

SPECIAL REPORT no. 211

India-Korea Relations in the Emerging Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific

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JULY 2023

Editor's Note

Great-power strategic competition is casting a long shadow over the Indo-Pacific as the rise of China and the relative decline of United States power have profoundly reshaped global dynamics in economics, technology, and politics. As well-worn tenets of foreign policy unravel, the region's capitals are scrambling to formulate a coherent, strategic response to the systemic challenges posed by the return of great-power competition to the region for the first time since the end of the Cold War. Nowhere is this more true than with India and South Korea.

In the span of only a decade, and particularly in the last few years, India-China relations have taken a nosedive as both powers have clashed over unsettled borders, issues of sovereignty, and China's expansion into India's South Asian backyard. In

response, India has pursued policies ranging from appeasement to greater alignment with more like-minded powers like the United States. China-South Korean relations, while less strained, have not been without their fair share of challenges. Seoul is concerned about its economic dependence on China, the challenges to freedom of navigation and the free flow of goods posed by its western neighbour, and its security vulnerability given its proximity to China's ascendant military power. On 28 December 2022, South Korea unveiled its Indo-Pacific strategy, which it has worked on from the time Yoon Suk Yeol became president in May 2022. For South Korea, the Indo-Pacific, other than being an economically vibrant region, is also beset with challenges that threaten a peaceful, free, and rules-based regional order.

Attribution: Premesha Saha, Ed., "India-Korea Relations in the Emerging Dynamics of the Indo-Pacific," *ORF Special Report No. 211*, July 2023, Observer Research Foundation.

These challenges range from great-power competition, intensifying arms race, lack of action to build transparency and trust in the military and security domains, North Korea's build-up of its nuclear and missile capabilities, and disruptions in supply chain networks. The strategy states that South Korea aims to emerge as a "global pivotal state"—i.e., "it actively seeks out agenda for cooperation and shapes discussions in the region and the wider world."¹

To achieve its ambition of becoming a 'global pivotal state', South Korea is aiming to deepen bilateral engagements, enhance cooperation by undertaking a "multi-layered and comprehensive approach", and pursue partnerships with minilateral groupings and regional and global organisations.² The scope of cooperation will extend beyond just Northeast Asia to key regions within the Indo-Pacific such as Southeast Asia, South Asia, Oceania, and the African Coast of the Indian Ocean, as well as Europe and Latin America, where South Korea seeks to "develop a network of strategic partnerships tailored to each region."³

In South Asia, the stress is on further strengthening the 'special strategic partnership' with India. The strategy outlines thus: "India presents great potential for growth, having the world's second largest population and cutting-

edge IT and space technologies."⁴ Furthermore, through high-level exchanges, the South Korea-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) can be upgraded to become a pillar of this bilateral relationship.

Since the turn of the century, and particularly in the last decade, the bilateral relationship between India and Korea has developed rapidly. Trade between the two nations has boomed and regularly cross the US\$20-billion mark. Much of this owes to a concerted effort on both sides to set up mechanisms like 'Korea Plus' to spur business investment in India's rapidly growing markets. Korea was hit especially hard by economic sanctions from Beijing in the aftermath of its 2016 deployment of the US-built THAAD missile defence system,⁵ while a cloud looms over India's trade relationship with China in the aftermath of its border clashes with its northern neighbour in April 2020 that caused numerous casualties.⁶ Both sides aim to boost bilateral trade to US\$50 billion as India searches for investments and Korea looks to diversify its supply chains.

The sustained high-level political and diplomatic engagement has driven ties in the last decade. In just the past five years, the two sides have upgraded the status of their bilateral relationship twice. Top-level ministers and diplomats from both countries convene regularly at both regional and bilateral summits. The reason for this is both simple and powerful: as the regional security order comes under stress, Seoul and New Delhi have realised that they share key principles including ASEAN centrality, freedom of navigation, the importance of international norms, and the need for creative multilateralism to help preserve regional stability.

Although strong government-to-government relations now exist, it is also important to look at prospects for more direct cooperation on key regional issues. Both sides have much to gain through closer security cooperation. They can build a partnership that defends shared values like freedom of navigation and trade while cooperating on technical operations such as disaster relief, maritime search and rescue, and maritime domain awareness. Despite numerous obstacles in the past, New Delhi and Seoul remain interested in establishing a strong partnership on defence technology. As regional stability slowly erodes and the prospect of conflict appears on the horizon, both New Delhi and Seoul are sharpening their focus on military capacity-building and are on the lookout for like-minded partners.

This report aims to answer one key question: Where does India stand in South Korea's new Indo-Pacific Strategy? The primary goal is to lay out areas of cooperation between the two countries in sectors ranging from economy and trade, maritime security, science and technology, defence and security. For fostering strong bilateral cooperation, it is important to get the views from both Indian and Korean sides to inform concrete policy recommendations that may contribute to the development of a mutually beneficial bilateral partnership. Thus, this report gathers scholars from think tanks and universities from India and South Korea who outline their country's perspectives on what the India-Korea relationship should be striving to achieve, and the challenges that could stand in the way. The report offers recommendations for pathways of cooperation.

The first two chapters by Yoon Jung Choi and Jagannath Panda lay the groundwork as to why India is an important player in South Korea's current Indo-Pacific Strategy. This is followed by Wondeuk Cho's chapter which outlines the broad contours of what issues should be discussed and what areas the two countries should invest in for a strong security relationship. The subsequent two chapters on the prospects of maritime security cooperation, by Sarabjeet Parmar and Kuyoun Chung, show that while little has happened in the maritime domain between the two countries, there remains scope for a lot more.

Indeed, there are talks about the need to upgrade the India-Korea Economic partnership and the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA). Arpita Mukherjee and Eshana Mukherjee's chapter argues that although trade figures show that South Korea is gaining more from the bilateral trade, India could still work with South Korea on different avenues like startups, technology-based services and digital trade, all of which can benefit both the countries equally. The Korean perspective on the need for upgrading the CEPA is discussed in Jeong Gon Kim's chapter. South Korea perceives of the Indo-Pacific as also "home to partners of strategic industries such as semiconductors."⁷ In the new strategy, South

Korea has also declared its desire to join the working groups of the Quad, especially the one on critical and emerging technology. Shimona Mohan's chapter explores the opportunities and challenges for this cooperation.

With this report, ORF aims to help inform the ongoing debate among the two countries' policymakers, academics, and business communities around the subject of India-South Korea relations. May the views and ideas put forward by the authors help develop a roadmap for improved bilateral ties.

-Premesha Saha, Editor

Acknowledgement

This research study is a part of the project, "India, Korea and the Twilight of the Indo-Pacific Regional Order," supported by the Korea Foundation under its Policy Oriented Research Program.

