to expand their collaborative efforts by engaging with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Seoul and New Delhi should increase their engagement in third-party countries located in Southeast Asia, as well as promote Korea-ASEAN-India trilateral cooperation.
- They should create synergies between the Indo-Pacific strategy, the Act East Policy, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific by utilizing the existing ASEAN-led multilateral and other multilateral and subregional cooperation platforms.
- The four potential areas of cooperation are as follows: (1) Institutionalization of the India-ASEAN-ROK trilateral dialogue platform, (2) maritime cooperation, (3) cooperation for enhancing connectivity, and (4) economic and technology cooperation.
- The Korea-ASEAN-India trilateral can help in responding to emerging regional and global challenges through more flexible, inclusive, and issue-driven multilateral cooperation.
- In terms of synergizing middle power diplomacy in the Indo-Pacific, India, Japan, and South Korea should align interests and capabilities toward deliverable and sustainable foreign policy coordination. They need to cooperate proactively and pragmatically to secure their national interests in order to avoid being swayed by the U.S.-China strategic competition.
- To accomplish such objectives, they could use their collective comparative advantages to develop new sustainable and meaningful initiatives. These could be enabled via stand-alone trilateral cooperation or by plugging into existing multilateral or multilateral forums such as AUKUS (the Australia-UK-U.S. defense pact), the Indo-Pacific

Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), and the Quad.

- At the same time, such multifaceted cooperation goals will need to note that the India-South Korea strategic relationship still remains somewhat limited. Nevertheless, the growth in the India-South Korea bilateral and the emerging strategic dimensions of their interactions point to the immense importance Delhi places on Seoul as an equal partner, with shared values, vision, and ambitions.
- To overcome the historically inconsistent and fragmented partnership, and step up their strategic, critical, and multidimensional bilateral ties in the Indo-Pacific, India and South Korea must focus on building political synergy; deepening economic and technological cooperation; strengthening the security vertical; and exploring a global connect.
- For example, in technology, India and South Korea need to change their cooperation approach from pure market economic principles to an economic and technology security orientation. As such, even though the two countries have tried to collaborate in several strategic sectors such as defense industry, space, shipbuilding (submarine), and biotechnology, the ground realities have not matched the political rhetoric in the last two decades.
- Thus, in this new era, the Korea-India bilateral technological cooperation needs to witness a transformation: The time has come for the two sides to formulate a real “security” alignment in the context of multi-dimensional securities convergence, if not alliance. This represents just a change of fundamental structure within the global political-economic-technological security structure.
- Another critical area of convergence is defense diplomacy, which is emerging as a key foreign policy tool. Their emerging defense industry collaboration is looking to push the envelope for joint research, joint production, and joint export in defense industrial cooperation, including in cyber, space, and intelligence-sharing domains.
- It also aims to enhance its respective strengths in defense manufacturing and technology. Joint research and production ventures have been undertaken in recent years, such as the co-development of the K9

Vajra, which is essentially India's version of the K9 Thunder.

- For South Korea, India—the fourth-highest military spender in the world—is a valuable partner. A defense technological partnership will help Korea mitigate overdependence on Chinese manufacturing. It will also give impetus to South Korea's aspiration for a 5 percent share in the global export market by 2027 to become the world's fourth-largest defense exporter.
- For India, too, its goal to build a domestic technological manufacturing hub will benefit from South Korea's long-standing expertise in developing a credible domestic defense industry, and help India achieve its goal of substantially enhancing its defense exports.
- For India and South Korea to find greater strategic convergence, however, the two partners need to take proactive measures, such as enabling new-era collaborations on critical technologies centered on defense and security.

Introduction

Global South: Can South Korea and India Catalyze Equivalent Partnerships for Global Good?

Jagannath Panda

In recent years, the term “Global South”—largely spanning countries in Africa, Central and Latin America, Asia, and the Caribbean—has gained tremendous geopolitical currency. One of the most salient drivers of this reclamation of the so-called emerging and developing world as a symbolic power has been India’s rising strategic and diplomatic prominence.¹ In 2023, particularly, hosting the twin presidencies of the Group of Twenty (G20) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), India as a developing country and leading voice has brought the concerns of the Global South center-stage.

This renewed push for expanding ties with the South was seen in the Group of Seven (G7) summit (hosted by Japan) in 2023, too, which at the same time also reignited the terminological debate by skirting the term altogether—instead using a combination of “emerging/developing” partners or countries in its communique.²

Undoubtedly, India’s “special strategic partner” South Korea—a vital member of the G20 and an invited participant at the 2023 G7—has contributed significantly over the years to the Global South through its evolving official development assistance (ODA). However, it has been conspicuous by its absence over any official commentary on the Global South—unlike Japan that has since January 2023 been espousing the need to share governance responsibilities with the South as a partner.³

In such a scenario, will South Korea that has now in place an Indo-Pacific strategy and is looking to be a “Global Pivotal State” join India in

the quest for a new liberal order marked by “equivalent” partnerships with the Global South—not just an aid provider?

Has South Korea Embraced the New Realities vis-à-vis the Global South?

In September 2022, South Korea’s President Yoon Suk Yeol in his address to the United Nations (UN) General Assembly highlighted the need for global cooperation to mitigate the risks of the increasing gap between nations, from digital access and green transition to the fight for global health.⁴ The address nowhere mentions “Global South,” instead using the cumbersome but specificity-oriented phrase “countries with limited fiscal space and technical expertise.”⁵

South Korea’s approach, thus, seems to acknowledge the essence of the debates surrounding the term. Currently, some quarters, including the grouping for rich, industrialized nations G7, are reluctant to accept the term Global South despite, mostly because of, the term’s political origins; other reasons include the term’s inadequacy (e.g., contradictions as a geographical label) to truly reflect the “great heterogeneity and the dynamics” of states typically included.⁶

At the same time, Global South as a politically significant anti-colonial “cohesion” symbol encompasses the movement toward a new-era evolving global order that embraces its rich diversities.⁷ That major Asian powers China, India, and Japan (as evidenced by Kishida’s speeches) are actively using the term, with support from states within its fold, attests to its importance. For example, the “Voice of the Global South” Summit hosted by India in January 2023 included 125 country representatives from the South.⁸

Notwithstanding South Korea’s lack of an official endorsement—and what appears to be a conscious choice, as evidenced by Yoon’s aforementioned UN speech—of the term Global South, South Korea’s commitment in policy to foster a prosperous global community through shared global development envisages an inclusive vision.⁹ As a post-Korean War aid recipient that not only has transformed itself into an advanced economy, an aid donor, and a development partner but has become also

an exemplary model for economic and social development for the rest of the emerging and developing world, South Korea's voice is significant in matters related to the Global South.¹⁰

India-South Korea: Global Developmental Partners for Peace and Prosperity?

In May 2023, the meeting between President Yoon and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi on the sidelines of the G7 summit included the development of the "Global South" in their agenda.¹¹ This clearly highlighted that their shared commitment to South Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy and India's Act East Policy is more than just their economic, defense, or technological bilateral concerns and entails strategic regional development too.

Importantly, South Korea's developmental pitch with the objective of enhancing "policy coherence and aid effectiveness" is in line with India's outcome-oriented Global South approach that aims to amplify the voices of "over three fourths of the planet's population that is most vulnerable to the deleterious impact of the several interlinked risks."¹²

The Yoon administration's ODA initiatives for the next five years are designed keeping in mind South Korea's mission to become a "Global Pivotal State"; strengthening relations with developing countries and boosting linkages between bilateral and multilateral cooperation is naturally an integral part of this vision.¹³ The focus is on enhancing "multidimensional" international cooperation to address global challenges like climate change and post-pandemic recovery through the creation of a strategic, advanced ODA ecosystem as well as digital transformation.¹⁴

These aims tie up well with India's consultative, human-centric vision of achieving development in partner countries through "simple, scalable and sustainable solutions."¹⁵ In this context, India's new initiatives include "Aarogya Maitri" (an extension of "Vaccine Maitri," the post-pandemic example of South-South cooperation) and Global South Centre of Excellence that will provide development solutions like electronic payment systems and e-governance.¹⁶

Areas of Synergy

Further, while collaboration between India and South Korea encompasses a wide range of areas, global security and governance management stand out as critical domains. Both countries face common security threats, including terrorism and regional instabilities. By working together to address these challenges, they can enhance regional and global stability. In 2018, the two have already committed to work together on non-proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and delivery systems, particularly to terrorists and non-state actors.¹⁷ Their strengthening defense cooperation in line with the respective Indo-Pacific visions will surely build on this aspect, and have a subsequent impact on security tie-ups with regional states in South and Southeast Asia.¹⁸

Additionally, they must jointly advocate for reforms in global governance structures to ensure fair representation and inclusivity for developing nations, as well as for capable, reliable middle powers that can effect meaningful changes. In these forums, the two countries have often been able to find common ground and work together to advance the interests of the Global South. For example, South Korea has supported India in its bid for membership in the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG).¹⁹

Other key areas of their developmental cooperation aimed at the Global South include a number of multilateral issues, such as climate change (finding new synergy via the Korean Green New Deal), global health, infrastructure connectivity, renewable energy technologies development, and digital access.

The two partners are already working together on several priority areas within India such as transportation, environment, and the development of renewable energy technologies, including energy storage systems (ESS), smart grids and electric vehicle charging systems, to help meet India's growing needs.²⁰ Extending such cooperation multilaterally or via third-country cooperation in South Asia would enhance regional integration.

In global health, South Korea under Yoon has been vocal about enhancing engagement with the developing and emerging countries. For example, South Korea has pledged US\$300 million to push for global research and development in the fight against COVID-19.²¹ South Korea

has also increased its contribution to the Global Fund (India, too, is a donor and recipient) to fight against infectious diseases.²² Considering India's proactive record domestically and globally in responding to COVID-19 vaccine challenges and as a provider of affordable health products, the two make for ideal partners.

The Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which is undergoing a green transition and where both are members (South Korea is the fifth largest and India second largest shareholder) would be a viable forum to explore joint digital and physical connectivity projects particularly in Southeast Asian states, with which both India and South Korea have advanced relations. Moreover, South Korea has recently declared its intent to partner with the AIIB and is looking for new joint project opportunities.²³

In addition, South Korea is also looking to expand cooperation with the World Bank in the climate and digital sectors through "tailored cooperation."²⁴ India, which is still a lower middle income country and an aid recipient but is gearing toward building its capacities as a donor, too, must capitalize on South Korea's intent and expertise. This will, in turn, help further both South Korea's and India's respective strategic autonomy and global governance goals.

Toward Greater Global Governance?

In June 2023, South Korea was elected by the UN General Assembly to serve a two-year term (2024-2025) as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council—its third time on the council.²⁵ India, which served its eighth term during 2021-22, has already declared its candidature for the 2028-29 term.²⁶ Via this coveted position, South Korea would seek to expand its diplomatic outreach in the UN Security Council to address global security challenges, primarily to advance its North Korean agenda. But it should also be a time to advance the reforms agenda. Importantly, South Korea is not in entirely consonance with the Group of Four's (G4, comprising Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan) proposal to increase the number of permanent members ("with or without veto").²⁷ But it does agree on the urgency of the UNSC reforms.²⁸ Considering the evolving geopolitical tensions, India and South Korea must work on

their differences to create a consensus for the greater security concerns, including in Northeast and South Asia.

Together, India and South Korea have the potential to forge a strong partnership that would benefit both countries and the wider Global South. Particularly in multilateral forums, by working together to minimize differences; promoting the interests of the Global South; advocating for reforms that would make these forums more equitable and democratic; and providing financial and technical assistance to other countries in the Global South, the two countries can promote economic development, global peace and security, and reform of the global governance system that would create a more prosperous and stable world for everyone.

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Special Note

Enhancing ROK-India Strategic Partnership in ROK's Indo-Pacific Construct: Pivotal State, Minilateralism, and Multilateralism

Choong-yong Ahn

South Korea's Yoon Suk-yeol government declared in December 2022 its "Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region", in which South Korea (ROK) would play a global pivotal state role.¹ The document is basically the ROK's de facto flagship diplomatic manifesto, adding a "prosperity" component to the U.S. drive for a "Free and Open Indo-Pacific." Undoubtedly, South Korea has shifted from the "structural ambiguity" of the previous Moon Jae-in administration to "strategic clarity" by aligning clearly with the U.S. democratic value system and the U.S. initiated Indo-Pacific construct in navigating the increasingly intensifying U.S.-China rivalry.²

To this end, the Yoon administration has resumed the ROK-U.S. joint defensive drills, which were suspended during the Moon administration to reaffirm the U.S.-Korea security pact against North Korean military provocations. Toward China, the Yoon government announced a principled diplomacy on the basis of mutual respect and common interests, not to decouple the ROK from China in economic linkages but to derisk ROK's excessive economic dependence on China.

In the ROK's quest for a global pivotal state in the new Indo-Pacific construct, India has emerged as a key strategic partner in driving ROK's geo-political and economic ambition on a global scale. Both India and the ROK can play an important role in the Indo-Pacific construct based on a

common strong security relationship with the U.S. and shared freedom value in realizing their sustainable development agenda in a minilateral and multilateral framework. For example, both countries belong to the U.S.-led IPEF, which seeks a new liberal order and cooperation schemes in the digital and de-carbonization era to contain China's assertive rise.

The purpose of this paper is 1) to present the nature of ROK's global pivotal state and ROK's role in ensuring liberal order in Indo-Pacific, 2) to analyze bilateral performance and prospects under the ROK-India Special Strategic Partnership with an emphasis on the security-trade nexus amid the intensifying U.S.-China technology hegemony and middle power coalition to navigate the geo-economic fragmentation caused by the U.S.-China rivalry, and finally 3) to suggest some policy recommendations for the ROK-India Special Strategic Partnership to mature in view of the key challenges ahead so as to achieve sustainable and inclusive growth in Indo-Pacific.

Post-Pandemic ROK's Global Pivotal State Role in Minilateralism and Multilateralism in the Indo-Pacific

The concept of global pivotal state can be viewed from various angles, ranging from the hegemonic power setting unilateral rules in a unipolar system, and an effective balancer of conflicting interests of competing stakeholders in international relations to an active participant making constructive proposals to produce international public goods and necessary international coordination thereof. Given the ROK's present military and economic power, Korea's role as a global pivotal state may rest on an active participation in international rule making and public goods for liberal order and norms by "actively seeking out agenda for cooperation and shape discussions in the region and wider world".³ The ROK's core values and implementation strategy contained in its Indo-Pacific construct address an active outreach to many countries inclusively across globe to pursue a rules-based liberal system and sharing its development experiences and knowledge with the Global South as a soft power⁴ with increased Official Development Assistance (ODA) resources. This represents a significant transformation for the ROK, departing from

its conventional diplomatic trajectory focused on the Korean Peninsula and surrounding four powers, namely the U.S., Japan, China, and Russia.

In connection with South Korea's development cooperation with the Global South, South Korea has undergone a significant transformation from being a recipient of international aid post Korean war poverty stricken years to becoming a donor country while achieving a miracle economic growth. In 1982, South Korea initiated the International Development Exchange Program (IDEP) to invite foreign government officials and policy makers to share Korea's experience of rapid economic development via various training programs. Then, South Korea enacted the Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) Act in December 1986 to provide soft loans for developing countries and finally established the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) in 1991 to centralize and better coordinate diverse types of technology aid for development projects for developing countries.⁵ KOICA now operates in 46 countries around the world. In 1996, South Korea joined the OECD and the continuing increase of ODA resources allowed South Korea to join the Development Assistance Committee in 2009,⁶ which signified South Korea to become the first aid providing country from an aid recipient status. In addition to providing concessional loans to developing countries' development projects, South Korea has carried on a variety of Knowledge Sharing Programs to diffuse its development experiences to the Global South based on a spirit of South-South cooperation to help poorer countries map out their implementable development strategies.

The ROK is one of the most FTA dependent economies in the world. Its trading partners occupy 80 percent of global GDP. The ROK has established the effective robust Korea-U.S. FTA since 2012, becoming one of the few countries having a meaningful free trade deal with the U.S. The ROK is also a founding signatory state of the largest trade partnership, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), which became effective in 2022. The ROK is going to submit a formal application soon to the most advanced FTA club, the Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership or CPTPP, the backbone of which was based on the Korea-U.S. FTA. Most CPTPP members welcome the

ROK's entry to the free trade club as they gladly accepted the UK's entry.

A host of minilateral and multilateral architectures existing in the Indo-Pacific are presented in Table 1. Many of them are motivated to secure supply chain resilience under the increasingly looming security-trade nexus logic. At present, the ROK belongs virtually to every organization in the economy related pacts and consultation schemes in Table 1, and, is seeking a membership to the CPTPP soon. In terms of security-related architectures, the ROK is interested in joining the Quad+ in addition to the 70-year-old U.S.-ROK ally relationship, one of the strongest security bondages in the world.

