

India-Korea

Why in News?

In the intricate tapestry of global geopolitics, defence collaboration emerges as a foundational imperative, crucial for the preservation of international peace and stability. The recent diplomatic overture during the visit of General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Army Staff of India, in 2023, to the Republic of Korea, signifies a critical juncture in the trajectory of India-Korea defence relations.

- Despite recent high-level engagements, a challenge that persists is the absence of a shared vision for a new comprehensive defence framework, one that can provide a robust structure under which both nations can operate and align their policies to construct a novel and sustainable emerging regional order.
- The imperative for India and Korea is to transcend the confines of bilateral cooperation, and embrace a paradigm shift that cultivates a more profound understanding of their roles in the swiftly evolving global scenario.

Reigniting the flame of India-Korea defence cooperation

In the intricate tapestry of global geopolitics, defence collaboration emerges as a foundational imperative, crucial for the preservation of international peace and stability. The recent diplomatic overture during the visit of General Manoj Pande, Chief of the Army Staff of India, in November 2023, to the Republic of Korea, signifies a critical juncture in the trajectory of India-Korea defence relations. While this visit fortified diplomatic ties, it also unveiled the challenges, necessitating meticulous consideration. This prompts an exploration of the challenges faced by India and Korea in enhancing their defence cooperation, along with an examination of opportunities for mutual growth.

Despite recent high-level engagements, a challenge that persists is the absence of a shared vision for a new comprehensive defence framework, one that can provide a robust structure under which both nations can operate and align their policies to construct a novel and sustainable emerging regional order. The imperative for India and Korea is to transcend the confines of bilateral cooperation, and embrace a paradigm shift that cultivates a more profound understanding of their roles in the swiftly evolving global scenario.

Korean view of India's regional role

A hurdle lies in the resistance on the Korean government side to reassess India's role in the region. It is incumbent upon Korea to comprehend that India is not merely the largest consumer of defence products. Rather, it stands as a regional power capable of substantial contributions to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific. A departure from Cold War mentalities, where the Korean government perceived India as standing in the opposite Soviet bloc, is imperative for Korea to forge a deeper, more meaningful partnership with India. This paradigm shift in Korean government strategic thinking is indispensable for any meaningful engagement between the two nations.

Further, the prevailing overemphasis by the



Lakhvinder Singh

is the Director of Peace and Security Studies at the Asia Institute in Seoul

Both nations need to transcend the confines of bilateral cooperation and understand their roles in a rapidly evolving global scenario

Indian government side on weapons acquisition and technology transfer from Korea, while undeniably pivotal, has tended to overshadow broader strategic considerations. Similarly, the unwavering focus of the Korean defence establishment on profit-driven weapons sales to India, devoid of strategic considerations, may prove shortsighted in the face of fast-changing geopolitical dynamics. Powerful arms lobbies in India and Korea pose a potential roadblock, emphasising the necessity to prioritise long-term strategic goals over short-term gains.

The emerging coalition of North Korea, China, and Russia poses a new serious challenge to collaborative efforts between the two nations. Divergent stances may arise, necessitating a nuanced appraisal of each party's strategic imperatives.

The high-level interactions of Gen. Pande with the top Korean military leadership and his engagements with the leadership of top Korean defence institutions, such as the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) and the Agency of Defence Development (ADD), are anticipated to further unite the defence communities of both countries.

Explore technological collaborations

Leveraging their technological capabilities, India and South Korea are aiming to collaborate in developing advanced defence systems and equipment. Given their shared understanding of the pivotal role technology will play in future conflicts, the scope for cooperation in this sector is limitless. Such synergy can lead to a mutually beneficial defence technology and industry partnership, propelling both countries to the forefront of innovation and self-reliance.

In an era where defence against space warfare, information warfare, and cybersecurity is paramount, both nations can further explore opportunities for cooperation. Given Korea's status as an advanced high-tech digital superpower, vast opportunities exist in the development of robust security measures in these

areas to effectively counter emerging threats in the digital domain, ensuring the security of critical infrastructure and information.

Strengthening coordinated efforts to counter terrorism aligns seamlessly with the shared concerns of India and South Korea. There is potential for collaboration in maritime security, including joint patrolling and information sharing, given the significant maritime interests both countries have in the Indian Ocean.

Peacekeeping and exercises

India and South Korea can leverage their United Nations peacekeeping expertise for collaborative efforts. Sharing insights and resources in peacekeeping operations can enhance regional and global stability, underscoring their joint commitment to peace and security. Additionally, joint exercises and the exchange of best practices in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) demonstrate the shared responsibility of both nations in addressing vulnerabilities to natural disasters.

Lastly, mutual growth is found in enhancing joint army exercises, fostering interoperability, and strengthening the capabilities of both armies for effective collaboration in diverse scenarios. Gen. Pande's visit to Seoul has spurred the extension of cooperation beyond naval focus to other branches of India's armed forces.

While the recent visit of Gen. Pande has reignited the flame of India-Korea defence cooperation, the path forward necessitates meticulous navigation through the challenges and the wholehearted embrace of opportunities. A strategic, balanced approach, coupled with adaptability to the evolving geopolitical landscape is key to unlocking a robust and enduring defence collaboration, in turn creating a partnership that fosters peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. United, both nations stand ready to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of the future, forging a path toward a stronger and more resilient partnership.