New Indo-Pacific Vision and the Road Ahead for South Korea-India Partnership

Yoon Jung Choi

South Korea Pivots to the Indo-Pacific

At the 23rd ASEAN-Republic of Korea (ROK) Summit in November 2022 in Cambodia, ROK President Yoon Suk Yeol formalised the launch of the Indo-Pacific Strategy and declared that the Korean government would implement such strategy under the three principles of cooperation – “inclusiveness, trust, and reciprocity”.¹ These principles are, in turn, based on the three-fold vision of “freedom, peace, and prosperity”.² Shortly thereafter, towards the end of December, Foreign Minister Park Jin unveiled the ‘Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region’ as South Korea’s own regional strategy. Foreign Minister Park identified the Indo-Pacific Strategy as the de-facto “foreign policy doctrine” of the Yoon administration.³

The announcement of South Korea’s Indo-Pacific strategy was prompted by the recognition that the country depends on peace and stability in the Indo-Pacific region for its survival and prosperity. South Korea is an open-trading nation, and 85 percent of its GDP in 2021 was accounted for by foreign trade. Of total trade, Indo-Pacific countries accounted for 78 percent of South Korea’s exports, and 67 percent of imports.⁴ Therefore, to secure South Korea’s national interests and sustain its economic prosperity, a comprehensive regional strategy that expands its diplomatic, economic, and strategic engagement across the Indo-Pacific region was called for.

The Yoon administration recognised the need to build a sustainable and resilient regional order in the Indo-Pacific by working together with other key actors to find common solutions to a range of complex challenges. To realise such a vision, South Korea seeks to cooperate and promote solidarity with like-minded states that share universal values and agree on the need to preserve peace and stability in the region.

It is for this reason that “building regional order based on norms and rules” may be identified as the overarching goal of the Indo-Pacific Strategy. This is seen in each of the nine areas of cooperation, or core lines of effort in the strategy—from cooperation with like-minded countries to build regional order based on norms and rules (area 1); promotion of the rule of law and human rights (area 2); renewed non-proliferation and counter-terrorism efforts including cooperation on North Korea’s nuclear threat (area 3); to comprehensive security cooperation on emerging security issues such as maritime security, cybersecurity, and health security (area 4). On the economic side, the goal of building an open and fair economic order in the Indo-Pacific has been embodied in such initiatives as strengthening supply chain resilience and economic security (area 5) and cooperating in the field of advanced science and technology (area 6).

Notably, South Korea’s Indo-Pacific Strategy emphasises its goal to fulfill international responsibilities as a Global Pivotal State ranking among the world’s most developed countries.⁵ The Yoon administration has stated its intention to engage in “contributive diplomacy”⁶ through reciprocal and more proactive cooperation policies in regional development, including cooperation on climate change and energy security (area 7) and on individual and societal gaps in digital technology and health (area 8). Also proposed is the plan to build solidarity between future generations by way of stronger mutual understanding and exchanges (area 9).

In this context, South Korea’s Indo-Pacific strategy clearly defines its growing role as a pivotal power in the region from a perspective emphasising regional cooperation and strong diplomatic ties. Given the growing attention to cooperation in the strategy, relationships with other nations become particularly significant. The bilateral partnership between South Korea and India will be discussed in this light later in this essay.

India Promotes the Indo-Pacific as a Model for Inclusive Growth

As mentioned briefly earlier, South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy is not only its foreign policy doctrine but also the country's unique diplomatic strategy. In this context, India's impact on the evolution of the broader Indo-Pacific concept into a country-specific regional strategy cannot be overlooked. India's "Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy" and "Act East Policy (AEP)" in 2014 expanded the horizon of Indian diplomacy from Southeast Asia to East Asia, and from the Indian Ocean to the Pacific Ocean.⁷ The doctrine of "Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR)," announced by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in Mauritius in 2015, has become the template for India's Indo-Pacific Strategy.⁸ SAGAR laid out a vision of a secure and stable Indian Ocean region that brings prosperity to all by ensuring rule-based and sustainable use of the ocean.⁹

Since then, India's Indo-Pacific Strategy has pursued the dual goal of conceptual and practical expansion of areas of cooperation. In his speech at the 2018 Shangri-La Dialogue, Prime Minister Modi announced the "Free, Open, Inclusive Indo-Pacific (FOIIP)." By adding the principle of inclusiveness to the Indo-Pacific strategy, it transcended the exclusivity that the previous versions of the strategy had implied. At the East Asia Summit in 2019, PM Modi announced the "Indo-Pacific Oceans' Initiative

(IPOI)" for cooperation and put forward seven pillars to flesh out the initiative: maritime security; maritime ecology; maritime resources; capacity building and resource sharing; disaster risk reduction and management; science, technology and academic cooperation; and trade, connectivity and maritime transport.

Indeed, India has successfully responded to the multi-layered and complex challenges in the region through an effective exercise of its Indo-Pacific Strategy. In terms of defence security, India has conducted joint military exercises with other Quad members (the US, Japan, and Australia),¹⁰ in addition to Indonesia, the Philippines, and France. India has also inked key military agreements such as Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA), and Mutual Logistics Sharing Agreement (MLSA) with these countries.¹¹ The Indian Navy is also taking the lead in promoting Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) by hosting the Information Fusion Center (IFC) in the Indian Ocean Region.¹²

In the domain of economic security, New Delhi has either signed or is negotiating FTAs with a number of countries including Australia, the UAE, Israel, the UK, Canada, and the EU.¹³ With Taiwan, there are further talks beyond the FTA regarding semiconductor and supply chain cooperation.¹⁴ India is also participating in the trilateral Supply Chain Resilience Initiative with Japan and Australia. Likewise, its membership in I2U2—a grouping of India, Israel, UAE and the US for economic cooperation, often called the ‘West Asian Quad’—is a good example of India’s efforts to build a multi-layered supply chain.¹⁵ Moreover, as a founding member, India is taking part in the US-led Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) negotiations.

On the tech-security front, India is implementing digital transition under its “Digital India” policy and actively pursuing tech-security cooperation. India launched the “Defense Cyber Dialogue” with the US in 2021 and the “Trade and Technology Council” with the EU in February 2023.¹⁶ Since 2020, the Modi government has also placed particular emphasis on fostering the semiconductor industry to make India the global manufacturing hub of semiconductors by 2026.

New South Korea-India Partnership in Action

As the great-power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific intensifies, the regional actors are discovering at the same time that they share more conceptions and experiences in common than previously thought, including the principles of freedom of navigation, primacy of international norms, ASEAN centrality, and the need for more robust multilateralism to help preserve the stability of the Indo-Pacific region. In this context, an imperative for South Korea and India is to build partnerships that can promote these shared values inherent in the strategy of building partnerships for a “free Indo-Pacific”. As middle powers with the capacity to bring together smaller countries in the region, both India and South Korea should take responsibility in building a positive regional order.

For the second goal of advancing peace in the region, cooperation between the two countries may be the most urgent and thus, effective in the domain of maritime security, which is emphasised in their respective Indo-Pacific strategies.