Table 1: Minilateral and multilateral architectures in Indo-Pacific

Free Trade & FDI	Consultation Schemes	Security architectures
CPTPP	IPEF	QUAD
RECP	CHIP Four	QUAD+
AEC	DEPA	AUKUS
ASEAN+3	APEC	SCO
ARF	FVEY	

All the architectures in Table 1 interact with each other in the U.S.-China bipolar world to cause ongoing geo-economic fragmentation. In the worst narrative, we might run into the danger of a Kindleberger trap or even Thucydides' war⁷ if the U.S.-China rivalry is mismanaged out of proportion. As Lee (2020)⁸ pointed out, most Asian countries do not want to be forced to side with either the U.S. or China. Then, a crucial role of a global pivotal state can be to help the two superpowers search for a strategic convergence or competitive co-existence in the years to come

ROK's Special Strategic Partnership with India: Performance and Middle Power Coalition

India and the ROK have no remorseful legacies each other and share the

values of a democratic political system and market economy, as well as a rules-based, open and inclusive regional system. India is now the most populous state with the youngest population structure in the world. It is expected to become the third-largest economy this decade—and is currently the fifth largest, having successfully weathered the COVID-19 pandemic and registered the highest growth rate in the world, at 8.7 percent and 6.8 percent in 2021 and 2022, respectively.

Although the ROK-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) has been effective since 2010, bilateral trade and FDI flows have not produced the desired results, requiring a new momentum to tap inherent and complementary industrial structure and factor endowments into full swing. In comparison with the ROK's economic linkage with Vietnam, Korea-India economic connectivity has been far lower. Over the period 2019-2022, ROK's cumulative bilateral trade with India and ROK's cumulative outbound FDI to India recorded \$88.9 billion and \$1.8 billion, respectively, whereas ROK's corresponding figures with Vietnam registered \$297.7 billion and 12.9 billion, respectively.⁹ Major reasons for this can be offered by the fact that Vietnam has been much more active in liberalizing its economy, as evident in its membership of both the CPTPP and RCEP and highly appealing business friendly environment. In the past several decades, the ROK has been actively involved in forward and backward integration in trade and FDI with ASEAN member-states and is likely to do more given the RCEP's free trade framework.¹⁰

In comparison with India-Japan economic contacts over the period 2000-2021, the ROK's cumulative outbound FDI to India reached \$5.1 billion, only 0.9 percent of the total FDI India received, while Japan registered \$36.3 billion, constituting 6.3 percent of the total, according to Indian government sources. Indeed, Japan has been very active, initiating the Indo-Pacific concept and as a key proponent of the Quad. Japan is using its massive ODA resource to construct a Japanese-type bullet train to connect Mumbai and Ahmedabad and a highway linking Mumbai and New Delhi. Along the high-speed railway and highway, Japan has been fostering a variety of industrial parks for Japanese companies. Regular

bilateral summits and numerous high-level ministerial meetings between the two countries have established a high-trust relationship.

While staying within the U.S. anchored likeminded security domain, ROK and India need to pursue “strategic autonomy” by making middle power coalitions with other like-minded countries to ensure a rules-based inclusive regional order. The U.S. is turning to inward-looking protectionism and in response China is also turning to self-sufficiency strategy in high tech areas especially in semiconductor by “weaponizing” their dominant endowments of strategic materials such as rare earths, nickel, lithium, and manganese. In recent years as seen in the Inflation Reduction Act and the Chip 4 and Science Act, the U.S. has taken unilaterally assertive, if not coercive, protectionist trade and investment policies at the expense of smaller and less powerful economies. In response, China has also taken highly coercive actions against those trading partners siding with the U.S. anti-China policy to disrupt supply chains of strategic materials and punishing foreign investors for security reasons.

The concept of economic security can be defined in many different ways¹¹ but has also been used to justify protectionist behavior on the basis of a security-trade nexus. As a result, even like-minded countries need to agree on a demarcation line between military and civilian technologies. This is particularly true for semiconductors. As a result, a sudden and coercive disruption of the existing supply chain should be viewed as a core dimension of economic security. As Yusuf and Leipziger (2021) point out, many firms are adopting a ‘Just in Case’ diversification strategy deviating from the “Just in Time” strategy with no inventory accumulation.¹² For ROK’s resilient supply chain, it is critical to diversify the outsourcing of strategic materials. In this context, India and ROK can enhance strategic bilateral cooperation to acquire needed strategic materials, and in ensuring respective supply chain resilience, decarbonization and anti-corruption measures as prescribed in the major objectives of the IPEF as the charter member states.

India has been a core founding member of Quad to ensure freedom of navigation in the Indo-Pacific and a rules-based regional order. Recently,

India has also visibly tilted to the U.S. in security arrangements, especially against China. The ROK also respects the value of freedom of navigation, which is critically important in the Indian Ocean and South China Sea to guarantee the safe and less expensive passage of ROK's heavy merchandise and oil cargos. South Korea, along with New Zealand and Vietnam, has already participated in 2020 in the first working-group meeting of the Quad to address new areas of economic cooperation such as public health, green growth and digital connectivity. In this context, India and ROK shares a common denominator in preserving the freedom of navigation and regional public goods while deepening security linkage with the U.S. Given the increasingly emerging security-trade/FDI nexus, the ROK's and India's economic contacts with the U.S. are likely to increase—not only in trilateral trade/FDI but strategic R&D collaborations in future and defense industries.

Concurrently, there are some important caveats in India-ROK economic relations. India has not joined either of the two mega deals of CPTPP and RCEP although it has several bilateral deals like CEPA with Korea. India has a long tradition of import substitution but more recently is engaged in rapid transition to become more outward-looking to attract FDI and to push for export promotion. However, some import substitution legacies are still lingering in many micro sectors. True, India can be easily tempted to pursue a self-sufficiency policy given its vast domestic market so as to protect self-employed retailers and domestic infant industries. To a great extent, the ROK has also been experiencing high wages and uneasy industrial relation issues.

Given the prevailing protectionist sentiment and inherent weakness of Indian industries, it is not surprising that India had opted out at the concluding round of RCEP negotiation for the fear of massive inflow of consumer as well as intermediate goods from China. Nevertheless, India's last minute withdrawal from RCEP has somehow defamed India's determination of opening the domestic market. Soon or later, it is highly desired that India join the RCEP, maybe with some safeguard measures negotiated with existing members to enhance India's market opening and subsequent economic competitiveness.

Although the RCEP's tariff and NTB concessions are far shallower than the CPTPP, it is still highly significant that the RCEP's rule of origin adopts a unified accumulation system plus self-certification method by all exporters including small and big business. Furthermore, the RCEP provides cross-border direct investment protection and promotion. As a result, intra-RCEP trade and investment are likely to rise by making all RCEP members take trade and investment diversion effects from non-RCEP states. In transition, in order to make up the loss caused by the diversion effects by RCEP member-states from India, India should pursue strong bilateral FTAs, including the India-ROK CEPA. For this purpose, the ROK and India should upgrade urgently the CEPA to increase bilateral trade and investment ties.

Recently, India has visibly tilted to the U.S. for its security reinforcement and economic cooperation in high tech areas, deviating substantially from its non-allied tradition as evident in the recent the U.S.-India summit, India's core Quad membership, aggressive "Make in India", and strengthened naval power development. It is well timed with the ROK's reaffirmed security alliance with the U.S. as demonstrated in the initiation of the U.S.-ROK nuclear consultation group.¹³

On the security-economy nexus side, it is impressive that at this year's India Republic Day parade, the ROK's K-9 self-propelled artillery appeared as depicted on the front page of ROK's *Chosun Ilbo*, symbolizing a great deal of security cooperation already in the works between the two countries. Recently, the ROK has been driving the arms industry as an important export sector as arms exports have risen sharply from \$3.17 billion in 2017 to \$17 billion in 2022,¹⁴ transacting with like-minded security conscious countries.

Challenges Ahead and Moving to a New Level

India is a country of diversity, consisting of polarized income brackets, early, middle and late industries including a still-huge agricultural sector, self-employed micro service businesses, small and medium enterprises, modern sophisticated industries including top-notch generic pharmaceutical industries, IT, and space technologies.¹⁵ India also needs to

develop a variety of SOCs. Its huge population is its greatest asset; Prime Minister Modi claims that “India’s big data due to its massive population is national wealth.” India has a large cadre of world-class scientists and engineers, IT powerhouses and many available workers at cheaper wages than in China.

The ROK is also well known for its high tech prowess including semiconductors, nuclear power plants, LNG shipbuilding, electric vehicles, advanced process technologies, and a modern arms industry. The ROK has also an admirable record of managing high tech SOC projects in Southeast Asia and Middle East countries, including the first-ever atomic power plant in the UAE.

For an immediate breakthrough to enhance the bilateral economic connectivity, India and the ROK should upgrade its CEPA agreement. We have seen that the most favored tariff rate India had applied was once lower than the CEPA tariff concession rate, implying that the CEPA agreement has been in administrative lethargy. A timely up-gradation of the CEPA is likely to enable the two countries to reach the bilateral trade target (set at the 2018 joint summit) of \$50 billion even beyond by 2030.

It is also encouraging that the ROK’s Economic Development Cooperation Fund of over US\$1.9 billion is set for an intelligent transport system on the Nagpur-Mumbai Super Communication Expressway Project in Delhi,¹⁶ which is likely to trigger various ROK engineered SOC projects in India. On the defense industry collaboration, it should be noted that India and the ROK signed a roadmap for Defense Industries Cooperation in 2020.¹⁷ Bilateral maritime cooperation can be further developed in the areas of shipbuilding, prevention of marine pollution, anti-piracy, anti-terrorism, anti-trafficking, in addition to public health as required in the Quad Plus working groups.

Despite the great potential of economic collaboration and some related positive signs, India and the ROK have not pushed bilateral cooperation to its full potential. Although some Korean companies invested early in India’s automobile and electronic sectors, ROK’s outbound FDI to India has not progressed to the level of India’s recent economic rise.

Many challenging issues remain for upgrading the India-ROK

Special Strategic Partnership. India still has some import substitution legacies in liberalizing its trade and investment regime. India's business environment needs to be upgraded as it ranks 62nd globally on a World Bank index compared to the ROK's 5th rank.¹⁸ A more investment-friendly environment with much-required reform in market regulations are urgently needed in India. The ROK still suffers from a militant labor movement with unabated wage hikes and frequent strikes, which is detrimental to induce needed inbound Foreign Direct Investment. India's opaque regulatory regimes must be deregulated toward global standards to induce the needed FDI for technology transfer and joint R&D activities with global leaders. In a sense, the same is also true for ROK to achieve industrial peace for high tech FDI inflows. It is also highly urged for India to adopt an aftercare service for multinational enterprises similar to ROK's Aftercare Ombudsman system for inbound foreign direct investors.¹⁹ True, the ROK has registered a consistent trade surplus vis a vis India. Although it is a natural consequence for India to undertake industrial transformation, India should then augment its inbound FDI from the ROK. The ROK has learned the hard lessons of supply chain resilience by diversifying its trading partners and outbound FDI destinations, after being excessively tilted to China. In this context, ROK should not put its major portion of "eggs" in one basket but diversify in different but like-minded baskets.

Mutual trust can be cultivated through ROK's formidable investments for India's urgently needed SOCs, defense industry collaborations given external security threats, and joint future-oriented R&D projects, going beyond bilateral trade. In this context, the strategic priority of industrial cooperation needs to focus on the arms industry, AI, Bio, R&D, semiconductor, etc. ROK-India cooperation should be upgraded to the level of India-Japan cooperation. This will allow trilateral cooperation mechanism of ROK-Japan-India, and ROK-ASEAN-India link after ROK and Japan has bottomed out from their diplomatic worst after resolving the war time forced labor issues by ROK's initiatives. As an extension of minilateralism in the Indo-Pacific, South Korea also aims to enhance its strategic relationship with Australia, another key member of Quad,

as already built in the South Korea and Australia Free Trade Agreement by upgrading the bilateral defence collaborations and joint military exercises.²⁰ South Korea and Australia have engineered together in the formation of APEC. This will also allow trilateral cooperation of ROK-Australia-India in Indo-Pacific. Ultimately, Seoul and Delhi must ensure that regional unilateralism as well as multilateralism in Indo-Pacific remains an open-ended effort.

Joint productions related to K-pop and Bollywood movies could be effective channels for improving mutual understanding. Student exchanges between India and the ROK are also desirable, as we have seen in the active student exchanges between China and the ROK.

This year marks the 50th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the ROK and India. India is also hosting the G20 meeting this year. This is a golden opportunity for the two countries to advance to a new level of cooperation. Regular summits and 2+2 ministerial meetings between Korea and India need to be institutionalized for action-oriented collaborations. To close the lingering psychological distance between the two countries' businessmen and people, mutual trust should be further cultivated via ROK's tangible SOC projects in India and lively business contacts in a sustainable fashion.

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I

**Revisiting Pivotal States as
a Medium of Cooperation**

1. Korea-India Bilateral Relations: Beyond the “Global Pivotal State” Rhetoric

Jeffrey Robertson

Like its predecessors, the Yoon Administration presents its foreign policy through a rhetorical frame. Its two guiding strategic documents, the *Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region*¹ and the *National Security Strategy: Global Pivotal State for Freedom, Peace and Prosperity*² are awash with the key terms of freedom, peace, prosperity, democracy, and human rights—all encapsulated around the single catchphrase of the “Global Pivotal State”.

Commentators were quick to jump on the bandwagon. The catchphrase supports op-eds,³ a growing number of thinktank reports,⁴ and some (very important) conferences⁵ that keep everyone busy. Some have quite rightly been more circumspect.⁶ For policymakers and diplomats, seeing through this rhetorical frame is important—this is particularly true in the context of building bilateral relations.

In a few years, the Yoon Administration will begin to wind down⁷ and many more will come to regard the Global Pivotal State rhetoric as ringing hollow. This short study looks at the rationale for taking a longer-term approach to building Korea-India relations.

The Pivot as a Rhetorical Frame

Language is critical to diplomacy.⁸ In Greek mythology, Hermes was not only associated with diplomacy, but also language, persuasion, and trickery. Language colors and contextualizes policy, but also persuades and deceives. Rhetorical framing constructs scaffolds to shape how individuals and/or social groups perceive, comprehend, and react to communicative acts.⁹ In diplomacy, rhetorical framing seeks to color and contextualize policy in order to influence and persuade, and sometimes

to trick and deceive, stakeholders and partners. The rhetorical framing of the Global Pivotal State is no different.

The Yoon Administration presents its catchphrase as a state that holds a significant role in maintaining international order. Contextually, it characterizes Korea as an influential facilitator, a reliable partner state, and importantly, a promoter of freedom, democracy, and human rights. For those who follow South Korea's diplomacy carefully, the genesis of the catchphrase follows a familiar path.¹⁰ It can be traced back through the early work of academics turned policymakers and/or advisors. Their ideas bubble up from graduate study; appear intermittently in op-eds, academic papers, and social media posts; touch the surface in earlier administrations; and then finally hit the sunlight. As is often the case with the initiatives of academic turned policymakers, there is more form than substance.

Academics routinely use international relations terms that pass language and time barriers with imperfect correlations.¹¹ These terms can take on different meanings as they enter new linguistic, cultural, and temporal settings. In extreme forms, representatives from partner states can use the same terms, but mean something very different¹² leading to misunderstandings and mistakes.

Reflecting this, the term "pivot" once related to a state that took on importance because, just like in engineering, it acted as a point on which pressure could be applied through a fulcrum to alter the condition of a system. Pivots turn, and herein lay the rationale to control them. As such, Zbigniew Brzezinski referred to Korea as a pivot in his 1997 text *The Grand Chessboard*.¹³ For Brzezinski, Korea was a state whose importance derived from its "sensitive location" and "potentially vulnerable condition" to primary power competitors. There's a reason that Korea is divided, and that reason was its strategic location and vulnerability. Twenty-five years later and across the Pacific Ocean, what it means to be a pivotal state has transformed significantly to its current promoters. The term Global Pivotal State has no real meaning outside its use within Yoon Administration promotional materials.¹⁴

The term Global Pivotal State is also ambiguous.¹⁵ It has a degree of

semantic vagueness, which allows individuals to infer meaning based on linguistic practice, context, and sometimes, desire. This essentially allows individuals to hear what they want to hear—an important quality when sitting on the fence between two demanding partners.

Here lies the reason to be cautious about buying into foreign policy rhetoric. It provides only a weak reed on which to build policy. Additionally, five-year terms with up to a year of settling in at the beginning and a year of winding down at the end mean that policy action occurs within a relatively narrow timeframe.¹⁶ To better understand and respond to South Korea's foreign policy, we must first peel away the rhetoric.

Peeling Away the Rhetoric

As much as its supporters would like to believe, the Yoon Administration's foreign policy has not yet altered South Korea's long-term foreign policy trajectory. Rather than a pivot, it pays to think of South Korea's foreign policy as a pendulum.

Five years of the Moon Administration swung South Korea's foreign policy pendulum to a height that strained relations with Japan and the U.S. Through a series of policy actions, the Yoon Administration restored relations. The foreign policy pendulum thus currently sits at its original resting position. The Yoon Administration will likely allow the pendulum to continue on its path until it reaches a maximum height at the opposite arc. Relations with Japan and the U.S. will further improve, relations with China will further deteriorate, and then in the next administration, the pendulum will again swing back.