Korean View Of India's Regional Role

- A hurdle lies in the resistance on the Korean government side to reassess India's role in the region. It is incumbent upon Korea to comprehend that India is not merely the largest consumer of defence products.
- Rather, it stands as a regional power capable of substantial contributions to peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific.
- A departure from Cold War mentalities, where the Korean government perceived India as standing in the opposite Soviet bloc, is imperative for Korea to forge a deeper, more meaningful partnership with India.
- This paradigm shift in Korean government strategic thinking is indispensable for any meaningful engagement between the two nations.
- Further, the prevailing overemphasis by the Indian government side on weapons acquisition and technology transfer from Korea, while undeniably pivotal, has tended to overshadow broader strategic considerations.
- Similarly, the unwavering focus of the Korean defence establishment on profit-driven weapons sales to India, devoid of strategic considerations, may prove shortsighted in the face of fast-changing geopolitical dynamics.
- Powerful arms lobbies in India and Korea pose a potential roadblock, emphasising the necessity to prioritise long-term strategic goals over short-term gains.
- The emerging coalition of North Korea, China, and Russia poses a new serious challenge to collaborative efforts between the two nations.
- Divergent stances may arise, necessitating a nuanced appraisal of each party's strategic imperatives.
- The high-level interactions of Gen. Pande with the top Korean military leadership and his engagements with the leadership of top Korean defence institutions, such as the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) and the Agency of Defence Development (ADD), are anticipated to further unite the defence communities of both countries.



Explore Technological Collaborations

- Leveraging their technological capabilities, India and South Korea are aiming to collaborate in developing advanced defence systems and equipment.
- Given their shared understanding of the pivotal role technology will play in future conflicts, the scope for cooperation in this sector is limitless.
- Such synergy can lead to a mutually beneficial defence technology and industry partnership, propelling both countries to the forefront of innovation and self-reliance.
- In an era where defence against space warfare, information warfare, and cybersecurity is paramount, both nations can further explore opportunities for cooperation.



- Given Korea’s status as an advanced high-tech digital superpower, vast opportunities exist in the development of robust security measures in these areas to effectively counter emerging threats in the digital domain, ensuring the security of critical infrastructure and information.
- Strengthening coordinated efforts to counter terrorism aligns seamlessly with the shared concerns of India and South Korea.
- There is potential for collaboration in maritime security, including joint patrolling and information sharing, given the significant maritime interests both countries have in the Indian Ocean.

Peacekeeping and Exercises

- India and South Korea can leverage their United Nations peacekeeping expertise for collaborative efforts. Sharing insights and resources in peacekeeping operations can enhance regional and global stability, underscoring their joint commitment to peace and security.
- Additionally, joint exercises and the exchange of best practices in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) demonstrate the shared responsibility of both nations in addressing vulnerabilities to natural disasters.
- Lastly, mutual growth is found in enhancing joint army exercises, fostering interoperability, and strengthening the capabilities of both armies for effective collaboration in diverse scenarios. Gen. Pande’s visit to Seoul has spurred the extension of cooperation beyond naval focus to other branches of India’s armed forces.
- While the recent visit of Gen. Pande has reignited the flame of India-Korea defence cooperation, the path forward necessitates meticulous navigation through the challenges and the wholehearted embrace of opportunities.
- A strategic, balanced approach, coupled with adaptability to the evolving geopolitical landscape is key to unlocking a robust and enduring defence collaboration, in turn creating a partnership that fosters peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. United, both nations stand ready to navigate the complexities and uncertainties of the future, forging a path toward a stronger and more resilient partnership.

India-South Korea Relations

Historical Ties	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ancient Connections: The "Heritage History of the Three Kingdoms" narrates the ancient ties between India and Korea, dating back to 48 AD. • Introduction of Buddhism: Maritime routes may have facilitated the introduction of Buddhism to Korea during the arrival of Princess Suriratna.
Political Aspects	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Korea War Role: India's significant contribution to the ceasefire agreement during the Korean War helped ease tensions between North and South Korea. • CEPA Initiation: The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement in 2010 elevated the India-South Korea relationship to a 'special strategic partnership.' • Common Interests: Both countries share interests in regional stability, especially given tensions in South Asia between India and China. • Concerns and Alignments: South Korea's concerns about North Korea's nuclear program align with India's interests in East Asian economic and regional stability.
Economic Relations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Bilateral Trade: Trade between India and South Korea in 2022 stands at \$27.8 billion, with a target of \$50 billion by 2030. • CEPA Impact: The Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, signed in 2010, has boosted trade relations.
Diplomatic Efforts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Regional Security: South Korea seeks a stronger diplomatic stance on regional issues beyond traditional alliances. • Cultural Exchange: Notable cultural exchanges include the visit of Korean Buddhist Monk Hyecho to India and Rabindranath Tagore's poem 'Lamp of the East.'

Indian Diaspora

- **Academic Presence:** Many Indian scholars in South Korea are involved in post-graduate and doctoral studies, primarily in pure sciences.
- **Professional Migration:** A significant number of Indian professionals, especially in IT, shipping, and automotive sectors, have moved to South Korea.
- **Multilateral Platforms:** Both countries are part of various global platforms, including the United Nations, World Trade Organisation, ASEAN Plus, East Asia Summit, and G-20.

Way Forward

Revitalizing
Defense
Cooperation

Long-term
Vision

Mutually
Advantageous
Collaboration

Crucial
Partnership

Growing
Relations

- **Revitalizing Defense Cooperation:** The recent visit rekindles defense collaboration, emphasizing the need for a strategic and balanced approach adaptable to changing geopolitical circumstances.
- **Long-term Vision:** Fostering a partnership for peace, stability, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region requires a strong and lasting defense partnership.
- **Mutually Advantageous Collaboration:** India and South Korea can position themselves as leaders in innovation and self-sufficiency through mutual collaboration in defense technology and industry.
- **Crucial Partnership:** South Korea views India as a crucial partner amid its evolving strategy with China, and India sees South Korea as a significant ally in its Act East Policy.
- **Growing Relations:** India-South Korea relations have grown multidimensionally, driven by mutual interests and high-level exchanges.