South Korea has the third largest military power among the countries implementing the Indo-Pacific strategy, after the United States and India. Geographically, the Korean peninsula is located at the heart of the First Island Chain, one of China's last lines of defence. South Korea should also consider working with India to secure naval bases along the key maritime routes leading to the Indian Ocean. This could be further synergised when incorporated with the South Korean Ministry of Oceans and Fisheries' plans to build a maritime base.¹⁷

With regard to Maritime Domain Awareness, South Korea may consider participating in the IFC, headed by India and based in the Indian Ocean Region, and promotes connectivity with ASEAN countries' IFC. Particularly, the MDA requires a high level of technology including high-tech equipment and satellites. South Korea and India could leverage their high-tech capabilities in hardware and software as well as satellite technology necessary for information sharing and convergence.¹⁸ The Third Quad Summit in 2022 launched 'Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness' based on shared recognition of MDA's importance.¹⁹ Through the Quad working group, South Korea will be able to participate in the collective effort to raise Maritime Domain Awareness.

The third point is that South Korea's goal of "prosperity" in the Indo-Pacific region should be pursued on the basis of its capabilities as one of the strongest manufacturers of high-tech industrial products. In the event of the US sanctions on the

purchase of Chinese semiconductors, secondary batteries, displays, and small nuclear reactors, South Korea is among the few countries with the production capacity to meet the growing demand for these commodities. Moreover, it is equipped with the means to meet the demand for weapons from the West. These sectors will provide the foundation for a new frame of cooperation between South Korea and India. South Korea can play a vital role in India's rise into a global production hub not only in general manufacturing but also in high-tech industries including semiconductors, advanced materials, electric and autonomous vehicles, as well as new energy industries including solar power.

Furthermore, South Korea and India can become key enablers in building a stronger region together by practicing development cooperation in the Indo-Pacific, extended to the wider Global South. Cooperation in the fields of climate change, digital, and health—with an emphasis on COVID-19 vaccine distribution—can bring both countries closer as they are common challenges felt acutely by both South Korea and India. A partnership addressing the above issues may well align South Korea's "contributive diplomacy" and India's spirit of "SAGAR (Security and Growth for All)."

Policy Suggestions

The ‘Act East’ policy has been the foundation of India’s foreign policy toward South Korea, in the same way that the ‘New Southern Policy’ has been South Korea’s regional strategy toward India and ASEAN. However, both strategies had been limited in scope with their project-oriented emphasis on economic benefits. It is time for the two countries to develop a truly strategic relation centred around the Indo-Pacific Strategy.

This requires, among others, South Korea and India clearly recognising each other’s strategic value. First, there are similarities in the circumstances driving their respective Indo-Pacific strategies. South Korea and India are key players in the Indo-Pacific region where the strategic competition between the US and China continues to intensify. Both countries share core values with the United States and have similar strategic positions. Furthermore, both South Korea and India are neighbours of China—and have this neighbour as their largest trading partner. Both are also obligated to effectively manage relations with China as their respective former other halves, North Korea and Pakistan, are hostile to them and have close ties with China.

In pursuing the Indo-Pacific strategy, the second point to keep in mind for South Korea and India is their mutual value for each other. From South Korea’s perspective, cooperation with India is a promising way to realise the three cooperative principles of its Indo-Pacific Strategy. In terms of “inclusiveness,” cooperation with India can serve as a catalyst for South Korea to engage with all countries in the Indo-Pacific.²⁰ As India is a leading participant in regional organisations spanning the Indian Ocean, South Asia, West Asia, and Africa as well as in functional organisations such as the Quad and the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (SCRI), India’s support can be a valuable asset for South Korea’s future participation in these groupings. As for “trust,” South Korea can become a “reliable partner” to solve together a range of regional and global challenges addressed by India as G20 president in 2023. This could be a favourable starting point for practicing “contributive diplomacy” based on economic and development engagements with partners in the Global South. Rightly acknowledging India’s rising prestige and supporting its activities in the international community based on “reciprocity,” South Korea may also be perceived as a more valuable partner in the future.

From India's point of view, South Korea's inclusive engagement with China and other countries through its Indo-Pacific Strategy offers endless possibilities for cooperation, especially on maritime security. South Korea is a country best positioned to help India become a key industrial base and a producer of technologies in the region. It is again South Korea that can forge the deepest connection with India and provide practical assistance in addressing the challenges faced by the Global South.

Based on such a recognition of the strategic values of South Korea and India, it is time to formulate a vision and roadmap for systematic cooperation between the two countries and put it into practice. Currently, the channels for regular dialogue

between South Korea and India are limited to the Foreign Affairs and Defense (2+2) Ministerial Meetings on the diplomatic and security fronts and the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement on the economy. What is needed now for South Korea and India is an implementing mechanism to discuss bilateral cooperation from a strategic perspective and to systematically pursue the potential areas for enhanced cooperation between the two countries.

Framing a Multilateral Connection for India and South Korea

Jagannath Panda

Any country that aims to emerge as a greater Indo-Pacific power needs to embrace the multilateral mode of cooperation whose principles include adherence to inclusive, consensus-based collective action. This is true for the Republic of Korea (ROK or South Korea). Amidst the current geopolitical circumstances characterised by ideological divisiveness and with Indo-Pacific security in a precarious state, if there is one country that fits into South Korea's ambition of emerging as a greater partner in the Indo-Pacific outside Seoul's alliance framework with the US, it would be India.

At the same time, in a region riddled with flashpoints, where effective multilateral responses to ever-growing conflicts and economic security have been sorely lacking, complex (often ad hoc) cooperation mechanisms have evolved including the widely successful minilaterals.¹ Their rise as a potential deterrent to the worsening security

landscape has mainly been a result of the increasing challenges of the US-China hegemonic battle.

South Korea and India, too, have both been at the mercy of this rivalry and its repercussions for long – the perennial security versus economic (over)dependence dilemma. However, the two partners have yet to enter greater strategic and regional alignment despite long-standing harmonious bilateral relations. This is largely because of a lack of political intent – South Korean greater deference to major powers and India's slow-blooming of its new, assertive neighbourhood/regional policies.

Undoubtedly, with global stakes rising and congruities in place due to the ROK's wholehearted, albeit belated, embrace of the "free and open Indo-Pacific" (FOIP) construct, in the coming years, the India-ROK bilateral will expand beyond the limited scope set by Moon Jae-in's New Southern Policy (NSP; later upgraded to NSP Plus).² This will ideally lead to an expanded engagement, particularly on several multilateral concerns such as economic security, maritime security, technological innovation, climate change, global health, and connectivity.