Beyond this pendulum swing and its five-year bouts of foreign policy rhetoric, lie South Korea's three longer-term foreign policy aims: First, the defense of the nation and the security of its citizens. Second, the maintenance of prosperity and economic well-being—in the context of an economy structured around a small number of highly dominant conglomerates. Last, and more relevant in the context of Korea, the pursuit of a capacity to support independent action. This last long-term aim is a powerful historical driving force in South Korea's foreign policy

and is often overlooked in assessments (especially in Washington). It is from these longer-term aims that we need to assess Korea-India relations.

Beyond the Pivot

India has a long foreign policy tradition as an independent actor built upon systemic conditions that restricted its relevance to global competition. For better or worse, this tradition is transforming as India becomes an increasingly relevant actor.¹⁷ India's recent foreign policy, epitomized by the "here, there, and everywhere" summitry of Prime Minister Modi,¹⁸ highlights that the prominence of India in global affairs, including in East Asia, is set to grow. This presents opportunities for Korea.

Secondary states, such as Korea, must ultimately overcome primary state opposition and/or indifference to their objectives. It is inimical to think that Seoul's diplomatic objectives will always align with Beijing, Tokyo, Moscow, or even Washington. Independent action for a secondary state relies upon the capacity to influence and/or persuade its primary state partners.¹⁹

To do so, secondary states must build coalitions.²⁰ They must pursue "snowball" coalition building—secure the support of smaller states, other secondary states, regional and multilateral bodies, as well as NGOs, until the initiative gathers enough momentum to overcome primary state opposition. India as an increasingly influential state in global affairs adds weight to any snowball. It pays to recall India's role as an independent diplomatic actor at the height of primary power competition during the Korean War.²¹ Today, India's role as an economic partner could not be clearer—its role as a potentially independent diplomatic partner deserves a lot more attention.

However, Korea faces significant challenges in improving bilateral relations with India. Chief amongst these is the lack of domestic constituency.²² Domestic constituency in a bilateral relationship relates to the willingness of individuals within the epistemic community, foreign ministry, executive, and wider government to see the partner state as a credible and ideal partner.

For many multicultural states, the domestic constituency that supports

the bilateral relationship with India rests in the diaspora. It's significant that on each of Prime Minister Modi's recent overseas visits he has engaged with diaspora communities,²³ which are increasingly acting as building blocks to strengthen bilateral relationships.

Korea lacks a significant Indian diaspora. How can South Korea increase the likelihood that its policymakers see India as an example and/or willing participant to address policy problems? The answer lies in targeted two-way public diplomacy with a focus on education (university MOUs, faculty exchanges, joint courses, joint degree programs), people-to-people links (sister city relationships, cultural exchanges, working holiday and labor agreements) and public service exchanges (parliamentary, civil service, and executive office exchanges).

Building a domestic constituency to support bilateral relations is not easy. It requires both a visionary outlook and long-term commitment. Seoul has started the ball rolling with initiatives such as the establishment of the Center for ASEAN-Indian Studies²⁴ at the Institute for Foreign Affairs and National Security (IFANS), and the establishment of a Delhi Office for the Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP),²⁵ but more needs to be done.

Foreign policy rhetoric that highlights aspects of superficial similarity, be it 'pivotal state', 'balancer' or 'middle power', does attract attention. It presents epistemic communities with a justification to pay more attention to the bilateral relationship. However, ultimately this attention is short-lived, can distract attention from long-term relationship building, and can even breed cynicism. South Korea needs to build domestic constituency that supports the India-Korea bilateral relationship in the longer term. To do this, it needs to go beyond the rhetoric.

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2. Fulcrum Lies in Seoul's Pursuit for a Global Pivotal State

Abhishek Kumar Singh

President Yoon Suk-Yeol has been showing notable momentum even before taking office, which further escalated with the unveiling of Seoul's Indo-Pacific strategy. The core objective of this strategy is to position Korea as a Global Pivotal State (GPS), reflecting a strong determination to enhance its role and influence on the international stage. However, despite its ambitious goal, its absence from key multilateral groups has led to questions regarding the country's actual influence and importance in global affairs. This paper highlights how Seoul's pivot to pivotal status faces a myriad of challenges but it still holds the potential to be the one.

Pivot to Pivotal

The strategy indicates a departure from Seoul's traditional peninsula-centric focus to embrace a more expansive global role. It aims to provide Seoul Korea with geopolitical stability and decrease its economic reliance on China amidst the heightened Sino-U.S. rivalry. Following the implementation of Yoon's GPS vision, Seoul has made significant progress in elevating its international standing, forming partnerships beyond the Korean Peninsula, and endorsing universal values.

Yoon's foreign policy follows the same path as his predecessors, focusing on strengthening ties with ASEAN nations. Like them, he recognizes the crucial significance of Seoul's alliance with Washington, which forms the foundation of the country's foreign policy. Thus, drawing from the foundation set by former President Moon Jae-In during his last two years in office, Yoon has further fortified the alliance with Washington and bolstered Seoul's stature in the eyes of the former. His performance of "American Pie"¹ and the signing of the Washington Declaration² during his visit to the

White House also contributed positively to his public image. Moreover, his recent stint to increase Korea's global outreach through his presence at the NATO Summit³ in Lithuania, his second such meeting, highlights his belief in the interconnectedness of global security and economic issues. Yoon expressed support for cooperation⁴ with NATO and advocated for the Asia Pacific 4—comprising South Korea, Japan, Australia, and New Zealand—to take on a pivotal role in safeguarding regional security in the Indo-Pacific region. This stance suggests that Yoon recognizes the importance of fostering stronger ties with Europe and other international partners as a means to counterbalance the growing assertiveness of China in the region.

Although, Yoon's approach differs from the previous administration's belief that close ties with China and Russia were essential to address the North Korean threat. Notably, the National Security Strategy⁵ identifies Pyongyang as the primary threat to Seoul, but it is interesting to observe that the assessment begins with an overview of the global security environment, moves on to the Indo-Pacific region, and then focuses on the Korean Peninsula. However, he has contributed to global security without compromising the security of the Korean Peninsula. Yoon has set himself apart from Moon by making a concerted effort to repair⁶ diplomatic ties with Japan by investing significant political capital to persuade both South Koreans and the Japanese to mend their historical differences. Furthermore, the following turn of events with the new Korean-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI), strengthening relations with India, and bolstering its defense exports have elevated Korea's stature in the Indo-Pacific.

Fulcrum in the Pivot?

Yoon's steps have led to a stronger alignment of South Korea with Western liberal democracies, which comes with three potential risks.⁷

The first risk pertains to Beijing's tougher position on Seoul's firmer stance⁸ on the Taiwan issue despite sharing warm economic relations. The second risk involves Seoul's dilemma of balancing between Western-oriented interests and appeals to the Global South especially amidst Sino-U.S. rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. Lastly, the third risk is the aspiration of being a global pivotal state. Despite having an impressive past, South

Korea is geographically small with a declining population⁹ that has slipped to 13th from 10th in the world's economic rankings.¹⁰ While it possesses various valuable assets, such as a strategic location in Northeast Asia, a strong military and arms industry, and influential cultural, technological, and investment capabilities, the question remains whether these attributes position it to a fervent global pivotal status.

In line with the State of Southeast Asia 2023 Survey¹¹ and the Asia Power Index by Lowy Institute¹², Seoul's influence has risen, but it remains ranked seventh behind countries like Japan, China, and the EU in the list of most influential powers in the region. Unlike other middle powers, like Tokyo and Canberra, Seoul's geopolitical interests aren't bold but narrowly engrossed with Pyongyang's nuclear threat, whereas other issues of the Indo-Pacific remain marginal.¹³ Moreover, Seoul does not possess the same degree of diplomatic influence and resources as other Asian middle powers, such as Tokyo and New Delhi.

While Seoul actively participates in ASEAN-led forums, it is yet reluctant in becoming a part of important regional minilaterals like the Quad, AUKUS, FOIP, or even coalition building.¹⁴ These groupings have gained attention for their potential to counter Beijing's assertiveness in the region, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, which Seoul has failed to bank upon. Although Seoul's aspiration to attain "global pivotal state" status is legit, its absence from these minilaterals is a fulcrum to its pivot carrying significant implications.

Way Forward

The effectiveness of Seoul's Indo-Pacific strategy in bolstering the country's strategic role holds potential but needs elevation for the pivotal status.

Firstly, South Korea should actively engage and express its views in minilateral forums such as Quad, CPTPP, and AUKUS while fostering strong collaboration with the member countries. This approach will not only enhance South Korea's global presence but also establish it as a reliable and committed partner in the Indo-Pacific region. Secondly, leveraging its rapid defense manufacturing capabilities and ensuring timely delivery of weapons and equipment can lead to economic growth and strengthen

South Korea's position as a special strategic partner for countries in the Indo-Pacific.

It is crucial for South Korea to recognize the risks associated with over-relying on the U.S. and China for its security and economic needs, especially given the impact of the situation with North Korea. By diversifying its partnerships and reducing dependence on these major powers, South Korea can mitigate tensions and enhance its own security, and the recent realignment¹⁵ of Tokyo-Seoul against Beijing-Pyongyang's nexus is a good illustration.

To solidify its status as a credible middle power, South Korea should assume a leading role in addressing global issues, including concerns related to Chinese Uighur Muslims and minority attacks in the West.

Lastly, South Korea can utilize¹⁶ its robust economy to elevate its diplomatic standing by actively cooperating in areas like green growth, blue economy initiatives, digital trade, and increasing Official Development Assistance to support countries in need and its partner nations. These actions will contribute to elevating South Korea's diplomatic influence and international reputation.

Moreover, South Korea must cease overlooking the fact that its middle power status is vulnerable and instead actively seek to broaden its engagements beyond its current partners in order to bolster its international political influence and ensure a secure future. Embracing a more proactive and inclusive diplomatic approach will be crucial for South Korea to navigate the evolving global landscape and effectively address the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. Nonetheless, South Korea has made significant strides as a highly successful middle power and influential democracy. Yet, whether it can truly claim the status of a global pivotal state remains uncertain and requires careful consideration of the associated risks and challenges. While Seoul's ambition to become a "global pivotal state" is commendable, it should be tempered with a greater dose of realism.

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3. India-ROK Economic Engagement: Much Promise, Good Intent, Lacking Strategy

Dattesh Parulekar

Despite figuring within the Top 10 economies in global sweepstakes, the visage of India-Republic of Korea (ROK) economic engagement and interchange, construes as arguably slender and relatively tepid. Basking in the glow of an early inking and operationalization of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) back in 2009-10,¹ the mutual declaration of a 'Strategic Partnership' in 2010,² elevated to a 'Special Strategic Partnership' in 2015,³ leading into a shared 'Vision for People, Prosperity, Peace and Our Future', in 2018,⁴ the recent rising incidence of trade volumes, even eclipsing India-Japan trade in the process,⁵ might well scale the USD 50 billion bilateral trade target, pegged for 2030.⁶ However, this masquerades the presence of multiple infirmities that have kept mutual economic equations and exchanges, circumscribed, witnessed most notably, in procrastination over upgrading the provisions of CEPA, the recriminations from New Delhi over nationalist mindsets within South Korean industry, impacting mutually beneficial market exposure and equitable two-way trade, and Seoul's persisting prevarication in betting big and deep, upon an infrastructure-binging, huge captive-market reposed, and vibrant human resource laden India—hesitations, particularly inexplicable, where India enjoys cost-competitive, locational advantages.⁷

It's not lost on anyone that, South Korean investments in India, have traditionally occupied the narrow confines of trenchantly competitive consumer-automotive and household-appliances sectors, which carry strong popular goodwill and name recall, but do not render these firms as organic stakeholders in the India growth story. Furthermore, investments from the likes of Hyundai, LG, Samsung, and Kia more lately, have tended

to follow a superficial, even opportunist market-tapping strategy, rather than ensure equity and spawn attendant compacts within the backend industry integration channels, a trend further accentuated by them being light on propensities to either engage in local sourcing of intermediate components or investing in procreating SME and MSME capacities within India.⁸ This said, Seoul's underwhelming footprint within India's infrastructure building spree stands in stark contrast to Japan, whose robust presence, in financially and logistically underwriting some of India's iconic infrastructure projects, is manifest. Furthermore, despite beholding a broad spectrum of multi-sectoral and multi-dimensional competencies at strategic capacitation, arguably of great functional utility to emerging economies, unlike the U.S., South Korea has lacked the imagination and determination to aggressively leverage its private sector and industrial corporations in underpinning broadsheet capacity-building and capability-enhancement initiatives in developing societies, spanning industrial manufacturing, supply-chains, electronics, information-technology, urban smart solutions, healthcare and biosciences, space capabilities, maritime domain awareness wherewithal, and the ilk. And unlike the EU constellation, the Republic of Korea has lagged in commandeering debt-sustainable financial transmission mechanisms to LDCs, SIDS, and the wider swathe of the Global South, vide the soft-touch societal influence instrumentality of development partnerships.

Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy and India-ROK Strategic Alignment

All of this is set to ameliorate, through ROK's embrace of the marquee Strategy for a Free, Peaceful and Prosperous Indo-Pacific (SFPPIP), that marks an inflection-point of sorts, in the annals of the nation's strategic orientation and statecraft in the extant, notwithstanding the seminal hue of its precursor 'New Southern Policy' (NSP), of predecessor President Moon Jae-in.⁹ The conceptualized enunciation of the Republic of Korea as a potential 'Global Pivotal State' adds spunk to the initiative, despite much skepticism abounding, about how much traction would this pronouncement have given the lack of domestic bipartisan consensus,

Seoul's diplomatic, security, and mercantilist constraints in leveraging such ambitions, and the intrinsic bit of whether this averment of a global pivotal state is more an aspirational ideal than practical verity. Nevertheless, the ideation of a global pivotal state in South Korean estimation carries three refreshing dimensions, which can be enterprisingly productive in themselves, and India could possibly relate with the import of these strategic distillations, having piloted something reminiscent over the past decade or so, without quite characterizing it as such. Firstly, the envision of a global pivotal state marks a distinctive breakout for Seoul, from its self-imposed hemmed-in profile within the Korean Peninsula and broader North East Asia, in favor of a cogent presence across the Indo-Pacific strategic terrain. Secondly, it proffers Seoul the latitude to explore a diversified slew of productive partnerships with sovereign actors across the Indo-Pacific, but specifically beyond too, in pursuance of a pervasive strategic presence, premised on "economic and technological strengths."¹⁰ Thirdly, it endeavors to mark up the nation's external disposition, in terms of its current and prospective wherewithal, to contribute to the quotient of benign, beneficent regional and global public goods.¹¹

Each of these have also been New Delhi's strategic objectives in the recent past, pivoting away from an inveterately compulsive Pakistan-conditioned South Asia policy to greater integration within the geopolitical and geo-economic architecture and structures within the Indo-Pacific, besides, pitching India as a credible performance-actor in fructifying quotient within regional and commons. The added stance of Seoul and New Delhi favoring a calibrated and nuanced posture of measured deterrence and pragmatic engagement with Beijing, the mutual intent to advance non-hegemonic and non-exclusionary, strategic product and process initiatives in the Indo-Pacific Region, a canny desire to court and deepen Mini lateral configurations to circumvent a degenerative U.S.-China binary and lever sovereign strategic autonomy, besides, a commitment to burnish Global South capacities, ostensibly draws India and South Korea into natural convergence and concert, provided they shed mutual inhibitions and endeavor to purposefully translate complementarities into operative synergies.

ROK as Organic Stakeholder in the India Growth Story: Whither an Agenda?

It is an obvious no-brainer that any deeper South Korean engagement within India's brimming growth trajectory behooves an optimal enhancement and earnest upgrade of the CEPA, whose inordinate delay has negatively impinged on the cause of propelling trade and investment to a higher orbit. However, substantive involvement with India on a productive economic agenda can proceed nevertheless, if Seoul can requisitely appraise the structural transformations underway within the Indian economic milieu, and seize the multitudinous opportunities that exist, for a qualitatively strategic rather than crass-transactional scheme of things, premised on attributes of production-intertwining, technology-transfer, participatory infrastructure build-and-uplift, financial-transmission into higher-order socio-economy avenues, and capacity-capability augmenting investment-outlays.

Seoul could jumpstart a retooled approach, by internalizing certain computations of instructive import. India, with its markedly youthful demographics, which is only set to get younger, presents a retail economy, predominantly reinforced by domestic demand, with projected value of upwards of a trillion USD, by 2025.¹² India's mobile and internet penetration and humungous appetite for data consumption, fuelled by decades of incremental technological revolution but capped by recent stellar transformations, in its incorporation within socio-economy and the state's governance services dispense, is numerically plotted at either side of a billion users through 2025 and upwards. The Unified Payments Interface (UPI) digital payments platform within India's digital public infrastructure (DPI) has consistently outpaced the aggregated likes of China, the U.S., and Brazil, in numbers of cashless transactions, even peaking at a close to ten billion hits, recently.¹³ India's incumbent federal dispensation has displayed an unprecedented penchant for multi-modal, multi-tiered and multi-vectored infrastructural rollouts, currently funneled through the medium of the National Infrastructure Pipeline Fund (NIPF), monetized at \$1.4 trillion, from 2020 through 2025.¹⁴ And in a world of ageing populations and intensified migration, the sliver of skills-imbued

workforce and its provisioning could not be greater underscored. Given the Indian State's aggressive pursuit of skills training in its education and professional spheres of human development, it is widely surmised that the world's largest democracy could propitiously underwrite a quarter to a third of the global demand for skilled manpower come 2050 and beyond.¹⁵

Topping it all off, is the Indian government's Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) template, which brandishes significant production-linked incentives (PLIs) to Indian businesses, foreign companies and attendant joint ventures, in pursuance of exhorting ramped-up production domestically. Across no less than 14 sectors, from smartphones and digital electronics, to pharma ingredients and bulk drugs, high-efficiency solar panels, automobiles, advanced chemistry cell batteries, textiles, food processing, etc., they ought to plausibly gravitate South Korean investments, not just in terms of evinced interest of corporate majors, but also the medium and small-scale enterprises—disproportionately higher engenderers of employment and revenue.¹⁶ These foregoing quantitative indicators and qualitative metrics speak to the imperative for the ROK to take a long horizon strategic view on India, contextualized to the emergent, unfolding, and purportedly enduring global pecking-order.