Nonetheless, doubt prevails whether South Korea would be able to sustain its proactive Indo-Pacific vision in view of the present administration's belief that China is essential for reining in the North Korean regime and the ROK's disinterest in complete decoupling from Chinese markets.³ In such a scenario, diversifying "like-minded" partnerships with democratic states like India will help the ROK to not "create a false sense of distance from the US."⁴

In other words, developing a greater regional connection between South Korea and India in the Indo-Pacific that factors in some of the multilateral and minilateral institutions or frameworks would be a natural strategic choice. It would be as much about regional integration as furthering their respective global ambitions.

What could be the potential trajectory or road map for achieving this multilateral connection? In what ways can they hone in on their common interests?

Leveraging the FOIP as a Common Denominator

The South Korean government's launch of its long-awaited 'Strategy for a Free, Peaceful and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region' in December 2022 formalises the ROK's intent to pursue regional and global goals.⁵ This institutionalisation of President Yoon Suk Yeol's political intent will help tide the fears of the reversal of essential policies due to either electoral changes or Northeast Asian compulsions.⁶ The document also gives a significant push to re-configure the ROK's perspectives on balancing the dependence on major powers, which already had a beginning with Moon's NSP but got eclipsed by the excessive stress on "strategic ambiguity" and North Korea.⁷

ROK has enough overlapping interests with India, given the latter's growing global profile, proactive involvement in both US-led and China-dominated forums like the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), its stress on Act East Policy, and its commitment to a rules-based FOIP through inclusive visions like Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). Since January 2023, the two 'special strategic partners' have been engaged in increasing the ambit of strategic ties via high-level diplomatic meetings.⁸

Some of the avenues for regional cooperation are infrastructure and digital connectivity, maritime security, renewable energy, emerging technologies, semiconductors, and supply chains, as well as cultural exchanges. Strengthening regional regulatory and legal capacity building and digital governance norms, as well as sharing their development strategy expertise with the developing world, could be the larger aim.⁹ Not only can such wider play enhance their balancing role but also give momentum to strategic autonomy goals.

Moreover, neither has ambitions of decoupling from China, but both view diversification of economic and security relations as imperative to their foreign policies. The two, however, need to work on reviewing their opaque regulatory frameworks for improving mutual investment flows; the upgrade of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement is already in the works despite India's concerns about the trade surplus

in South Korea's favour.¹⁰ Only a strong bilateral can lead to a rounded regional partnership, as evidenced in India-Japan ties.

Developing Regional Synergies: Exploring Frameworks and Third Countries

India and the ROK must elevate their engagement in third countries in South and Southeast Asia, as well as create opportunities in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) for sustainable development and in the process also quash China's growing footprint. The ROK depends heavily on IOR routes for trade (primarily energy imports via the Malacca Strait), and therefore needs to bolster its security partnerships in the IOR, where India still holds sway.¹¹

Milestones such as the fiftieth anniversary of the ROK-India diplomatic relations and India's G20 and SCO presidencies in 2023 can help create momentum towards not only strategic congruence on achieving regional integration but also effective multilateralism. In this context, the increasing confidence of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and its member states in India as a "preferred and trusted" regional power/partner that can counter the uncertainties of the US-China strategic rivalry is a boon for the ROK, whose strong ties with ASEAN need an impetus.

As per the *State of Southeast Asia 2023* report, India has moved up from 5.1 percent in 2022 to 11 percent in 2023, while South Korea has almost halved its reliability factor, from 6.8 percent in 2022 to 3.2 percent in 2023.¹² The two ASEAN dialogue partners would need to increase institutional cooperation including dialogues with individual ASEAN members.

Given India's leading maritime positioning including in the strategic (geopolitical and climate change) hotspot that is the Bay of Bengal, the ROK must open a new avenue of dialogue to collaborate with India in traditional and non-traditional security, including via the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC).¹³ Another relevant partnership that needs to be enhanced is with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), where South Korea is a dialogue partner and India is a founding member.

The two Asian giants should also explore third-country cooperation with specific states in the IOR that need developmental intervention or can contribute to their FOIP visions. These can include Vietnam (supply chains), Sri Lanka (economic recovery, where Japan is already partnering with India, though limitedly), and Maldives (securing sea lines of communication for maritime trade).

Global Reach via Regional Multilateralism

Notably, the ROK's pivot to the Indo-Pacific should help elevate the modest ROK-India ties to a level closer to those of Japan and India, or even the US and India. An initial step in this regard could be gradually increasing the ROK's involvement with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (or Quad, comprising Australia, India, Japan, and the US) through working groups on climate change (especially the Quad Climate Change Adaptation and Mitigation Package), health, maritime security, and emerging technologies. This will only solidify ROK as a preferred 'Quad Plus' partner.

In the same vein, speculations seem to have also begun about the potential of including South Korea in the West Asian quadrilateral of the I2U2 (comprising India, Israel, the UAE, and the US) – an arrangement that would strengthen India's West Asian policy.¹⁴ Though it might be an overstretch at present, these innovative regional connections will only strengthen ROK's Indo-Pacific outreach while advancing India-ROK ties regionally.

The US-initiated Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity (IPEF), launched in May 2022, covering trade, clean energy, supply chains, and anti-corruption—is another worthwhile option for increasing outreach and strengthening the bilateral. India and the ROK could work on enhancing digital economic connectivity in South and Southeast Asia via the IPEF. Similarly, sustainable quality partnerships through the G7's Build Back Better World and India-Japan-Australia-led Supply Chain Resilience Initiative could impact the Indo-Pacific and beyond in areas including supply chain resilience, maritime security, quality infrastructure development, cyber and digital technological innovation, climate action, and global health.¹⁵

In terms of achieving the region's carbon-neutrality goals, the ROK should earnestly look into partnerships such as via the Indo-French joint initiative of the International Solar Alliance (where all Quad states are members).¹⁶ A new study adds heft to this proposition: India, South Korea, and Vietnam are among the top ten solar-powered economies globally; and seven Asian countries – China, India, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam, the Philippines, and Thailand – have saved approximately US\$34 billion in 2022 by using solar energy instead of fossil fuels.¹⁷

Importantly, South Korea should support India in promoting values-based regional governance and in calling for reforms at the United Nations (UN), especially at the UN Security Council (UNSC). Besides the issue of increasing representation, supporting the G4's (Brazil, Germany, India, and Japan) latest bid for UNSC reforms might also help its already improving ties with Japan.¹⁸ The support from France and the UK for G4 should also embolden Yoon.¹⁹

In terms of trilaterals, a partnership with the European Union (EU), whose strategic intent and objectives align closely with those of India and the ROK, could be explored via the EU's Global Gateway-sponsored local partnerships outreach. This will strengthen the international infrastructure-building chemistry while promoting norms for resilient action plans for infrastructure and connectivity worldwide, thereby diminishing the clout of China's suspect Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Moreover, an India-ROK-Japan trilateral does not seem out of bounds (the author has been a part of track 1.5 dialogue earlier), especially as the US-ROK-Japan trilateral is making headway.²⁰ The imperative is for the three Asian partners to collaborate amidst mutual concerns over East Asian security, Taiwan/Cross-Strait instability, and increasing Himalayan conflicts propelling the descent of the wider Indo-Pacific into disorder.

In all, if a comprehensive engagement is allowed, Yoon's Global Pivotal State vision should help move the ROK forward beyond its "half-hearted middle-power diplomacy" thus far and enable the ROK to shed its image as a nondescript middle power with immense potential.²¹ As both India and the ROK focus beyond China or the North Korean factor, a progressive and promising partnership will undoubtedly emerge and influence the character of politics in the Indo-Pacific.

“India and the ROK must elevate their engagement in third countries in South and Southeast Asia, and create opportunities in the Indian Ocean region for sustainable development.”

India-South Korea Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific: Thinking Beyond Bilateral

Wondeuk Cho

Introduction

In the five decades since the establishment of official diplomatic relations between South Korea and India in 1973, the bilateral relationship between the countries has witnessed a steady and gradual growth. Cooperation has been achieved across domains, including politics, diplomacy, economic, trade, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. Notably, the partnership has undergone successive upgrades, evolving into a Strategic Partnership in 2010 under the leadership of President Lee Myung-bak and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, subsequently maturing into a Special Strategic Partnership in 2015 during the tenures of President Park Geun-hye and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.¹

Under the previous Moon Jae-in administration (2017–2021), South Korea pursued the New Southern Policy (and –Plus) with the objective of elevating its ties with India to a level equivalent to its relationships with the four powers surrounding the Korean Peninsula. However, this policy prioritised functional and practical cooperation, showing little interest in strategic cooperation with India and overlooking the geostrategic and geopolitical shifts unfolding in the Indo-Pacific region.²

With the inauguration of the Yoon Suk-yeol government in 2022, significant changes were introduced to Seoul's strategy for the emerging Indo-Pacific region. Proactive diplomacy took centre stage as the Korean government sought to foster strategic solidarity and cooperation with like-minded countries in the region.³ This shift marked a noteworthy departure in South Korea's approach to Indo-Pacific security and the broader strategic architecture.

South Korea's Engagement with India: Inconsistent, Short in Strategic Vision

South Korea's engagement with India has historically been marked by inconsistency, is short in strategic vision, and predominantly bilateral. South Korean presidents have expressed their commitment to pursuing various cooperative initiatives and projects through multiple summit meetings with India's prime ministers. However, the two have fallen short in implementing agreed-upon agendas, and there has been little progress in enhancing bilateral cooperation.

For instance, during the 2015 Korea-India Summit, leaders from both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) to facilitate cooperation between the Republic of Korea's National Security Office and India's

National Security Council Secretariat.⁴ Since then, however, a meagre three strategic dialogues have taken place, with the most recent one held in December 2021.

In a notable development during the 2010 Summit, the two countries agreed to elevate the Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue to the level of Vice Foreign Minister at Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade and to Secretary (East) at India's Ministry of External Affairs.⁵ Yet, there have been only five instances of the Foreign Policy and Security Dialogue.

In the areas of defence and security cooperation, communication channels have been established and implemented, encompassing activities such as naval ship visits and exchanges, bilateral naval exercises, navy dialogues, coast guard cooperation, and defence dialogues.⁶ However, these cooperative efforts in the security domain have been fragmented, primarily operating through cooperation and exchanges at the level of individual ministries or government agencies rather than being pursued within a comprehensive strategic framework.

These instances highlight the limited progress and lack of consistent engagement in fostering deeper cooperation between Seoul and New Delhi.

The Changing Strategic Landscape

In the face of a rapidly changing international environment, South Korea has become acutely cognisant of the imperative to adopt a proactive approach in addressing this change.

First, a dramatic shift in the geopolitical and strategic environment has presented unparalleled challenges on various fronts. The world is becoming increasingly intricate and polarised, with a host of transactional challenges spanning geopolitical rivalry, climate change, food security, the pandemic, political radicalism, and nationalism. Second, multilateralism has witnessed a decline, giving way to rising minilateralism.⁷ The shifting balance of power dynamics at the regional and global levels has impacted the effectiveness of larger multilateral institutions. The perceived ineffectiveness of formal multilateral bodies in addressing regional challenges has driven countries to seek alternative approaches. Minilateralism has gained traction as a concept, particularly as multilateralism has encountered difficulties in reaching consensus and executing actions. The trend towards minilateral platforms, including trilateral, quadrilateral, and plurilateral groupings, demonstrates how nations can converge in smaller groups, sharing threat perceptions and devising strategies to tackle challenges.

Third, the power competition between the dominant global power and challengers has engendered instability in global governance. In this context, the role of competitive and responsible small and middle powers in various issues has assumed significance in mitigating risks stemming from this instability, while upholding peace and prosperity in the international community.⁸ In domains where small and middle power countries possess a competitive advantage, they must display leadership by spearheading the agenda through collaboration with like-minded partners.

Against this backdrop, the Yoon government, in contrast to the reluctance of the previous administration to endorse the strategic importance of the Indo-Pacific and its cautious approach to strategic pursuits, unveiled Korea's Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region in Phnom Penh, Cambodia, in November 2022. Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy carries important meanings and implications for South Korea's strategic manoeuvring in the Indo-Pacific region. Notably, it underscores Korea's recognition of the importance and value of India in global politics.

Towards A New Phase of Security Cooperation: Beyond Bilateral and Functional

Both India and South Korea need to be ready to collaborate and cooperate to address more complex and complicated challenges faced by the international community. In this regard, the two countries must overcome their historically inconsistent, fragmented, non-strategic, and bilateral partnership and move towards establishing an integrated, strategic, and multidimensional partnership in the next 50 years. To this end, they may adopt several pathways to step up their special strategic partnership to a critical level in the Indo-Pacific region, where rules-based order should be maintained and bolstered.

a. Seoul and New Delhi could strengthen their strategic dialogues and communications.

Within India's strategic community, there exists a distinct lack of recognition toward South Korea, accompanied by a strikingly feeble state of strategic and security cooperation. As a result, the so-called special strategic partnership appears to be devoid of any substantive meaning. The reality is that India does not seriously consider ROK as a reliable strategic partner compared to its other partners. India's strategic perception of Korea is evident in opinion polls conducted by Indian think-tanks. Notably, surveys conducted by Observer Research

Foundation and Brookings India do not consider Korea to be a viable option for India's strategic partner selection.⁹ This stands in stark contrast to the inclusion of countries like the US, Russia, Japan, Australia, China, France, and Singapore.

However, with the announcement of Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy under the Yoon Suk-yeol government, Korea and India now share a strategic vision and understanding regarding the Indo-Pacific as a strategic space. Consequently, both countries should enhance and strengthen strategic communication from high-level to working-level through various dialogue channels.

b. Seoul could establish a multilayered channel to explore not only bilateral but also trilateral and minilateral security partnerships, aiming to strengthen the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific region and forge a collective front for regional stability. To achieve this, it will be necessary to establish minilateral security platforms involving India in various fields such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, maritime security, and cyber security. By doing so, the space for the security cooperation between Korea and India can be expanded.