India and the ROK: Minilateralizing Towards Benign Indo-Pacific Geo-Economics

The Indo-Pacific strategic axis is marked by trenchant Sino-U.S. big power competition, the rise of a welter of middle powers conditioning an ostensibly fluid balance of power configuration, and the increasing crafting of innovative and functional inter-sovereign coordinating mechanisms, expressed through strategic minilateral and plurilateral frameworks. As veritable entrepreneurial powers, India and South Korea partake in shaping the evolving regional order through curated architectures that advance mutually shared objectives of de-hyphenated engagement of Washington and Beijing, proactive productive socialization with peer middle powers for equities in shaping the unfolding balance of power, and aligning in favor of issue-based and interests-induced minilateral and

plurilateral remits of sovereign strategic action. Given that the India-RoK track shall neither be constructed nor will rise to the threshold of an anti-China bulwark, it enjoys the latitude of not being perceived by Beijing as a quintessential threat, unlike how a U.S. or Japan prominent cohort would possibly be viewed. Such prospective stewardship or incorporation within Mini laterals could take three possible forms of constitution. Firstly, an India-ROK coalesce with like-minded peers within ASEAN and the broader Asia-Pacific, around existentialist dimensions of supply-chain risk-diversification, and the deployment of critical infrastructure technologies for spatial maritime harness, marked by considerations of geo-economic stability and resilience.¹⁷ Secondly, an India-ROK led triangulation for sustainable development goals related benign public-goods procreation within South Asia and across miniaturized entities of the Small Island Developing States (SIDS), punctuating straddling maritime geographies of the Indo-Pacific. Lastly, exploiting the proximities of Indian locational coordinates in driving an India-ROK compact, for profitable in-concert commercial and project-investment ventures, heading into littoral Eastern Africa and beyond. This would mandate India and the Republic of Korea to build greater intertwined ecosystems of mutual complementarities, drawing on the mating of the former's human-tech with the latter's high-tech capabilities, to incubate entrepreneurial enterprises across a range of emerging technologies to interface and partner each other, besides creating national level mechanisms of factor productivity across financing, technology, skills, etc., to showcase to third country destinations, as a cogent expression of India-South Korea model of cooperation, project development and sustainable implementation.

Conclusion

The refreshing aspect in President Yoon's Indo-Pacific strategy is that, whilst India may not be a 'primary' partner in strategically epochal terms just yet, nevertheless, India is designated as a prominent 'priority' country, not only primed for material upscale in bilateral relations but also as principal peer in substantive collaboration for Seoul's desired strategic-depth within South Asia and the wider expanse of the Indian

Ocean Region (IOR).¹⁸ To this extent, India evokes and is the benefactor of an up-swinging policy continuity, in terms of its linearly improved prioritization, in policy calculus across four successive administrations, spanning the ideological spectrum—the amelioration evidenced no less in the manner of the ROK’s separation of South Asia from South East Asia, in its morph from the NSP to the SFPPIP ideational construct.¹⁹ India’s External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar, in recent conversation during the sojourn of his Japanese counterpart, termed Japan as “a natural partner in modernizing India”,²⁰ and there is no reason why a similar mantle cannot sit proudly and productively upon the Republic of Korea going forward.

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II

Minilateralism to Middle-Power Connect

4. Quad Plus: Importance of Supply Chain Diversification and Korea Inc

Eerishika Pankaj

In an era marked by rapidly evolving geopolitical dynamics and interconnected economies, the concept of “pivotal states”¹ has taken on new significance. The emergence of the Quad Plus, coupled with President Yoon Suk-yeol’s ambitious foreign policy agenda, has propelled South Korea into a unique position as a potential global pivotal state. This paper delves into the analytical exploration of South Korea’s role within the Quad Plus framework and how that will aid its global growth via the lens of the influence of Korea Inc and the imperative of supply chain diversification.

By expanding its focus beyond the Korean Peninsula to the Indo-Pacific, South Korea has already made a strong case as a global pivotal state.² Korea Inc’s active engagement in advancing President Yoon’s global pivotal state dream, coupled with a commitment to supply chain diversification within the Quad Plus framework, holds immense potential. These efforts can elevate South Korea’s role on the international stage, foster diplomatic ties, drive economic growth, and contribute to the collective stability and progress of the Quad Plus alliance and beyond.

The Role of Korea Inc: A Catalyst for Building Influence

President Yoon’s foreign policy vision has signaled a departure from traditional norms, emphasizing a proactive and dynamic engagement with global partners.³ The concept of a “global pivotal state” — first used in South Korea’s Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region⁴—encapsulates South Korea’s aspiration to transcend its regional influence and play a crucial role in shaping global discourse. By leveraging its diplomatic acumen, economic strength, and technological

advancements, South Korea seeks to contribute to international problem-solving and bridge the gap between developed and developing nations.

At the heart of South Korea's ascent to a potential global pivotal state lies the collective force of "Korea Inc".⁵ This term encapsulates the nation's conglomerates, such as Samsung, Hyundai, and LG, which have achieved global prominence across various industries. These largely family-owned corporate giants have not only elevated South Korea's economic status but also facilitated technological innovation and spurred job creation; they dominate the South Korean economy.⁶ These conglomerates, known as *chaebols*,⁷ are involved in a wide range of industries, including electronics, shipbuilding, automobiles, and finance.

The strategic investments and global supply chain networks established by Korea Inc. have positioned South Korea as an integral player in the global economic ecosystem. The chaebols have been a major force in South Korea's economic development, helping to lift the country out of poverty and into the ranks of the developed world.⁸ However, they have also been criticized for their close ties to the government and their opaque corporate structures. In recent years, the chaebols have come under increasing pressure to reform.⁹ The government, with renewed focus under Yoon, has introduced a number of measures aimed at reducing their influence, and some chaebols have begun to restructure their businesses.¹⁰

Korea Inc can play a pivotal role within the Quad Plus framework by leveraging its global economic influence, technological innovation, and extensive supply chain networks. As a prominent conglomerate of companies like Samsung, Hyundai, and LG, Korea Inc contributes to the grouping by promoting economic growth, trade partnerships, and technological collaboration. Its diversified operations across industries and international markets align with the Quad Plus' objectives of fostering stability, resilience, and sustainable development in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond¹¹; most importantly, it provides an opportunity to work together to diversify some of the most important supply chains away from unipolar sources such as China, especially as many of these chaebols have already implemented efforts for the same (see Table 4.1).

Table 4.1: Top Korean Conglomerates and their Supply Chain Diversification Efforts¹²

Company	Industry	Diversification Efforts
Samsung	Electronics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding manufacturing facilities in different countries like Pakistan and Vietnam to reduce dependence on a single location. Collaborating with global suppliers to source components from various regions. Investing in research and development to innovate and create new supply chain opportunities.
Hyundai	Automotive	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Establishing production plants in multiple countries to minimize production risks. Fostering partnerships with local suppliers in different regions. Exploring electric and autonomous vehicle technologies for new supply chain avenues. Has been investing in new production facilities in the United States and Europe. It has also been working to develop new relationships with suppliers in these regions.
LG	Electronics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Setting up regional hubs for procurement and production in key markets. Engaging in strategic partnerships for component sourcing outside of traditional supply channels. Has been increasing its sourcing from countries other than China, such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Mexico. It has also been working to develop new supply chain partners in Africa and South America.
SK Group	Memory Chips	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Diversifying investments across energy, chemicals, and telecommunications sectors in various countries. Collaborating with global partners to explore new markets and supply chain options. Has been expanding its production capacity in the United States but also China. It has also been investing in new technologies, such as 3D NAND flash memory, wherein it has taken full operational control of Intel's legacy SK Hynix facility in Dalian
POSCO	Steel and Materials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Expanding steel production capacity in different regions to meet local demand and reduce import reliance. Developing partnerships with suppliers and customers in diverse geographical areas. Focusing on 'greening' and considering green steel mill in India.
Lotte	Food Business	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Has been expanding its production facilities in Southeast Asia and India. It has also been working to develop new supply chain partners in these regions.

South Korea is a major producer of semiconductors, smartphones, and other high-tech goods, and its companies are well-positioned to help the Quad members, especially India, develop new technologies and strengthen their economies. Korea Inc can share its expertise in semiconductor manufacturing, which is essential for the development of 5G networks and other next-generation technologies; collaborate on research and development projects in areas such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and robotics; and provide access to its large and growing consumer market. Furthermore, Korea Inc, comprising major conglomerates like Samsung, Hyundai, and LG, possesses a remarkable ability to drive economic growth and innovation.¹³ These corporations can actively invest in sectors that align with President Yoon's global pivotal state vision, such as renewable energy, advanced technologies, and sustainable infrastructure. Their investments can not only boost South Korea's economy but also position the nation as a leader in emerging industries on the global stage.

The Inc's extensive international trade networks and established partnerships can serve as conduits for strengthening diplomatic ties. These corporations have a proven track record of forging business relationships worldwide. By leveraging these networks, South Korea can enhance its soft power, facilitate cultural exchanges, and establish collaborative ventures that contribute to the realization of its pivotal state ambitions. The technological prowess of Korea Inc can be harnessed to foster capacity building and knowledge transfer in developing nations. President Yoon's global pivotal state vision entails bridging gaps between developed and developing countries. Korea Inc can play a fundamental role in facilitating the transfer of expertise, technology, and best practices, thereby contributing to sustainable development and creating a more equitable global landscape.

It remains to be seen whether the chaebols will be able to adapt to the changing economic landscape and maintain their dominance in the South Korean economy. However, there is no doubt that they will continue to play a major role in the country's economic future. These chaebols are responsible for a significant portion of South Korea's economic output,

and they play an important role in the country's global trade. They are also major employers, providing jobs for millions of South Koreans.

A Shifting Geopolitical Landscape and Yoon's Global Pivotal State Vision

The Quad Plus, an extended version of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, comprises the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, alongside key partners such as South Korea, Vietnam, and New Zealand. This, albeit very slowly, evolving multilateral arrangement underscores a shared commitment to regional stability, economic growth, and the preservation of a rules-based international order. South Korea's inclusion reflects its growing economic prowess, technological innovation, and strategic location in the Indo-Pacific region furthered by the launch of Seoul's own Indo-Pacific Strategy, wherein as highlighted above the term 'global pivotal state' was first introduced.

Korea Inc can aid South Korea's Quad Plus role in a number of ways, depending on how the grouping energizes itself in the coming months and how expansive it chooses to become. Providing economic and technological assistance to Quad Plus countries is one such example. Korea Inc is home to some of the world's leading technology companies, such as Samsung and LG. These companies can provide economic and technological assistance to Quad Plus and even Quad countries, helping them to develop their own economies and become more resilient to disruptions. Secondly, owing to the fact that Korea Inc is a major trading partner of the United States, Japan, India, and Australia, it can expand trade and investment between South Korea and Quad Plus powers as well. Thirdly, Korea Inc can promote cooperation on shared challenges, such as climate change, cyber security, and maritime security. By working together, the Quad Plus countries can address these challenges more effectively and build a more secure and prosperous Indo-Pacific region, especially keeping the Global South in mind.

In addition to these economic and technological benefits, Korea Inc can also help to strengthen South Korea's soft power in the region. The chaebols are known for their innovative products and their commitment

to quality. By investing in the Quad Plus region, Korea Inc can help to raise the profile of South Korea and promote its values of democracy, freedom, and human rights. By working together, the chaebols and the South Korean government can help to make the Quad Plus a more successful and influential group, especially keeping in focus the China challenge vis-à-vis overdependence of supply chains. To counter this, the Korean government in 2022 announced a new supply chain strategy as well.¹⁴

Korea Inc competes¹⁵ with China in advanced technology sectors such as electronics, semiconductors, and automobiles, where it boasts of innovation and high-quality production. Unlike China, Korea Inc has a strong focus on research and development, enabling it to create cutting-edge products. Furthermore, Korea Inc's reputation for reliability, efficiency, and stringent quality control gives it a competitive edge,¹⁶ particularly in industries where precision and technological sophistication are paramount.

In some specific industries, South Korea has a clear advantage over China. For example, South Korea is the world leader in semiconductor manufacturing, while China is still playing catch-up.¹⁷ This is due to a number of factors, including the government's support for the industry, the availability of skilled workers, and the presence of world-class research institutions. South Korea is home to some of the world's leading smartphone brands, including Samsung and LG. These brands are known for their high quality and innovative features and are respected around the world. This gives them a leg up on Chinese brands, which are still relatively new to many markets. South Korean products are generally seen as being of higher quality than Chinese products; one need not look beyond the example of beauty products to prove this point.¹⁸ This is due to a number of factors, including the use of higher-quality materials and more rigorous manufacturing standards. Here, it is also of note that South Korea is a major producer of automobiles, and its brands, such as Hyundai and Kia, are well-known and respected around the world. These brands are known for their reliability and fuel efficiency; should manufacturing supply chain diversification in such brands occur successfully over time,

South Korea's role as an economic powerhouse, Quad partner and pivotal state will all be positively decided.

Overall, Korea Inc. can play a significant role in supporting South Korea's Quad Plus role. By providing economic and technological assistance, expanding trade and investment, and promoting cooperation on shared challenges, Korea Inc. can help to make the Quad Plus a more successful and influential group.

Supply Chain Diversification: Navigating Uncertainties

The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the vulnerabilities inherent in concentrated and interdependent supply chains which ultimately start or pass through China. South Korea, as a manufacturing and technological hub, experienced firsthand the repercussions of disruptions to these supply chains. This has underscored the imperative for diversification to enhance resilience and mitigate potential shocks. By advocating for supply chain diversification, South Korea can not only bolster its economic stability but also assume a leadership role in promoting a more robust and adaptable global supply chain architecture.

Furthermore, as seen with South Korea's focus on the Korean New Deal¹⁹ (especially the Green New Deal²⁰), advancing sustainability is critical as the world grapples with environmental challenges. The role of pivotal states in championing sustainable practices becomes increasingly important, especially in the Global South. A diversified supply chain provides the flexibility to incorporate environmentally sustainable practices. South Korea can lead by example within the Quad Plus framework by promoting eco-friendly production processes, responsible sourcing, and reduced carbon emissions. This aligns with President Yoon's emphasis on environmental diplomacy and positions South Korea as a role model for sustainable development among pivotal states.

The COVID-19 pandemic underscored the vulnerabilities associated with overly concentrated supply chains. Supply chain disruptions can have far-reaching implications for economies and industries. By diversifying supply chains, South Korea will mitigate risks and enhance its resilience against future shocks, ensuring that its pivotal state aspirations are not

hampered by unforeseen disruptions. Here, supply chain diversification aligns with the core principles of the Quad Plus, which include promoting regional stability and resilience.²¹ Collaborative efforts toward diversification can strengthen the alliance's ability to collectively address economic challenges and respond to disruptions effectively. Herein, the inclusion of South Korea in the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI)²² of India-Japan-Australia must be actively espoused, especially when Japan-South Korea are attempting to improve historically terse relations and India-Korea²³ ties are strengthening.

Keeping SCRI in mind, Korea Inc's leadership can foster deeper diplomatic ties. By engaging in diverse sourcing and production partnerships, South Korea can forge economic interdependencies with a broader range of countries. This, in turn, can create opportunities for diplomatic cooperation, leading to enhanced political influence and a stronger position within international forums like the Quad Plus. Diversified supply chains reduce dependency on any single nation for critical resources or components. This reduces vulnerabilities to geopolitical shifts and power dynamics, allowing Quad Plus members to pursue their strategic objectives without undue constraints.

Furthermore, diversification can contribute to a more balanced trade portfolio. By reducing overreliance on a single market, South Korea can better manage economic fluctuations and trade imbalances. This stability enhances South Korea's attractiveness to global investors and bolsters its economic standing, a key component of Yoon's vision for a global pivotal state. The Quad Plus, through its diverse membership, can drive sustainable development across multiple regions. Supply chain diversification can facilitate technology transfer, knowledge sharing, and the adoption of sustainable practices, contributing to a more equitable and environmentally responsible global landscape. A well-diversified supply chain fosters trade and economic growth by enabling efficient resource allocation. Quad Plus nations can benefit from each other's strengths, expertise, and resources, amplifying their collective economic influence and supporting their respective pivotal state aspirations.

Conclusion

In the rapidly evolving landscape of global geopolitics and economics, South Korea's emergence as a potential global pivotal state within the Quad Plus framework holds significant implications. President Yoon's visionary foreign policy,²⁴ bolstered by the influence of Korea Inc. and a commitment to supply chain diversification, places South Korea in a unique position to shape international discourse and drive positive change. As the world seeks to navigate complex challenges, the role of pivotal states like South Korea becomes indispensable in fostering cooperation, stability, and sustainable growth on a global scale.²⁵

The future of Korea Inc. is uncertain. The chaebols are facing increasing challenges from both domestic and international competitors. However, they are also investing heavily in new technologies and expanding into new markets. It is possible that they will be able to adapt to the changing economic landscape and maintain their dominance in the South Korean economy. Either way, Korea Inc. remains crucial to South Korea, and supply chain diversification remains critical to Korea Inc in order to help achieve a global pivotal state status and provide impetus to the indefinable grouping of Quad Plus.

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5. Making Existing Multilateral Platforms a Catalyst for India-ASEAN-ROK Trilateral Partnership

Wondeuk Cho

Introduction

Global challenges over the past decade have shaken the foundation of the existing liberal international order. Intensifying geopolitical competition among great powers led to a near breakdown of multilateral international cooperation. To make matters worse, the COVID-19 pandemic has placed a significant strain on the ability of existing multilateral governance systems to meet global challenges through international cooperation. ASEAN-centered multilateral platforms are no exception. Southeast Asia has become the epicentre of the U.S.-China strategic rivalry. ASEAN centrality has weakened in the past years when geopolitical tensions between great powers have been intensified in the Indo-Pacific. ASEAN member-states have traditionally enmeshed all major powers in ASEAN-led multilateral institutions to avoid entanglement in great power politics in the region and promote their strategic autonomy and economic prosperity.¹ But, ASEAN member-states are now increasingly under pressure to make a binary choice between the U.S. and China. ASEAN's central role in shaping regional architecture is in danger of being paralyzed.²

In addition, most all small and medium-sized countries, especially ASEAN nations, India, and South Korea, are currently facing unprecedented challenges on almost all fronts in the Indo-Pacific region. Those challenges are the escalation of the U.S.-China strategic competition, the spread of infectious diseases, climate change, supply chain disruptions, and rising nationalism and protectionism. It became evident that the two superpowers—the U.S. and China—cannot afford to tackle newly emerging problems alone. Thus, middle powers and small countries in the Indo-Pacific must explore how to navigate the shifting

geopolitics, finding alternative ways of collectively dealing with regional and global challenges.³

In this context, South Korea now finds itself in the same situation as other Indo-Pacific countries. The Yoon Suk Yeol administration, unlike the previous Moon administration's hesitancy to fully acknowledge the strategic significance of the Indo-Pacific and its careful stance on strategic endeavors, announced Korea's strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in November 2022. South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy (IPS, in short) carries significant ramifications for its strategic engagements in the Indo-Pacific region. More importantly, it emphasizes South Korea's acknowledgment of India's significance and influence in global geopolitics. In addition, the Yoon administration has upgraded Korea's existing policy toward ASEAN in a more strategic and comprehensive way through bolstering strategic and security cooperation, implementing the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI).⁴

Both South Korea and India have benign aspirations to become a more 'responsible international stakeholder' in global affairs, contributing to the inclusive and rules-based order. Seoul and New Delhi should strengthen cooperation to create synergies between the IPS and the Act East Policy (AEP). In this context, the partnerships between South Korea, India, and ASEAN can provide an alternative space amid the shifting international order and increasing uncertainties in the international system.⁵ South Korea, ASEAN, and India share common values and visions on the international order. Seoul and New Delhi consistently reiterate ASEAN's central role in shaping the regional architecture and endorse the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). Korea's IPS and KASI, and India's AEP and IPOI also share interests with ASEAN's AOIP in striving for an inclusive Indo-Pacific region. But while Korea's bilateral relations with either ASEAN or India have developed, its trilateral cooperation with ASEAN and India has been less emphasized. Thus, Seoul and New Delhi should increase their engagement in third-party countries located in Southeast Asia.⁶ This paper addresses this gap by providing insights into South Korea's ties with ASEAN and India in a trilateral setting.

Promoting ROK-ASEAN-India Trilateral Cooperation: Through ASEAN-Centric Multilateral Platforms and Beyond

Table 5.1. Selected Multilateral Cooperation Platforms between ASEAN-India-South Korea

Multilateral bodies	ASEAN	India	South Korea
ASEAN Region Forum (ARF)	o	o	o
ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting-Plus (ADMM+)	o	o	o
Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM)	o	o	o
Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)	Myanmar, Thailand	o	X
East Asia Summit (EAS)	o	o	o
G-20	Indonesia	o	o
SAARC	Myanmar (Δ)		Δ
Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA)	Indonesia, Singapore, Thailand	o	Δ
Mekong Region Cooperation	Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, Vietnam	o ⁽ⁱ⁾	o ⁽ⁱⁱ⁾
International Sollar Alliance (ISA)	Myanmar, Cambodia, Singapore,	o	X
Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)	Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand	o	X

* o: Member, Δ: Observer or Dialogue partner, X: Non-member

(i) Mekong-Ganga Cooperation; (ii) Mekong-Korea Cooperation

As the new wave of challenges in geopolitics reveals, the demand for an increase in the convergence between Korea's IPS and KASI and India's AEP and IPOI has emerged. At the same time, as mentioned in the introduction section, ASEAN's AOIP, India's AEP and IPOI, and Korea's IPS and KASI share essential fundamental principles and visions in promoting peace and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific. So, there must be many opportunities to create synergies between the policy initiatives of ASEAN, India, and Korea. In particular, while both Seoul and New Delhi are actively engaging in ASEAN-centered multilateral bodies, some key

Southeast Asian partners cooperate closely with India and South Korea in the existing multilateral frameworks beyond ASEAN. Thus, ASEAN-India-Korea can facilitate the trilateral partnership by utilizing the existing ASEAN-led multilateral and other multilateral and subregional cooperation platforms.

What can Korea, ASEAN, and India do to further facilitate trilateral cooperation through existing multilateral platforms? The four potential areas of cooperation are as follows (Table 5.2): (1) Institutionalization of India-ASEAN-ROK trilateral dialogue platforms, (2) maritime cooperation, (3) cooperation for enhancing connectivity, and (4) economic and technology cooperation.

Institutionalization of India-ASEAN-ROK trilateral dialogue platforms

Seoul and New Delhi must go beyond bilateral cooperation and establish trilateral strategic dialogue channels between Korea-ASEAN-India to communicate about the strategic situation in the region and find ways to cooperate.

ROK's KASI articulates "expand[ing] cooperation and coordination with other ASEAN dialogue partners through enhanced policy dialogue on ASEAN." In that context, India, ASEAN, and South Korea need to establish and institutionalize issue-oriented dialogue networks by utilizing ASEAN-led multilateral platforms such as the EAS, ARF, and ADMM+ to deal with geopolitical and geoeconomic dynamics, various non-traditional security issues, digital transformation, and critical and emerging technologies. In some cases, Korea and India can build various formats of trilateral consultation mechanisms with ASEAN itself or member-states at the intergovernmental, Track 1.5, or Track II level under the umbrella of ASEAN-centric multilateralism. Building such strategic dialogue mechanisms should be a priority over implementing specific cooperative initiatives. The institutionalized dialogue platforms will help India, ASEAN, and Korea explore the overall direction of cooperation on shaping the regional architecture in the Indo-Pacific. The three parties will share a vision and a mutual understanding of international order by exchanging views on contemporary regional and global issues.

Maritime Cooperation

ARF, ADMM+, and IORA will expand the opportunities to boost maritime cooperation among Korea, ASEAN nations, and India.

Both India and Korea have been actively involved in regional maritime issues through ARF and ADMM+. They have made efforts to play a constructive role in preserving stable maritime order and in maritime cooperation. India has been cooperating with ASEAN through maritime diplomacy, in which India “increased bilateral maritime trade” and “bilateral naval cooperation,” improving maritime domain awareness (MDA) of maritime Southeast Asian countries. According to Abhjit Singh, areas of maritime cooperation between Seoul and New Delhi might be “shipbuilding, joint capacity building, maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, search and rescue, marine pollution, anti-piracy, counter-terrorism and counter-trafficking, and combating marine pollution.”

In addition to ASEAN-led multilateral forums such as ARF and ADMM+, IORA is an emerging inter-regional multilateral organization that can make South Korea closely cooperate with both India and ASEAN states regarding maritime cooperation. South Korea joined IORA as a Dialogue Partner in 2018 and expanded its diplomatic diversification to the Indian Ocean.⁷ The IORA includes Korea’s key partners such as India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand. In particular, India and Indonesia have played a pivotal role in establishing the IORA and Indonesia hosted the first IORA Leaders’ Summit. The IORA pays much attention to various issues of maritime cooperation, including maritime security, blue economy, marine tourism, marine resources, marine safety, search and rescue operations, and Illegal-Unreported-Unregulated (IUU) fishing. Among them, the blue economy has gained importance as a new paradigm of development in recent years. So there are far more opportunities for India, South Korea, and IORA members of ASEAN to work together on maritime manufacturing, maritime ICT, marine tourism, and maritime services.

Cooperation for Enhancing Connectivity

Along with ASEAN states, South Korea and India need to explore potential synergies with sub-regional frameworks, such as BIMSTEC and

Mekong Subregional Cooperation Platforms.

Both India's AEP and Neighbourhood-First Policy aim to secure sovereignty over India's northeast region and cooperate with neighbouring countries in response to China's increasing influence over the region. New Delhi intends to maximize production cooperation by building a highway connecting Myanmar and Thailand through BIMSTEC. Therefore, Seoul should also seek cooperation with India and ASEAN states under the umbrella of BIMSTEC.

Both India and South Korea are implementing development projects in the Mekong subregion. India cooperates with lower Mekong countries, including Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Thailand, and Vietnam through the Mekong-Ganga Cooperation (MGC). South Korea is also engaging in the Mekong subregion through Mekong-ROK Cooperation.

South Korea has strengthened its partnership with lower Mekong countries since the first ROK-Mekong Foreign Ministers' Meeting in 2011. The two parties adopted the "Mekong-Korea Comprehensive Partnership for Mutual Prosperity" in order to deepen the ROK-Mekong partnership. Seoul implemented the "Action Plan: 2021-2025" as a plan for mid-to long-term cooperation, which "covers exchanges in diverse sectors, rural development, joint endeavours on technological development in response to the Fourth Industrial Revolution, joint response to environmental problems of Mekong region, increased cooperation in non-traditional security areas."⁸

In the past decade, the Mekong subregion has increasingly become an epicenter of great power competition in the struggle for influence. The Mekong subregion countries hope that middle powers such as Korea and India will play a constructive and benign role in improving the connectivity and economic development in the region amid great power competition in the Indo-Pacific. In particular, New Delhi and Seoul can contribute to further helping Mekong countries deal with emerging regional issues such as digital illiteracy, climate change, energy security, capacity building, and water management in addition to physical connectivity. More importantly, the two countries should develop new synergies between Mekong-Ganga Cooperation and Mekong-ROK Cooperation in the Mekong subregion.

Economic and Technology Cooperation

As the global economy and industry paradigm is changing rapidly, opportunities for cooperation between Korea, India, and ASEAN are increasing not only in economy and trade but also in high-technology and global supply chains.

South Korea and India need to take the lead in setting up and shaping agendas for cooperation within ASEAN-led multilateral platforms. In particular, among the specific issues where cooperation should be prioritized are to ensure the resilience of post-COVID-19 supply chains, promote high-tech cooperation and digital transformation, artificial intelligence, ICT, and smart cities networks in ASEAN.

Table 5.2. Selected Areas of Trilateral Cooperation

Area for cooperation	AEP/IPOI	AOIP	ROK's IPS & KASI ⁹	Cooperative platforms
Maritime cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maritime security • Maritime ecology • Maritime resources • Maritime security, science, technology & academic cooperation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • unsustainable exploitation of maritime resources & maritime pollution • maritime safety & security Transnational crimes-human trafficking, sea piracy, robbery & armed robbery against ships at sea • technical cooperation in marine science collaboration; research & development; sharing of experience and best practices 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Expanding Comprehensive Security Cooperation (IPS) -Deepening maritime security cooperation -Reinforcing cooperation in maritime security, maritime domain awareness, maritime economy, and maritime environment • Support AMS' maritime law enforcement capacities (KASI) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • IORA, ARF, ADMM+, EAS, IONS

Connectivity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Maritime transport •Trade connectivity •physical infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •physical, institutional & people-to-people linkages •synergising with sub-regional frameworks •Addressing challenges of rapid urbanisation through ASEAN Smart Cities Network 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •IPS Vision: Securing growth engine by enhancing the connectivity and complementarity of trade and investment networks •7th Core line of Efforts of IPS: Lead regional cooperation on climate change and energy security -Contributing to the establishment of infrastructure in the Indo-Pacific region •KASI: Enhancing ASEAN-ROK cooperation within ASEAN-led mechanisms -The ROK is committed to supporting the mainstreaming of AOIP's four priority areas (maritime cooperation, connectivity, SDGs, and economic and other areas of cooperation) -Exploring and strengthen linkages among ROK's projects on youth exchange. Maritime connectivity and public health and those of other ASEAN dialogue partners to promote practical cooperation in a trilateral format(ROK, AMS, Dialogue Partners) 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •IORA, BIMSTEC, MGC-MKC collaboration, ACMECS
Disaster management	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Disaster risk reduction & management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •climate change & disaster risk reduction and management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •8th Core Line of Efforts of IPS: Engage in Contributive Diplomacy Through Tailored Development Cooperation Partnerships -Increasing assistance in areas where our strengths and the needs of our partners coincide, namely digital education, climate change, smart city, and transportation. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •IORA, ADMM+, ARF

			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •KASI: supporting ASEAN's efforts to tackle challenges stemming from climate change and environmental crises. 	
Economic cooperation & other areas of cooperation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •Trade connectivity & maritime transport •capacity building & resource sharing 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •South-South cooperation •trade facilitation & logistics infrastructure and services •digital economy •science, technology research & development, and smart infrastructure •The fourth industrial revolution •development of private sector-micro, small & medium enterprises 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •IPS' 8th Core Line of Efforts: Contributing to the strengthening of the Indo-Pacific regions' capacity to respond to infectious disease, by providing assistance which links the building of health and medical infrastructure with the establishment of health and medical development plans. -Increasing assistance in areas ... transportation -IPS' Southeast Asia and ASEAN: Building on the existing solid partnerships spanning trade and socio-economic cooperation towards fostering a comprehensive and strategic partnership with ASEAN 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> •EAS, IORA, MGC-MKC collaboration

Conclusion

Now it is time for Korea and India to move forward to the next level in their partnership, as the two countries mark their 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations this year. South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Mod held a summit during the 2023 G7 Summit and agreed to enhance strategic communication and cooperation between the two countries. Additionally, the two leaders reached a consensus to support the development of the 'Global South.'¹⁰ In this context, Seoul should collaborate with New Delhi to improve the economic development and capacity-building of ASEAN member-states, particularly those that are less developed. In particular, South Korea,

India, and ASEAN need to expand their collaborative efforts not only at the national level but also in a multilateral context, in areas such as “critical technologies, sustainable infrastructure, digital learning, maritime security, and tailored development.”¹¹

Korea-ASEAN-India trilateral cooperation can create more synergies in responding to emerging challenges by orienting itself toward more flexible, inclusive, and issue-driven multilateral cooperation. Therefore, the three actors in the Indo-Pacific should not hesitate to cooperate even in minilateral platforms which form an inclusive mechanism without being exclusive. These efforts will undoubtedly create significant synergies for strengthening bilateral cooperation between Korea and India, as well as yielding substantial positive effects on the relationship between Korea-ASEAN and India-ASEAN.

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6. South Korea and India's Multi-layered Pivotal Roles in Indo-Pacific

Chiew-Ping Hoo

The term 'pivot' is currently a popular policy catchphrase but by reviewing how this term entered the International Relations lexicon, we understand better the multiple meanings of the term and appreciate deeply the already pivotal roles South Korea and India are playing and the possible pivotal roles that other states in the Indo-Pacific can play regionally and globally.

As Kurt Campbell, former Assistant Secretary of State for East Asia, reminds us in his book, *The Pivot: The Future of American Statecraft in Asia*,¹ the term [the pivot] was "mentioned but three times in a 5,500-word article" and it was "suddenly and indelibly affixed to U.S. policy". The article, of course, was former Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's "America's Pacific Century," published in October 2011 in *Foreign Policy*.²

In 2011, Hillary Clinton could not have predicted how the U.S. would withdraw from Afghanistan ten years later (on August 30, 2021) but, surely, she would have remembered that the war in Iraq was premised on the presence of weapons of mass destruction in Iraq, which to this day have never been found. Campbell's lengthy *tour de force* attempts to justify the U.S. pivot to Asia but if the pivot is based on the U.S. looking for another region to engage after the debacles in Iraq and Afghanistan, not to mention the war in Indochina which ended in April 1975, the Southeast and East Asian states are understandably skeptical. Thus, the U.S. pivot received mixed responses from the Asian states, ranging from "thanks, but no thanks" to full embracement.