For instance, it would be worthwhile to consider trilateral security cooperation among Korea, Japan, and India in areas such as HADR joint exercises and joint exercises for submarine rescue support. Additionally, it is essential to prompt the agreement between the Korean and Indian navies regarding submarine rescue support and cooperation. In October 2021, Korea successfully deployed an advanced rescue submarine with a cutting-edge capability, enabling operations in challenging deep-sea conditions irrespective of weather. This is complemented by an Auxiliary Submarine Rescue Ship that conducts rescue operations, underwater research, and recovery missions.¹⁰ Furthermore, there are opportunities for trainings, exchanges, HADR joint exercises, and defence industry cooperation between Korea, India, and Vietnam. The exploration of cooperation on maritime security, maritime safety, and maritime domain awareness between Korea, India, and Australia has potential.

c. It is imperative for Korea to deepen, regularise, and upgrade cooperation with India on maritime security and maritime domain awareness in the Indian Ocean.

Maritime security cooperation in the Indian Ocean benefits both Korea and India. The Indian Ocean serves as a crucial maritime transportation route for Korea's trade and energy imports. As the safety of transportation, fisheries, trade, and energy supply in the Indian Ocean directly impacts Korea's national interests, it is necessary to strengthen close military cooperation with India in terms of maritime safety and

security. Furthermore, it is necessary to enhance joint maritime training and exchanges between the coast guards and navies of Korea and India in areas such as maritime safety, counter-piracy operations, and disaster relief. Additionally, Korea's expanding participation in multinational maritime exercises led by India and establishing platforms for bilateral and minilateral maritime exercises between Korea and India should be reinforced. Korea and India already established a military logistics agreement between their navies in 2019, enabling refueling and maintenance support and enhancing interoperability between the two naval forces.¹¹

Therefore, Korea should strive to expand cooperation platforms beyond the general level of naval collaboration and seek new initiatives, approaches, and mechanisms to ensure mutual security interests through information and experience sharing in the maritime domain. For instance, Korea could consider joining the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium as an observer, elevating the Foreign and Defense 2+2 dialogue to the ministerial level, and deploying Korean liaison officers to the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR)¹² to actively participate in sharing maritime security information in the Indian Ocean.

India-South Korea Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Sarabjeet S. Parmar

Where We Stand

India and South Korea are situated on the western and eastern extremities, respectively, of the geographic stretch of the Indo-Pacific Region (IPR), as it is widely accepted. The modern-day linkages between the two nations were born during the Korean War (1950-53), which saw active Indian participation, especially during the ceasefire and repatriation process thereafter. The relationship between India and South Korea progressed in the aftermath of the war through a number of milestones over time, starting from the institutionalisation of diplomatic relations in 1973. At the broad strategic level, some of these milestones that impact maritime-related issues are as follows:¹

- Trade-related agreements signed in 1974, 1976, 1985, and 1986;²
- The construction of three Offshore Patrol Vessels (OPVs) for the Indian Navy (from 1989 to 1991) by the Korea Tacoma Marine Industries, Masan;
- Operationalisation of the 2010 Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and raising the relationship to a Strategic Partnership in the same year;
- Upgrade of the relationship to a Special Strategic Partnership in 2015;
- Participation of South Korea in the Defence Expo India and Maritime India Summit in 2016;

- Signing of a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Defence Industry Cooperation in Shipbuilding in 2017;
- Discussions between the Indian Prime Minister and the South Korean President on synergising India's Act East Policy and South Korea's New Southern Policy, Indo-Pacific strategy, cooperation in the fields of defence, future technologies, economics, and science in 2018 and 2019;
- Signing of agreements to further defence educational exchanges and extend logistical support to the respective navies in 2019.

Despite the variety of discussions and agreements on issues regarding the Indo-Pacific, little progress has been made in the maritime domain, and there is a sense that the India-South Korea relationship lacks a robustness.³ This article analyses the gaps impacting the progress and offers suggestions for a roadmap of cooperative mechanisms that will enhance maritime cooperation between the two countries in the Indo-Pacific.

Bridging the Geographical Gap

India and South Korea are two important middle powers of the Indo-Pacific. Their geographical locations have constrained their interactions, mainly due to the sub-regional dynamics that forced both nations to focus on their respective immediate neighbourhoods. India has been able to step out of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), which was once seen as India's strategic boundary, to engage the Indo-Pacific, stretching from the shores of Africa to the Americas,⁴ as a key player. In comparison, South Korea is yet to step out of its immediate neighbourhood, even though its Indo-Pacific Strategy, released on 28 December 2022, "signifies a major shift in Seoul's foreign policy, moving from a close regional focus to the broader Indo-Pacific."⁵

Further, the strategy "opens a new vista of foreign policy dynamics and engagements as it recognises that the Indo-Pacific stretches from the African coast in the Indian Ocean to the Americas. This wide swath of the Indo-Pacific thus aligns South Korea with India's view of the region."⁶ There are several convergence factors that can be exploited to cement a more robust maritime relationship between India and South Korea. These are central to the common vision of a free, open, inclusive, and prosperous Indo-Pacific and can be placed under three broad themes:

- ASEAN and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) via the Indian focus on ASEAN centrality and the Korea-ASEAN Solidarity Initiative (KASI);
- Engagement opportunities arising from:
 - Maritime threats, challenges, and risks underlined by common sub-regional and overall Indo-Pacific dynamics;
 - Linking of India's Act East Policy and South Korea's New Southern Policy (NSP) through the rubric of Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) and South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy, and QUAD initiatives;
- South Korea's shipbuilding capacity and capability and India's growing shipbuilding capacity and capability.

ASEAN

The maritime area of ASEAN, which is essentially the South China Sea, is of utmost significance for both India and South Korea, as common interests converge in this mid-point maritime area of the Indo-Pacific. These range from economics, due to the amount of trade from both nations that plies the region, to maritime security issues, and

further, to convergence on international laws and conventions, especially the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Therefore, a common understanding and approach to the impact of such issues to ASEAN and the broader Indo-Pacific would enable the enhancement of maritime cooperation between India and South Korea and a joint projection of views at the various engagement platforms of ASEAN.

India and South Korea are ASEAN's dialogue partners and members of the East Asia Summit (EAS). As ASEAN's dialogue partners, both countries attend the ADMM Plus meetings and have positioned ambassadors to ASEAN. Additionally, South Korea is part of the ASEAN Plus Three (APT), along with China and Japan. As ASEAN centrality is a key factor in almost all Indo-Pacific strategies/guidelines enunciated till date, a common approach by New Delhi and Seoul could strengthen the existing maritime cooperative mechanisms while opening doors for new initiatives, such as bringing South Korea on-board QUAD initiatives. This would not only expand South Korea's outreach in line with its Indo-Pacific strategy, it would also enhance New Delhi's standing as an important Indo-Pacific player and provide the grounds for stronger cooperation, including the maritime domain.