The Biden administration continues in the same pivotal direction, but the Asia-Pacific region has been given a new name, the Indo-Pacific, which was inherited from the Trump administration which introduced its Indo Pacific Strategy (IPS) in 2019. The Biden administration updated the IPS in February 2022 but while 'pivot' is no longer mentioned, the focus

is clearly on the Indo-Pacific region.

South Korea announced its own Indo-Pacific strategy in November/December 2022, probably to align itself more closely with U.S. values, which is a departure from the nuanced position of the previous Moon administration. Circling back to the post-Iraq U.S. pivot to Asia, South Korea needs to be mindful of being entrapped in confrontations that may bring more harm than benefits in the long-run.

While India did not make any policy pronouncement, but as it represents the “Indo” in Indo-Pacific, the policy can be said to be India’s by default.

How then do South Korea and India perceive themselves as ‘pivotal’ and how do minilateralism and multilateralism factor in their respective Indo-Pacific policies or strategies? It is important to note that while the U.S. takes a clearcut ‘either-or’ position when it comes to China, supply chain systems, and military-strategic issues, etc., South Korea and India do not need to adopt similarly limited options and positions.

Before announcing its IPS, South Korea was already pivoting in multiple bilateral and multilateral relationships with various major and middle powers, for example, its alliance with the U.S., the New Southern Policy with Southeast Asia regionally, ASEAN institutionally and India, and partnership with countries and regions stretching from the South Pacific to the Gulf. South Korea’s IPS is also the only one that indicates clearly the geographical scope of its conception of the Indo-Pacific, which includes eastern Africa.

As a neutral and non-aligned major power in South Asia, India has adopted nuanced positions on global issues, including the Russia-Ukraine conflict. While India’s position of neutrality in the conflict initially hurt its standing within the Quad, matters improved after the other Quad members acknowledged India’s indispensability in the Indo-Pacific policy framework.

For ASEAN, both South Korea and India are important partners for three major reasons. First, South Korea and India are non-Western powers. India not only shares similar positions such as neutrality and non-alignment in its foreign policy, it also respects ASEAN’s principle of

non-intervention. This has helped Southeast Asian countries navigate the intricate geopolitics in South Asia and all have diplomatic relations with both India and Pakistan. Though India has had numerous problems with China's actions near its borders—some of which have resulted in deadly confrontations between their armed forces—India does not maintain an aggressive posture (as the Western powers are wont to do) with China. Instead, India has remained rational and managed its relations with China prudently.³

For South Korea, which has been compared to being a shrimp among whales, navigating its relations with its behemoth neighbors has never been easy. Successive South Korean governments have grown increasingly sophisticated in managing relations with both the U.S. and China, as indicated by how South Korea managed the controversies surrounding the THAAD deployment in 2016. South Korea's foreign policy is omni-direction and aims to build long lasting partnerships and cooperation with key states around the world, not just its immediate neighbors, which has secured tangible benefits. For example, South Korea's friendly ties with the Gulf states in the Middle East has not only secured the country's energy interests, but also the expansion of its construction and petrochemicals industries. South Korea is now engaged with cyber/digital development, which is growing increasingly important, in the Gulf. The New Southern Policy, arguably the Moon government's most significant foreign policy achievement, has elevated ASEAN in South Korea's political and economic outreach, alongside the U.S., China, Japan, and the EU. In 2021, ASEAN replaced China to become South Korea's largest trading bloc, which testifies to South Korea's successful pivot to Southeast Asia.

In its December 2022 policy initiative (announced in November), *Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region*,⁴ South Korea signaled its aim to be a 'global pivotal state'. South Korea can build on the multiple partnerships it has developed in recent decades to fulfil the ambitious role it envisions for itself.

South Korea currently is the 'spoke' in the 'hub-and-spoke' U.S.-ROK alliance, which the U.S. leads as the 'hub' of the regional architecture. South Korea can extend its role from being merely a supportive ally of the

U.S. to being an indispensable partner to major and middle powers in the region. After the May 2023 G7 Summit in Hiroshima, the U.S., Japan and ROK began institutionalizing their trilateral alliance cooperation. While the past quasi-alliances among the three states relied on the leadership of the U.S., the new alliance is modelled on the three allies playing equally important roles. As such, there is much that South Korea can contribute to the stability of the region as an equal of the U.S. and Japan.

South Korea is extremely versatile in maintaining bilateral and multilateral relations with states in numerous regions, as shown by such global partnerships as South Korea-ASEAN,⁵ South Korea-European Union,⁶ and South Korea-Gulf States.⁷ This is especially the case in Southeast Asia and Europe, where strong regional institutions exist. South Korea's successful maximizing of cooperative bilateral and multilateral relations with states in these two regions requires it to deftly align its approaches to the regions with the individual states' interests. In Southeast Asia, South Korea's New Southern Policy has remarkably integrated bilateral relations, functional cooperations and multilateral dialogues. This stands in stark contrast to the U.S.'s approach which targets only a few member-states or regional institution. South Korea's bilateral and multilateral pivots to Southeast Asia are much welcomed and should be sustained for the long-term.⁸

South Korea has also enhanced its global and regional stature through minilateralism with other major powers, that is, engaging in inclusive partnerships in multiple coalitions. South Korea, for example, was invited to the Quad and G7 summits and is an active member of several multilateral initiatives such as APEC (as a founding member), AIIB (the China-led financial group), RCEP (the ASEAN-led multilateral trade deal), and the G20. South Korea will find that being involved in various financial, technological, and economic supply chains with non-discriminatory nature is much more likely to gain it the global stature it seeks.

India's membership in the Indo-Pacific is limited to bilateral partnerships with various states in the region (including South Korea), and the bilateral-multilateral nexus within ASEAN-based platforms (for

example, the East Asia Summit, ADMM-Plus, and ASEAN Regional Forum). India has its own Asia-oriented policy, from its 'Look East' policy, which was upgraded to the 'Act East' policy in 2014. In the Indo-Pacific region, India is a member of Non-aligned Movement (NAM), a member of the G20, and, in 2017, was admitted to the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) (with Pakistan). A review of India's international organization memberships reveals that India's emphasis on functional and technical cooperation has always been part of its strength.

India's recent reservations in participating in several multilateral initiatives (for example, its last-minute withdrawal from the RCEP, despite having joined in the negotiations, and its delay in joining APEC) highlight its cautious regional and global posturing. India would need to consider participating more in multi-layered and multi-track diplomacy, focusing on the functional and tangible benefits of memberships in organizations that further integrate India into the Indo-Pacific. These do not require India to compromise its neutrality and non-aligned posture: Inclusive, multi-layered engagement will only enhance India's global stature, not undermine it.

When India embraces inclusive multilateralism, its role converges with South Korea's, providing it with a multi-layered pivotal role in the Indo-Pacific. One of the characteristics of a pivot is setting things in motion, that is, being able to move things, with the pivot at the center. In geopolitics, a pivotal state adds stability to its surroundings. While the intensifying U.S.-China rivalry makes it increasingly difficult to balance and bandwagon, it is even more important for states such as South Korea and India to partner with each other and with regional groupings such as ASEAN to promote their own and regional interests in geo-economic and geopolitical development, while strengthening geostrategic cooperation to safeguard the most vulnerable value in the Indo-Pacific: Peace and security.

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7. India-South Korea-Japan: Middle Power Synergy in the Indo-Pacific

Stephen R. Nagy

The Lowy Institute's Asia Power Index empirically demonstrates that India, South Korea, and Japan belong to the same grouping of states in terms of their comprehensive national power—the middle powers. Book ending this group of states includes a heterogeneous set of countries with the U.S. and China at the apex of the list and small countries or powers such as Nepal, North Korea, and the Maldives at the bottom end of the power ranking.

This middle power grouping tell us little about the nature of their diplomacy as the group is politically and economically heterogenous and comprises of countries as diverse as Japan, South Korea, Iran, Vietnam, Indonesia, and India. Nonetheless, there are countries such as India, South Korea, and Japan that converge in their interests in promoting a rules-based order, in balancing the growing weight of China in the Indo-Pacific region, and in cooperating on emerging issues. These issues include resilience initiatives, technology, the provision, and protection of global public goods such as health infrastructure, preserving the status quo across the Taiwan Strait, and infrastructure and connectivity.

Notions of middle powers, meanwhile, continue to evolve. Scholars such as Chapnick (2011), Cooper (2016) and Higgot (1990) discussed middle powers in terms of functional, normative, and hierarchical behavior, niche diplomacy and coalition building.¹ Ping in contrast puts forward the concept of hybridization, that states that are empirically defined and that middle powers have an “innate statecraft and perceived power” as a result of their size.² On the flipside, Robertson rejects the notion of middle power using examples such as MIKTA arguing that the middle power concept is definitionally powerless.³ Still others such as Nagy (2021) argue that effective middle powers engage in neo-middle power diplomacy

characterized by lobbying, insulating, and rulemaking in the realms of security, trade, and international law, to protect their national interests from Sino-U.S. strategic competition.⁴

In short, reflecting the new realities of U.S.-China strategic competition and a U.S. partner that is less reliable on the international stage, neo-middle power diplomacy requires pragmatic, realistic and regionally focused diplomacy in lieu of normative agendas which can include but are not exclusive to the promotion of human rights, human security and feminist foreign policy initiatives that while important make it more difficult to achieve tangible results that meet national interests.⁵

Through the above lens, the trifecta of India, South Korea, and Japan represent a middle power constellation that can provide global public goods to the Indo-Pacific that are tangentially linked to each country's national interests. By aligning their comparative advantages, Japan, South Korea, and India can engage in synergistic middle power diplomacy that aligns interests and capabilities towards deliverable and sustainable foreign policy coordination.

Taking up Resilience

Resilience has migrated to the center of economic security policy planning since the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020. Disruptions associated with the lockdowns in the China-based global production networks strained a variety of supply chains bringing acute clarity to many states that they needed to build broader and deeper resilience into supply chains to ensure that a breakdown or disruption in one part of the global supply chain would not disrupt economic security.

In addition to the disruptions brought about by COVID-19 related supply chain disruptions, states including Japan, India, and South Korea have become acutely aware of the potential for supply chain weaponization and that economic coercion can be an additional source of disruption. This has resulted in enhanced unilateral, multilateral, and multilateral cooperation that focuses on resilience and economic security through de-risking or selective diversification.

Japan, India, and Australia have already invested in the Supply Chain

Resilience Initiative (SCRI).⁶ The recent G7 Hiroshima Summit held a session that was entirely focused on “Economic Resilience and Economic Security” and the G7 Leaders’ related a Statement on Economic Resilience and Economic Security.⁷ Broader coordination between South Korea, Japan, and India in contributing to supply chain resilience, de-risking and joint economic security at a trilateral level but also plugging into existing initiatives such as the SCRI represents an opportunity to match comparative advantages to economic security needs.

New Delhi, Seoul, and Tokyo should approach their cooperation in a manner that is pragmatic, realistic, and regionally focused rather than diluting resources through the expansive Indo-Pacific region. By way of example, the triffecta could focus on South Asia or Southeast Asia resilience by enhancing de-risking initiatives and SCRI through policy coordination including but not exclusive to financing, labor coordination, and human capital development that inculcates more resilience into regional supply chains and economy.

The Pacific Island is another subregion within the Indo-Pacific that may be ripe for trilateral middle power coordination to deliver environmental resilient initiatives to a part of the world facing existential environmental threats.

A “plug-in” approach to resilience initiatives allows for trilateral cooperation within pre-existing frameworks without the need to formulate new cooperation platforms. To illustrate, South Korea could potential plug into the SCRI of Australia, Japan, and India.

Focus on Technology

Technology cooperation is another area where India-Japan-South Korea middle power synergy in the Indo-Pacific have a role to play. All three states recognize the importance of technologies such as AI, quantum computing, and the digital economy. There is consensus that AI and quantum computing will shape the region’s economy, societies, and the relationship between governments and their citizens. Coordinating policies in the area of AI, quantum computing, and the digital economy will be important in ensuring that transparent rules govern these technologies

and their development, so they are consistent with democratic institutions and the rule of law.

Trilateral cooperation can take place by plugging into existing minilaterals such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) and or the AI and quantum computing components of AUKUS. They can also be standalone forms of cooperation for New Delhi, Seoul, and Tokyo.

In the case of the Quad and AUKUS, both minilaterals have technological pillars. Creating interfaces for engaging as a trilateral partnership that would add expertise, capital, and a critical mass of resources will have a high likelihood of success if New Delhi, Seoul, and Tokyo could package their trilateral cooperation into deliverables. For example, pooling research and development resources, harmonizing regulatory and legal frameworks, the middle power trifecta can add value to these pre-existing minilaterals through initiatives that are already working synergistically in the areas of AI and quantum computing.

In the case of the latter, standalone technological cooperation between India, South Korea, and Japan can occur. At the high level, semi-conductor manufacturing and human capital should be invested in to contribute to building an alternative semi-conductor production center that is less vulnerable to economic coercion or supply chain weaponization. Coordination on export controls, AI and quantum computing research and development can not only contribute to advancing technological development but also building more resilience into technology supply chains.

Proactively supporting initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) that includes proposals for technological cooperation is another minilateral/ multilateral organization where the collective weight of India, Japan and South Korea could shape how technology develops in the region.

Provision of Public Goods

The broader Indo-Pacific region continues to have a paucity in infrastructure and connectivity, thereby hampering development. Enhancing coordination of financing for infrastructure and connectivity,

pooling resources, and joint planning of projects can lead India, Japan, and South Korea to contribute to development and building more strategic autonomy into the region. Increased development and interconnectivity foster deeper economic integration. This has the potential to deepen strategic autonomy of subregions such as Southeast Asia so that they make decisions that are based more on their national interests and less on their asymmetric economic relationship with China.

Plugging into the SCRI, the Australia, U.S., and Japan trilateral partnership for infrastructure investment in the Indo-Pacific or including South Korea in the Blue Dot Network are all avenues to inculcate this middle power trifecta into existing infrastructure and connectivity initiatives. There is also space for New Delhi, Seoul, and Tokyo to focus their public good provision at the subregional level in the areas of health or digital infrastructure, environmental initiatives that help stem the negative effects of rising sea levels, as well as water, food and energy security.

Towards Peace and Stability

Coordinated middle power diplomacy between New Delhi, Seoul, and Tokyo should also be leveraged to preserve the existing rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. Initiatives could include joint diplomatic statements on the importance of peace and stability across the Taiwan Strait within the context of the so-called “One China” policy, the legitimacy of the 2016 Permanent Court of Arbitration decision against China’s territorial claims in the South China Sea or enhancing sanctions enforcement on North Korea.

Supporting the G7 Leaders’ Statement on Economic Resilience and Economic Security, the Declaration Against Arbitrary Detention in State-to-State Relations or calls for the comprehensive, irreversible, verifiable denuclearization of North Korea’s WMD program are other areas that Seoul, Tokyo, and New Delhi could throw their collective weight behind to promote peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Without a doubt this will not take place without a *quid-pro-quo* among New Delhi, Seoul, and Tokyo in the case of denuclearization of North Korea’s WMD. India would likely want more coordinated diplomatic

pressure on Pakistan to compel them to denuclearize or more forceful statements related to China's recent actions in the Tawang sector of Arunachal Pradesh state or in the Galwan Valley.

Conclusion

The dynamic changes and challenges that face the Indo-Pacific region are taking place in the context of the intensification of U.S.-China strategic competition. To avoid being shaped by the strategic competition, middle powers such as South Korea, India, and Japan need to cooperate proactively and pragmatically to secure their national interests. To accomplish these objectives, a variety of formulas exists in which the middle power trifecta uses their collective comparative advantages to develop new sustainable and meaningful initiatives. These could be stand-alone trilateral cooperation or through plugging into pre-existing minilateral or multilateral initiatives like the Quad, AUKUS, and IPEF.

Both routes should be pursued to align interests and capabilities towards deliverable foreign policy coordination that is pragmatic, realistic, and regionally focused. New Delhi, Seoul, and Tokyo should ensure that they coordinate their diplomacy by lobbying, insulating, and rulemaking in the realms of security, trade, and international law, to protect their national interests from Sino-U.S. strategic competition.

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III

Framing the Critical Areas of Cooperation

8. India's Indo-Pacific Strategy: Where Does South Korea Stand?

Mahima Duggal

As U.S.-China great power competition casts a shadow over the Indo-Pacific, New Delhi and Seoul realize the importance of establishing stronger linkages with like-minded middle powers to have a profound impact on global dynamics in economics, technology, and politics. The bilateral relationship between India and South Korea has evolved rapidly over the past decade. Trade between both countries has consistently expanded; in 2022, bilateral trade grew by 17.3 percent to US\$27.8 billion.¹ Both countries also maintain positive security relations, characterized by steadily growing defense and strategic collaborations. However, while New Delhi's Indo-Pacific outlook places significant emphasis on strategic relations with actors like Japan, the U.S., Australia (via the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue; Quad) and ASEAN, South Korea has found comparatively limited mention in India's Indo-Pacific outlook.

What are India's priorities in the Indo-Pacific, and how does South Korea figure therein? This paper argues that a deeper strategic partnership with Seoul can be advantageous for New Delhi, bolstering not only India's economic growth outlook, but also its objectives in the Indo-Pacific region.

Inclusivity across Oceans: India's Indo-Pacific Approach

The increasing salience of the Indo-Pacific concept in global discourse has made it a central point of focus in India's foreign policy. In June 2018, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi first outlined India's vision for the Indo-Pacific region. In brief, India calls for a "free, open and inclusive order" in the region based on "respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity of all nations, peaceful resolution of disputes through dialogue

and adherence to international rules and laws".²

India's Indo-Pacific approach is holistic in that it considers both the security and the economic spheres. This complementarity is highlighted in SAGAR (translated as 'sea' in Hindi)—Security and Growth for All in the Region—which constitutes India's core vision for its regional approach. SAGAR's aim of deepening economic and security cooperation with maritime neighbors, combined with India's Act East Policy (AEP), form the underpinnings of its approach towards the Indo-Pacific. India's transition from the Look East Policy (LEP) to AEP was primarily driven by its aim to significantly expand economic engagement with prospering Southeast Asian and East Asian economies. However, the Modi government has sustainably expanded its outlook Act East to Act Indo-Pacific,³ by adopting a larger definition of its extended neighborhood as well as a more pragmatic approach in its strategic orientation. This has involved enhancing India's economic focus to include a security dimension with a view of China.

One of the strongest manifestations of India's deteriorating relations with China, brought on by the Galwan Valley clash of 2020,⁴ has been its turn towards the Indo-Pacific. The specter of China's growing expansionist behavior—a direct threat to India's peace and stability—has forced India to contend with a new strategic environment that made it prudent for New Delhi to pursue stronger security relations with like-minded partners. In other words, as the India-China relationship grew more adversarial, the inherent power asymmetry that India shares with China made it necessary to bolster the country's regional and global posture by raising its profile as a major power. Delhi's Indo-Pacific strategy—characterized by focused engagement with certain strategic partners—is an important part of this new foreign policy thinking. This new matrix in Indian foreign policy can be seen through the prism of *pointed alignment*, based on *realpolitik*.⁵ India's Indo-Pacific engagement has time and again highlighted inclusivity as a cornerstone, in keeping with its vision of a multipolar world order. Its *pointed alignment* approach involves a shift from emphasizing Asian solidarity to fashioning a new balance of power system in the Indo-Pacific.

Accordingly, New Delhi has visibly stepped up engagement with partners like Japan, the United States, Australia, ASEAN, South Korea, and the EU, while also asserting greater leadership in its interactions with diverse regional and global institutions as it champions the causes of the Global South.⁶ India's participation in, and shaping of, the Indo-Pacific minilateral architecture—through forums like the Quad, Quad Plus, Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI), Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), the India-led Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and various other trilaterals—elucidate its active commitment to achieving security and prosperity in the region.⁷ India's IPOI addresses practical cooperation in seven areas, which represent its key regional priorities: (i) Maritime security; (ii) Maritime ecology; (iii) Maritime resources; (iv) Capacity building and resource sharing; (v) Disaster risk reduction and management; (vi) Science, technology, and academic cooperation; and (vii) Trade connectivity and maritime transport.⁸

India's work in these domains is anchored by its regional partnerships; where does South Korea stand in this new matrix?

Situating South Korea

Understanding how South Korea is positioned in India's Indo-Pacific policy is a somewhat intricate matter since there is no clearly laid out strategy document that defines India's Indo-Pacific vision, objectives, plan of action, and its perception towards regional partners. Nevertheless, the growth in the India-South Korea bilateral and the emerging strategic dimensions of their interactions point to the immense importance Delhi places on Seoul as an equal partner, with shared values, vision, and ambitions. In 2018, a joint statement released by both countries, post former President Moon Jae-in's state visit to India, explicitly stated that Delhi sees the ROK as an "indispensable partner in its 'Act East' policy" and their bilateral partnership as an important pillar upholding peace, stability, and security in the Indo-Pacific.⁹ Conversely, India is a central stalwart of South Korea's New Southern Policy (NSP), released under President Moon, and now its Indo-Pacific strategy, which frames the economic, sociocultural, political, and strategic cooperation between the

two countries.

India's shift in perception over China was accompanied by a similar turn in South Korea, as China-South Korea relations underwent several challenges. Seoul's growing economic dependence on China is complicated by the challenges to its freedom of navigation and the free flow of goods that have followed China's rising military power and increase in regional tensions. In other words, South Korea's geographical proximity to China poses vulnerabilities to its security calculus. More importantly, however, the fact that China (and Russia) stood side-by-side with North Korea, as they reviewed its latest nuclear-capable missiles and attack drones at a military parade in Pyongyang explicates Seoul's rapidly deteriorating security landscape. Increasingly, South Korea is finding itself in a rather hostile and unstable neighborhood. Much like India, the ROK is also faced with a situation where building deeper strategic partnerships with middle powers has become vital. In 2016, the deployment of the U.S.-built THAAD missile defense system resulted in harsh Chinese sanctions that hit the Korean economy hard.¹⁰ This highlighted the need to focus more on special strategic partnerships across the continent, especially in a bid to build economic resiliency by diversifying its economic portfolio. For India too, South Korea is critical to its economic ambitions, which naturally reflect its vision to become a leading regional if not global power.

India is increasingly realizing that as the regional order comes under greater stress, both countries face a shared challenge amid China's aggressive behavior as well as shared imperatives on furthering ASEAN centrality, freedom of navigation, safeguarding and bolstering international norms, and working via creative multilateralism and minilateralism to preserve regional security. India's model for inclusive growth in the Indo-Pacific and its *pointed alignment* strategy provide the necessary impetus for country-specific engagement, and South Korea features prominently therein. As middle powers with great capacity to effect change, Delhi and Seoul realize that their partnership can help advance peace and bring together smaller nations to build a positive regional order.

Despite the high regard both countries hold for each other in their political rhetoric, as well as the myriad of convergences in their outlooks,

the India-South Korea partnership remains somewhat limited. Some attribute this gap to their geographical constraints; both middle powers are hindered by the geopolitics in their respective sub-regions. While South Korea remained singularly focused on the nuclear threat from North Korea, India was largely focused on the IOR, which was considered its strategic boundary. Yet, this does not explain the strides that the India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership has achieved. Arguably, India-South Korea relations have lacked political momentum; historically limited interactions, a high (and still growing) trade deficit in the ROK's favor, lack of robust developmental aid and collaborations, and both states' rather inward-looking foreign policies.

Regardless, India's shift beyond the IOR to the Indo-Pacific strategic space and South Korea's embrace of the concept, with the release of its strategy in December 2022, opens new vistas for their cooperation. As India-ROK celebrate 50 years of diplomatic ties in 2023, both can boast of solid and multifaceted cooperation spanning various domains. The fifth India-Korea Security and Foreign Policy Dialogue, held in January 2023 at the Secretarial level shortly after Seoul's release of its Indo-Pacific strategy,¹¹ reiterated the strides that both countries have made and the importance of the bilateral for the future of the Indo-Pacific. Their alignment over ASEAN centrality, maritime threats and challenges, and economic convergences and complementarities (such as in the shipbuilding sector) can be leveraged for substantive progress moving forward.

Analyzing Potentials: Policy Recommendations

As South Korea adopts the Indo-Pacific concept and seeks to become a Global Pivotal State through more "contributive" and proactive cooperation policies in the region,¹² there are several areas with potential for greater bilateral engagement. To overcome the historically inconsistent and fragmented partnership, and step up their ties as a strategic, critical and multidimensional bilateral in the Indo-Pacific, India and South Korea must focus on the following pathways:

(a) Building Political Synergy: Strengthening strategic dialogues and interactions must be a priority for India and South Korea to add substance

and momentum to their strategic partnership. For Seoul, the challenge will be to establish itself as a reliable regional partner to India; for this, bilateral interactions must include not only regular high-level meetings but also multi-layered cooperation at various working levels across sectors. Ultimately, both partners should look to work towards regular 2+2 Foreign and Defense dialogues to strengthen the strategic dimension of their partnership.

(b) Deepening Economic and Technological Cooperation: As a tiger economy, South Korea can not only offer India expertise and support, but it can also help raise India's profile as a global manufacturing hub—a foremost aim of the Modi administration, under its *Make in India* and *Atmanirbharta* (self-reliance) initiatives. Discussions are already ongoing on how South Korea can support India's budding shipbuilding industry, considering its immense expertise in the domain. As a technologically advanced nation, South Korea can support India's push to expand its high-end manufacturing capabilities in sectors like semiconductors, advanced materials, electric and autonomous vehicles, as well as renewable and new energy industries, including solar power. Both countries can find pathways for collaboration on climate change, energy security and public health related digital technologies, which are important priorities for both.

(c) Strengthening Security Vertical: Building on their shared understanding and vision of the Indo-Pacific as a strategic space, India and South Korea need to bolster their defense cooperation to respond to the complex challenges therein. In terms of maritime security, both countries can explore potential for joint HADR exercises (including deploying rescue submarines in challenging deep-sea conditions), counter-piracy operations, and maritime domain awareness. They can also seek to enhance interoperability through joint trainings, regular naval and coast guard exchanges, military logistics agreement, and joint exercises. In this vein, they must explore the possibilities of expanding interactions in multinational and multi-service exercises, especially pertaining to maritime security. Both countries share civil nuclear, space and defense industrial cooperation. Continued focus on the latter is especially important to stimulating the strategic partnership.

(d) Exploring a Global Connect: As Seoul and Delhi seek to build regional synergy, their partnership must focus on how they can leverage their regional positions to strengthen third country cooperation. Here, India's rising profile in Southeast Asia as a 'preferred partner' can be a conduit for South Korea's dwindling presence in the critical region. Both states highlight the need for ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific; launching joint projects on physical and digital connectivity infrastructure, climate change resilience and sustainable economy. India is already working closely with Japan on quality infrastructure in the region; drawing in South Korea will not only strengthen the public good that the partners are able to deliver to the region, but further help raise India's strategic presence in face of China's growing influence in the region. Some experts are concerned that the ambitious scope of South Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy can inadvertently detract from the focus accorded to Southeast Asia under the NSP; by partnering with India on maritime, connectivity, economic and sustainable development cooperation—ASEAN's priorities in the Indo-Pacific—it can reassert its potential as a valuable and trusted partner.

Additionally, both countries must also explore how cooperation via specific minilateral and multilateral groupings in the region—such as Quad Plus, SCRI, IPOI, IPEF, IONS, etc.—can help achieve shared goals. As a major solar-powered economy, South Korea can, for example, join the India-led International Solar Alliance. It can also be an important part of the IPOI (especially on disaster risk reduction, trade, and maritime security), linking it with its NSP rubric and Indo-Pacific strategy. It can also contribute to several of the Quad working groups on an ad hoc basis, and work with India to inject momentum into the Quad Plus forum, along with other ASEAN and European middle powers. There is also immense room for New Delhi and Seoul to explore the merits of new issue-based trilaterals, such as with Australia, Indonesia, or European middle powers; with Japan too, track 1.5 dialogues on Indo-Pacific security can be explored. Such cooperation can extend to the multilateral domain as well, such as with South Korea's support for India's bid for a permanent seat at the UN Security Council.

Although India-South Korea ties have been limited and fragmented, the mutual recognition of the Indo-Pacific strategic space provides new momentum to their partnership. Moving forward, both sides must show dedicated political will to explore cooperation and transform their relationship into a functional one. This will require sustained interactions at both operational and strategic levels. Ultimately, the goal of both countries must be to build greater solidarity and lay the foundations of what can become a middle power axis in the Indo-Pacific.

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9. India-South Korea Cooperation in Technology: Opportunities and Challenges

Wooyeal Paik

The India-South Korea multi-faceted relations have been developing for the last two decades. Since 2015, bilateral relations have been upgraded to “Special Strategic Partnership,” which has culminated in the two sides sharing most aspects of their respective Indo-Pacific strategies and making great efforts to overcome the tyranny of distance.

The two countries’ foreign ministers held bilateral talks in April 2023, discussing ways to enhance strategic cooperation. The Indian Minister for External Affairs S. Jaishankar described the talks as “warm and wide-ranging” and highlighted the “steady progress” in the ties: The ambit of their discussion includes an expansive list of areas covering political contacts, trade and investment, defense, science and technology, energy, space, semiconductors, emerging technologies, and cultural exchanges.¹

His Korean counterpart, Park Jin echoed the goodwill and common democratic values-centered political intent in bilateral and in Indo-Pacific cooperation initiatives: “We are both exemplary democracies, vibrant economies, and cultural powers and we are both committed to contributing to a free, open, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific region.”² The current bonhomie and stress on a trajectory for tighter relations highlights, however, that these two countries seemed to reach their bilateral potential a long time ago.

The question then emerges is, will their strategic bilateral relations achieve greater goals under the present and near future circumstances? Will South Korea’s need to execute its “Global Pivotal Power” drive and search for new development engines and India’s need to create a technological manufacturing hub help them coordinate and work more

effectively than in the past? Can a set of new approaches catalyze a transformation in technological ties?

Lagging “Special Strategic” Technological Ties

The bilateral cooperation’s progress across the policy dimensions including that of science and technology has been disappointing, despite the two foreign ministers’ warm exchanges to celebrate the 50th anniversary of diplomatic relations between South Korea and India and to consolidate the Special Strategic Relations between the two Indo-Pacific partner countries.³ This critical evaluation of their stagnant relations is widely but quietly shared among the strategic communities in Seoul and New Delhi.

From a Korean point of view, out of the nearly 700 Korean companies operating in India, the established top three enterprises Hyundai, Samsung, and LG, which already have become key in-house brands in India, are the only economic and technological presence of South Korea in India. The others that have invested in India have been struggling to establish themselves, let alone becoming major economic and technological players. On the other hand, Indian enterprises have not entered the Korean market; moreover, they are not co-developing any significant technological product with Korean partners.

As a result, the bilateral technological cooperation has been minimal, especially in comparison with their respective bilateral cooperation with the other states, such as with the United States, Japan, Russia, and major European countries. It must be noted that occasional upbeat rhetorical exchanges between decision-makers, even via the relevant science and technology authorities, or among the strategic community does not lead to concrete developments on the ground. During the multiple venues to mark the 50th anniversary of Korea’s ties with India this year, this pattern has been repeated.⁴

So at the outset, the two sides need to develop honest mechanisms to evaluate the ground reality and then make bold, if not disruptive, efforts at the highest levels to push science and technology cooperation forward. In this context, the growing level of bilateral trade is a veritable incentive: According to the Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA),

bilateral trade between India and South Korea grew by 17.3 per cent to US\$27.8 billion in 2022.⁵ More economic incentives and political push are direly needed from both countries in order to make sustainable progress in this regard.

At the same time, India and South Korea need to change their cooperation approach from pure market economic principles to an economic and technology security orientation. As such, even though the two countries have tried to collaborate in several strategic sectors such as defense industry, space, shipbuilding (submarine), and biotechnology, the market interactions, which was limited by red tape, lack of mutual understanding, and short-sighted profit seeking, have not matched the state-level intention in the last two decades. In particular, the disagreement on level of technology transfer should be seriously reconsidered from an economic and technological security point of view.

Against this backdrop, they must consider the needs of science and technology cooperation as serious “security” partners—an aspect that has been lacking in their respective outlooks for each other. In other words, in this era of convergence of multi-dimensional securities (military, economic, technological, political regime, and environmental securities) as well as regions of Indo-Pacific and Euro-Atlantic (and beyond), bilateral technological cooperation should be taken as security cooperation and co-evolution.

This would be a bold step forward for South Korea and India, which have been very cautious to limit their security horizons and partnerships within their respective traditional regions (South Asia and Northeast Asia), as well as the extended Indo-Pacific region. The time has come for them to formulate a real “security” alignment in the context of multi-dimensional securities convergence, if not alliance. This is just a change of fundamental structure within the global political-economic-technological security structure.

Securitizing Economic-Technological Partnership?

Unless the governments on both sides show bona fide political will in enhancing the low levels of strategic engagement, their leadership's rhetoric, the strategic communities' strong recommendations, as well as the vibrant but market-weary business community cannot take their technological cooperation to a recognizable higher level.

In this respect, Seoul and New Delhi might want to consider developing a technological partnership along the lines of the latest U.S.-India makeover in new technologies, such as their recently launched initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET).⁶ As per the iCET, India and the United States will "elevate and expand" their strategic technology partnership and defense industrial cooperation between governments, businesses, and academic institutions in fields including innovation ecosystem, defense technology industrial cooperation, semiconductor supply chains, and space, among others.⁷ To be sure, India's relationship with the U.S. in science and technology cannot be identical to that between India and South Korea. Ditto for South Korea.

Yet, the latter two states must look for ways to initiate bilateral frameworks such as the iCET adapted to their own context. For example, India's most recent technological gain from the U.S.—namely, the co-production of a jet fighter gas turbine engine—which will substantially improve India's jet fighter technology might be a good starting point. South Korea, which solely depends on importing the jet fighter engine for its light jet fighter FA50 as well as the 4.5 generation jet fighter KF-21 from the U.S., would be very interested in joining this technological project. More promising 'technological security' cooperation is found in strategic industries—bio-pharmaceutical, nuclear, 6G, quantum, robotics, and artificial intelligence technology.