A few maritime areas that could be avenues for India–South Korea cooperation at the multilateral and bilateral levels are discussed in the following paragraphs.

Engagement Opportunities

a. Operational Level

The maritime domain throws open a large vista of holistic maritime security issues through which nations can avail opportunities to cooperate while assessing risks, and thus, address common threats, challenges, and risks at the regional and global levels. Elements of holistic maritime security fall under either traditional or non-traditional heads. Alliances or treaties address both these heads, with a central focus on traditional elements, while strategic partnerships provide avenues to address the non-traditional elements. Under the ambit of traditional threats and challenges, the volatility of

their respective sub-regions due to the proximity of adversarial nations, and the associated nuclear shadow provides opportunities for India and South Korea to share and discuss issues of converging interest.

The field is more open in the case of non-traditional threats. This will need interaction at a more deliberate operational and strategic level to thread maritime cooperative mechanisms together. While examples of the broad strategic level interactions were mentioned earlier, a snapshot of interactions between the Indian Navy (IN) and Republic of Korea Navy (ROK Navy) at the operational level in the last decade is provided in Table 1.

Table 1:
Operational-Level Interactions between the IN and the ROK Navy

	Interaction	Remarks
Bilateral – Navy Staff Talks		
(a)	First and second IN–ROK Navy Staff Talks conducted in September 2018 and April 2023, respectively.	
Bilateral – Exercises and Port Calls		
(b)	IN ships visited South Korea in October 2015, June 2016, and November 2022.	
(c)	ROK Navy ships visited Chennai in October 2022.	
(d)	Maritime partnership exercises in the East China Sea in June 2021, Bay of Bengal in October 2022, and off Busan in November 2022.	

	Interaction	Remarks
Multilateral Exercises – Under ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus)		
(e)	Participation in the Maritime Security and Counter Terrorism Exercise in May 2016 and Maritime Security Field Training Exercise in May 2019.	
Multilateral Exercise		
(f)	Participation in the multilateral Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) Exercise Komodo in 2014 and the Anti-Submarine Warfare Exercise Sea Dragon in 2022 and 2023.	
Interactions at Fleet Reviews		
(g)	IN participated in the Fleet Review in South Korea in October 2018 and the ROK Navy participated in the Presidents Fleet Review in India in February 2016 and February 2022.	

Source: Author’s own

From Table 1, it is evident that interaction has been limited and there is space as well as a requirement for greater interaction between the navies of these two important Indo-Pacific middle powers. This space and requirement can be easily addressed, as there is a base of understanding and interoperability given the types of exercises and interactions carried out in both bilateral and multilateral engagements. However, while the IN has expanded its outreach eastward and is an important arm of India’s Act East Policy, the ROK Navy will have to reach out further west, towards the Indian Ocean. This would enable a better understanding of the dynamics of the IOR and enhance the maritime relationship. The following aspects merit attention for possible implementation to facilitate a more balanced relationship:

- Institutionalisation of a bilateral exercise between the IN and the ROK Navy could be examined.

- The ROK Navy could look at more port visits to India and regularly participate in the MILAN series of exercises conducted by India on its east coast. It is important to note that the ROK Navy participated in this exercise in 2022 for the first time.
- South Korea could consider joining the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) as an observer.

Strategic Level

At the strategic level, there are convergences between South Korea’s NSP and Indo-Pacific Strategy, and the IPOI and QUAD-led initiatives, which can provide avenues for India and South Korea to engage and strengthen maritime cooperation at the bilateral level and in the Indo-Pacific.

While the NSP looks at engaging ASEAN and India, the Indo-Pacific strategy expands that horizon to the broader IPR through a matrix of sub-regions and Core Lines of Effort (CLOEs). A snapshot of feasible engagement opportunities is provided in Table 2.

While South Korea finds it easy to navigate the regions of Northeast, East, and Southeast Asia given its geographical position and relations with ASEAN, it will need to understand the IOR for an overall

perception of the IPR. Thus, Seoul could consider becoming a Dialogue Partner with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). This would not only complement the operational-level approach of joining IONS, should Seoul choose to do so, but also support its endeavour to step out of its sub-regional area and engage the broader Indo-Pacific.

Table 2:
Feasible Strategic-Level Engagements between ROK and India in the broader Indo-Pacific

	Engagement Matrix	Remarks
(a)	Enhance economic cooperation with India by upgrading the ROK-India Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA).	Seoul's Indo-Pacific Strategy looks at engaging South Asia and places economic engagement India at high priority. This would also be in line with the NSP, whose target nations are ASEAN and India. This aspect could further maritime trade between India and South Korea. Hopefully, the upgradation will address several issues that were not considered earlier. ⁷
(b)	CLOE: Build Regional Order Based on Norms and Rules.	There are existing regional initiatives that can be examined, duly supported by the operational-level initiatives discussed earlier. These would support this CLOE as well as other CLOEs. These regional initiatives would require an involvement and working with India on the seven spokes of the IPOI and QUAD as well as suitably identified QUAD initiatives. This approach would enhance the generic inclusivity factor and the minilateral cooperation approach mentioned in this CLOE.
(c)	CLOE: Expand Comprehensive Security Cooperation.	This CLOE looks at cooperation on real-time maritime monitoring and information sharing through participation in international discussions on the establishment of a Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) system. This aspect finds resonance under the IPOI pillars of maritime security and capacity building and resource sharing, as well as the QUAD Indo-Pacific MDA (IPMDA) initiative.

	Engagement Matrix	Remarks
(d)	CLOE: Strengthen Cooperation in Critical Domains of Science and Technology and Close Digital Gap.	The areas mentioned under this CLOE could complement the Science Technology and Academic Cooperation pillar of the IPOI, as well as the Critical and Emerging Technologies initiative of the QUAD.
(e)	CLOE: Lead Regional Cooperation on Climate Change and Energy Security.	To effectuate this CLOE, Seoul could look at joining the Coalition of Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI), which has several Indo-Pacific nations as members, including the QUAD, and work with India on the IPOI pillar of Disaster Risk Reduction and Management. This would also add impetus to the QUAD initiative on Climate to convene a Climate and Information Services Task Force and provide technical assistance to Indo-Pacific nation, especially the small island developing states. The interlocking of these initiatives could empower Indo-Pacific nations to address climate change issues effectively.

Source: Author's own

Shipbuilding

South Korea's shipbuilding industry has ranked among the top three globally for several years and provides stiff competition to neighbouring China. South Korea's shipbuilding status should be taken advantage of, especially under the special strategic relationship between both nations. This area of cooperation has not been exploited after the early 1990s, when the IN acquired seven OPVs, of which three were built in Masan, South Korea, and the balance four by collaboration at the Hindustan Shipyard limited (HSL), Visakhapatnam.