Further, space technology cooperation should be on the table again. It is well known that India tried to leverage its expertise in space technology—especially to launch Korean satellites—to negotiate with Korea on many occasions in the last decade or more but to no avail.⁸ Now, Korea has succeeded in its homegrown space launch vehicle "Nuri," and pathfinder lunar orbiter "Danuri", which could be seen as an

important milestone on the trajectory of achieving South Korea's future space goals such as a robotic landing on the moon by 2032 and on Mars by 2045.⁹ As a result, South Korea is now a more equitable partner in their quest for becoming global player in space exploration. Similarly, in 2023, India not only launched its Chandrayaan-3 spacecraft—expected to land on the moon in late August 2023 if successful—but also joined the U.S.-led Artemis Accords.¹⁰ As South Korea is already a signatory to the Accords and the U.S. wants to include India and South Korea in space technological cooperation, the time is right for them to enhance space technology initiatives in bilateral and minilateral formats.¹¹

A New Dimension: Exploring a Minilateral Approach?

Unarguably, if there are structural reasons for the slow progress in the bilateral framework, a different type of approach is needed. One of the currently viable and popular mechanisms is through minilateralism; today, multilaterals and minilaterals are being preferred over bilaterals on significant new technological cooperation among the major powers. Korea and India can seek minilateral approaches, too.

The science and technology avenues that are of common interest to South Korea and India are, as briefly mentioned above, both well-known and new emerging areas. Even though Korea is one of the most technologically advanced countries and India has its own technological strength, advancement in new emerging fields would benefit more through a globally cooperative approach. India and South Korea should, therefore, consider involving “like-minded” technologically advanced countries such as the United States, Japan, Germany, France, UK, and a few others to create an effective and evolving science and technology ecosystem, rather than working in isolation.

At the same time, this kind of minilateral approach should consider technological assistance and investment for the Global South by creating conditions for technological innovation such as smart city-digitalization and financial technology including electronic payment methods (as India has been quite successful in popularizing this mode domestically). Seoul and New Delhi should use technology diplomacy to seek ways to advance

into third regions and countries together, as well as to attract investment and utilize technology transfer for the greater good. Such steps would further both India's and South Korea's respective strategic autonomy goals, as well as showcase their strengths as responsible global pivotal powers. Again, such a step forward requires the aforementioned overhaul in the bilateral strategic thinking on economic and technological security in an era of multiple security convergences.

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10. Defense Diplomacy on the Rise: What It Means for India-ROK Strategic Collaboration?

Jagannath Panda and Choong Yong Ahn

Introduction

Since 2015, when India and the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea) upgraded their ties to “special strategic partnership,” the two Indo-Pacific partner-states have witnessed a sharp rise in global profiles, including a growth in defense ties with multiple states as part of their expanded stress on such collaborations as a key foreign policy tool. This is largely thanks to the evolving realignment in global geopolitics, primarily caused by China’s hegemonic rivalry with the United States and accelerated by Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the threat from North Korea’s nuclear capabilities in Northeast Asia.

However, India and South Korea have yet to elevate their strategic cooperation, including in defense, to heights comparable to their long-standing bilateral ties centered on economic growth. During 2019-2021, there was a surge in defense collaboration through a flurry of visits to the respective countries by high-level defense officials, including the defense ministers and the Indian chiefs of army and air staff, as well as through creation of several forums for regular communication on security matters and a roadmap for defense industrial cooperation.¹ This was to a great extent due to India’s continued impetus on seeking a greater relationship with South Korea. It was accelerated by the Moon Jae-in administration’s push for according ties with India a status similar to the ROK’s relationship with the major powers (China, Japan, Russia, and the U.S.) via the convergence between the New Southern Policy (Plus) and India’s Act East Policy (AEP). Yet the potential never really took off. However, the Yoon Suk-yeol administration has shifted to a broader

and action oriented diplomatic and security strategies as evident in the declared Indo-Pacific strategy in December 2022.²

According to the Global Firepower(GFP) Index evaluated on the basis of 60 different factors, India ranked fourth in 2023 after the U.S, Russia, and China while South Korea ranked sixth right after the UK. Given the variety of factors considered in the GFP, both India and South Korea, almost equally ranked, can gain a lot from a strategic partnership in defense due to each other's inherent comparative advantages.

On the security and defense front, India is a core member of the U.S.-led Quad Four. South Korea has also been one of the staunchest allies of the U.S. and is participating in the Quad Plus' working group meetings to address regional public goods. As Lee and Corbon argue, South Korea is regarded as "A K-Arsenal of Democracy" in which South Korea can help to fulfill the defense procurement needs of frontline US allies.³ Both countries are concerned about the ceaseless nuclear threats from North Korea and highly assertive rise of the most populous China as on 2022 militarily and economically in the world to realize the "Chinese Dream" by 2049 to climb to the hegemonic power status in World geo-politics.

Against China's bellicose military threats, India is increasingly drawn to the U.S.-led Free and Open Indo-Pacific, substantially deviating from its traditional non-allied posture. South Korea's Yoon Seok-yeol government is also determined to ensure a free, peaceful and prosperous Indo-Pacific aiming at South Korea' increased role as a global pivotal state, reaching out to many likeminded countries across the globe beyond the conventional focus on the Korean Peninsula.

Against this backdrop, can the current ROK government tilt the scales through an active arms collaboration with India? Will India under Modi's newly assertive defense diplomacy be able to capitalize on South Korea's global goals? What could be the new trajectory of India-ROK defense, and in turn strategic, ties?

Growing Defense Deals: Ascertaining the India-ROK Equation

According to the Indian government, at present, India has defense cooperation agreements with over 53 countries.⁴ Moreover, Prime Minister Modi's latest high-profile visits have ensured enhanced strategic technology and defense industrial collaborations with the United States and France, largely in a bid to reduce dependence on Russian arms and equipment. In 2022, India's military spending (about US\$81.4 billion) was the fourth highest in the world—a rise of 6 percent from 2021.⁵ Importantly, the Modi government's emphasis on developing a strong, dynamic defense industry ecosystem, including designing and manufacturing of defense equipment domestically, is shaping the country's new trends. This has resulted in an unprecedented level of defense exports (approximately US\$1.95 billion during the financial year 2022-2023) to more than 80 countries worldwide. Yet the increase is a far cry from the sales of the major defense exporters, including the ROK.

Similarly, South Korea, too, has been expanding its defense ties with countries like Australia, Vietnam, and Poland, besides solidifying its existing military alliance with the United States. South Korea has been a major supplier of weapons and military equipment to India, too. The growing threat from North Korea and China's attempts to alter the status quo in the Taiwan Strait, along with supply-chain disruptions and non-traditional security concerns, have accelerated President Yoon Suk-yeol's plans to place strategic deterrence at the centerstage.⁶ Improving strategic ties with its partner states, stepping up multilateral diplomacy, and strengthening its own military capabilities form a key part of this new strategy.⁷ In terms of military expenditure, the ROK (about US\$46.4 in 2022) is among the top 15 military spenders in the world—about half of what India spends.⁸

However, compared to India, South Korea has already capitalized its manufacturing capabilities, largely a result of the government-led heavy and chemical industrialization, "wealthy economy and strong army" policy drive under President Park Chung-hee (1962-1979) against ever hostile North Korean military threats,⁹ and technology transfers from

the United States and other advanced countries.¹⁰ Today, one of the most important growth stories has been South Korea's rise as the world's eighth-largest weapons exporter.¹¹ In 2022, the ROK signed deals worth more than US\$17 billion, including about US\$14 billion contract with Poland to sell tanks, howitzers, and light attack aircraft.¹² In 2023, South Korea became the first Asian state to be awarded a multi-billion-dollar defense contract by Australia; notably, the South Korean company Hanwha beat Germany's Rheinmetall for the US\$6 billion deal.¹³ Such deals highlight that the Yoon administration's aspiration for a 5 percent share in the global export market by 2027 and becoming the world's fourth-largest defense exporter has found a good head start after surpassing Israel as the 10th largest exporter.

Naturally, India's continually rising military budget and the need for affordable defense equipment in the face of rising tensions with China and Pakistan along with Russia's unstable status as a defense supplier under current circumstances make it a valuable partner for South Korea. It will also help the ROK reduce concerns about overdependence on Chinese manufacturing and align their Indo-Pacific visions/strategies.¹⁴

For India, too, its requirements to build a reliable domestic manufacturing hub will benefit from South Korea's long-standing expertise on developing a credible domestic defense industry, and help India achieve its goal of reaching US\$5 billion in defense exports in the next two years.¹⁵ Moreover, India could showcase the co-produced equipment as a "Make in India" success story and build on its intent to export to third countries in cooperation with the ROK.¹⁶ Importantly, in time, India could refine its capacities, a la South Korea, via joint ventures and R&D, and active inducement of high tech foreign direct investment to enhance its exports.

On the frontlines of Korea's defense industries as globally ranked players are Hanwha Aerospace, Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI), Hanwha Defence, LIG Nex1, Hyundai Rotem and Daewoo Shipbuilding & Engineering (DSME). According to SIPRI, the first four companies belong to global top 100 arms companies. Korea's arms sales abroad averaged about US\$3 billion a year over the period of 2017-2020 but experienced a

phenomenal increase to US\$7.25 billion in 2021 and US\$17 billion in 2022. The main reasons for this quantum jump in South Korea's arms exports are 1) fulfilling the criterion of interoperability with U.S. weapons' system, 2) cost-effectiveness, 3) short delivery times, 4) production and technology transfers, and 5) low political cost.¹⁷

Various areas of defense and security cooperation are currently being explored by South Korea and India. Numerous high-level defense exchanges and dialogues are being conducted to provide opportunities to exchange views and promote coordination. For example, the Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue—the latest fifth edition took place in January 2023—has deepened shared perspectives on regional and global security and defense issues, as well as on exploring opportunities in new technologies and defense industry collaboration.¹⁸ Joint military exercises have also been consistently conducted by India and South Korea to promote interoperability, enhance their defense capabilities and promote regional security in the Indo-Pacific region.

Besides bilateral exercises, the two often participate in multilateral military drills with regional partners, such as the “Sea Dragon 23 exercises” in March 2023.¹⁹ The two partners were joined by Canada, Japan, and the United States, in these joint anti-submarine warfare drills.²⁰ In the current security environment of the Indo-Pacific, displays of military power with allies are now frequent to demonstrate military muscle and unity. As such, China and Russia have also increased their military exercises, most recently with Iran, too, participating (e.g., “Security Bond-2023” exercises in the Gulf of Oman in March)—a factor contributing to the rising regional tensions.²¹

As a result, for India and South Korea to promote stability in the Indo-Pacific, maritime cooperation has become a strong shared area of interest for their expanding defense ties—covering maritime domain awareness, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief operations, and counterterrorism.

In particular, cooperation in maritime security is important to secure their common economic interests, given that important sea lines of communication are being disrupted by geopolitical challenges and are affecting essential trade. Particularly for South Korea, as an export-led

economy, safeguarding the freedom of movement throughout the Indo-Pacific is crucial for ensuring that critical supply chains, such as for semiconductors or energy, remain unharmed. For such maritime security purposes, in 2019, the two sides signed two major agreements to further defense educational exchanges and extend logistical support to each other's navies.²²

They also have an inter-governmental Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) on "Defense Industry Co-operation in Shipbuilding," which is expected to help India in its defense modernization goal; the first five year period has ended.²³ India's Hindustan Shipyard Ltd. (HSL) was speculated to collaborate with Hyundai Heavy Industries to construct five-fleet support ships at an investment of about US\$1.5 billion, but the deal has reportedly fallen through over standards and cost concerns.²⁴ In addition, HSL's shipbuilding and technology transfer deal signed in 2020 with Turkey's TAIS consortium raises questions about the India-ROK defense partnership.²⁵

Nonetheless, defense industry collaboration is being explored between India and South Korea to enhance their respective strengths in defense manufacturing and technology. Joint research and production ventures have been undertaken in the recent years, such as the development of the K9 Vajra, which is essentially India's version of the K9 Thunder. The indigenized K9s are manufactured by the Indian company Larsen & Toubro (L&T) in technical collaboration with the South Korean company Hanwha Aerospace. In 2017, India had approved a nearly US\$646 million deal for the purchase of 100 modified Vajra-T 155 howitzers, co-developed by Hanwha's joint venture with L&T at the latter's India plant (Hazira).²⁶

Importantly, L&T's Armoured Systems Complex, inaugurated in 2019 and where the indigenized K9s were manufactured, was the first such private sector facility in India to produce advanced armored platforms for the defense sector; reportedly, India's latest order for another 100 K9s is under process.²⁷

Moreover, the meeting between defense ministers in 2021 decided to push the envelope on joint research, joint production, and joint export in defense industrial cooperation, including in cyber, space, and intelligence-

sharing domains.²⁸ This adds to the 2019 framework for joint development of different land and naval systems. India has already assured the South Korean industry leaders of its serious intent to facilitate investments in “India’s defense corridors,” via incentives and concessions, as well as “easy access to markets in other countries in the region.”²⁹

Catalyzing Trade and High Tech R&D

In 2023, at the sidelines of the Group of Seven (G7) summit in Hiroshima, the meeting between Modi and Yoon boded well for India-ROK strategic ties.³⁰ It highlighted that the high-level meetings being held regularly in the diplomatic and defense sectors are not just a tick in the box but have serious backing by the country’s top leadership. Earlier in April, Foreign Ministers Park Jin and S. Jaishankar had conveyed similar intent on strategic communication for Indo-Pacific issues.³¹

At the same time, India and the ROK need to take proactive measures for envisioning collaborations in new technologies centered on defense and security to enable the new-era cooperation. In maritime security, the ROK should consider broadening its presence by looking into collaborating with the Indian Navy-hosted Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean region (IFC-IOR), where the United States, the ROK’s alliance partner, and the U.S. treaty allies and India’s Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) partners Australia and Japan are already involved. In April 2023, an ROK Navy delegation did visit the IFC-IOR and a high-level meet between their coast guards also took place, highlighting future possibilities.³² Such measures will enhance the prospects for mutual cooperation including in capacity building, maritime domain awareness, and intelligence sharing.

Notably, the Indian government would be hoping that the L&T K9 co-manufacturing story will inspire more domestic companies to (co) produce defense products globally, and will attract foreign investment for joint product development and production in defense technology-related fields. It will certainly give a new impetus to the “Make in India” initiative. In 2020, the Indian Defense Minister had emphasized India’s and South Korea’s readiness to “leverage mutual strengths in digital application and other advance technologies.”³³ It is time to put such plans

into action, especially in view of India's unprecedented technology and defense cooperation with the United States and France.

Economically, now India and South Korea recognize each other as strategic complementary partners in terms of factor endowments and development stage. At present, India is the fifth largest economy in the world with the largest but youngest population structure, soon to become the third largest economy within this decade. South Korea is a top 10 economy with its globally recognized high tech prowess. Both countries are also pursuing robust and sustainable economic growth through strengthening existing bilateralism first and also working together to reinforce minilateral and multilateral architectures with other like-minded countries in the Indo-Pacific, an increasingly important construct in a rapidly changing global geopolitical landscape.

In the 21st century high tech era, frontier arms technologies are very hard to distinguish from civilian high tech industries as evident in semiconductors, quantum computing, and AI. The increasingly blurring nature of dual high techs for defense capacity building and simultaneously commercial leading edge tradable commodities have made the arms industry a strategic sector for South Korea and India to diffuse high tech components of the arms industry developed by public expenditure across the entire industrial chain led by the private sector or vice versa.

South Korea now recognizes the arms industry as a strategic sector for export earnings, technology transfers and defense diplomacy leverage. India has also been focusing on the indigenous development of its national arms industry and increasing arms imports rapidly to make it a formidable export industry after the recent Galwan skirmish with China and China's continued astonishing military build-up.

In case of South Korea, the arms industry has demonstrated highly superior backward and forward linkage effects as well as general manufacturing. According to the input-output table analysis in recent years, if South Korea succeeds in exporting arms worth 26 trillion won, it is estimated to create 200,000 jobs. One unit increase in the arms' sector in the final demand is estimated to generate 2.301 unit in the derived output, much higher than general manufacturing's 2.096. In terms of

value added, one unit increase in demand in the arms' sector has resulted in 0.625 increase, far higher than 0.568 in general manufacturing.³⁴ It is also expected that India will show similar input-output effects in terms of job creation, derived output, and value added. Therefore, both countries should regard the arms industry as strategic trigger for high tech trade and overall industrial upgrading.

Despite the bilateral comprehensive economic partnership agreement effective since 2010 between India and South Korea, bilateral trade and investment have not been fully explored its potential. South Korea's trade volume with India recorded mere US\$23.7 billion in 2021 and South Korea's total FDI to India from April 2000 up to September 2022 was valued at US\$5.35 billion, sharing just about 1 percent of India's total cumulative inbound FDI. The two countries agreed to increase the bilateral trade volume to US\$50 billion by 2030, which appears a very modest target in consideration of the growth trajectories of the two nations.

Given the sluggish performance in trade and FDI performance compared to their great potential, a strategic cooperation in arms trade and joint manufacturing of military hardwares in accordance with "Make In India" and related software R&D at the government as well as commercial level are likely to trigger drastic increase in overall trade and investment activity because of the inherent spill-over effects on suppliers of sophisticated parts and components. In a nutshell, arms collaborations between India and South Korea will contribute to enhancing mutual trust and lead to deeper overall trade and investment linkages, and joint high tech R&D in a win-win framework.

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