Since then, most shipbuilding deals for the IN have not fructified for a variety of reasons. These include the construction of five Fleet Support Ships (FSS), with the first being constructed by Hyundai Heavy Industries in South Korea and the balance four by HSL under a Government to Government (G2G) Transfer of Technology (ToT) agreement. The project to construct 12 Mine Countermeasure Vessels (MCMVs) under a similar understanding between Kangnam Corporation, Busan, and Goa Shipyard Limited (GSL) also failed to fructify.⁸ Recently, South Korea's Daewoo Shipbuilding and Marine Engineering Company Ltd (DSME) expressed an interest in submarines for the IN under Project 75I.⁹

India and the IN could look at collaborating with South Korea in ship and submarine building projects, which are more comprehensive and ‘watertight’. This would enhance India’s ship and submarine building capabilities as well as serve to underscore the maritime cooperation between both nations.

“The maritime area of ASEAN is of utmost significance for both India and ROK, as common interests converge in this mid-point of the Indo-Pacific.”

India-South Korea Maritime Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

Kuyoun Chung

The Indo-Pacific is a geopolitical space in which the United States (US) and like-minded countries attempt to resist revisionism by renovating the existing regional architecture with new coalitions that share common threats and interests. South Korea is relatively a latecomer to this transformation; it was only after President Yoon Suk-yeol came into office in 2022 that Seoul first revealed its strategic interests in securing the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific together with the US and its allies. President Yoon has further emphasised that South Korea's foreign policy will involve "strategic clarity" rather than "strategic ambiguity" vis-à-vis the great power competition.¹ This stance has been underlined as President Yoon raised his concern over declining democracies and weakening rules-based order as

the expansion of authoritarianism continues to challenge the status quo in the Indo-Pacific.² The president's concern exhibits South Korea's regional interests beyond the Korean peninsula and its willingness to work with Indo-Pacific countries to address them. This motivation was evidenced at the Phnom Penh Statement on US-Japan-Republic of Korea Trilateral Partnership for the Indo-Pacific.³

Against this backdrop, South Korea published the much-anticipated Indo-Pacific Strategy Report in December 2022. This report cautiously delineates the inclusiveness of South Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy as a guiding principle of engaging regional partners, which does not target, antagonise, or exclude in accomplishing its goals of freedom, peace, and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific.

At the same time, South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy geographically encompasses larger regions between the Pacific, Southeast Asia, South Asia, and the littoral region of East Africa. This naturally begs the question of which country South Korea would engage with as a priority.

When it comes to South Korea's relations with India, it was developed under the previous Moon Jae-in Administration's 'New Southern policy'. The policy was initially formulated to bridge the gaps in South Korea's diplomatic, economic and strategic ties with regional partners, further attempting to minimise the risks of the great-power competition between the US and China. As the Moon administration refrained from fully aligning with the Trump administration's effort to counter China, Seoul perceived Southeast Asian countries as partners who understand the inevitability of hedging vis-à-vis the US and China. Although the current Yoon Suk-yeol administration negatively assesses such a hedging strategy and would rather strengthen its alignment with like-minded countries in the region, it seems optimistic about sustaining the current relationship with India, which is a rising power in South Asia.

India in South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy

South Korea and India's relations have been historically anchored in economics.⁴ Rising trade volume has naturally made the two countries maritime partners, understanding the significance of stable sea lines of communication along the Indian and Pacific Oceans and freedom of navigation on the high seas therein. Considering the strategic landscape of the Indo-Pacific where revisionist powers constantly attempt to change the status quo, cooperation over enhancing maritime security to resist revisionism is inevitable.

Therefore, these seemingly converged interests have enabled scholars and experts to probe several areas of cooperation. The area where bilateral cooperation is most visible is, not surprisingly, security cooperation. While existing literature sporadically suggests a number of activities the two countries can coordinate—such as conducting humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, monitoring illegal, unreported and unregulated fishing (IUU fishing), and mitigating marine pollution—the more imperative task for both countries is to come up with a comprehensive roadmap with which they can consolidate maritime partnership.

The first step could be expanding and diversifying the connectivity between two countries and building layers of trust and understanding of each other's interests both at the operational and strategic levels. For instance, maritime confidence-building measures such as port visits, personnel exchanges between navies and coast guards, and establishing a hotline between naval ships could be an optimal step to this end. By doing so, both countries can get a more specific and nuanced understanding of their shared interests and threats in the Indo-Pacific.

South Korea and India can then combine capabilities to respond to a common goal. Cooperation between the two can serve as a force multiplier in maintaining stability in the Indo-Pacific. Particularly from the perspective of capacity-building to address the regional security issues such as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief, marine pollution and anti-terrorism and anti-piracy, the coordinated effort between two countries' navies, and even the air forces and coast guards will be crucial. To this end, concerted effort in maritime domain awareness is also inevitable. As India already operationalises multiple information fusion centers along the Indian Ocean Rim that provide radar and sensor information from participating countries, South Korea can also join this endeavour to better understand the strategic aspect of the Indo-Pacific theatre, which could be crucial in expanding its role as a global pivotal state in the region.

The next step could be operational. Military exercises between India and South Korea could be diversified. The recent naval exercise between two countries in the Bay of Bengal in 2022, another one between the Indian naval battleship *INS Kiltan* with South Korea in the East China Sea in 2021, and the ADMM-Plus Maritime Security Field Training Exercise in 2019, exemplify the two countries' efforts to conduct communication drills, tactical manoeuvres, and ultimately strengthening inter-operability of the two navies.⁵

To be sure, India might be suspicious of how far South Korea would be willing to be combative vis-à-vis China, as the previous Moon administration took an accommodating attitude toward China in its attempt to sustain a momentum for continuing dialogue with North Korea.⁶ However, the current Yoon administration has been slightly moving closer to the idea that China's role in either imposing sanctions or encouraging dialogue with the North is futile, given that China's priority on the Korean peninsula is maintaining balance vis-à-vis the US. Whether South Korea can join the US and others' efforts to counter China in a military domain, therefore, depends on China's choice in the foreseeable future.

Last but not the least, South Korea-India cooperation on maritime security might be considered as an institutional venture to forge an inclusive maritime rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. South Korea's interests in maritime security are nothing new, but alignment with other countries to attain this goal is relatively nascent. For instance, considering South Korea's enthusiasm to join the QUAD, initiating ROK-India Cooperation on maritime security could strengthen South Korea's role and capability in improving maritime security, which makes Seoul an eligible partner to the US-led coalition such as QUAD or other regional minilaterals. Indeed, in 2022, the QUAD members launched the maritime security initiative, the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA).⁷

While the iterated QUAD summits and meetings have downplayed their gathering as a response to balance China's rising power and revisionism so far, this IPMDA, which intends to promote maritime domain awareness between four QUAD members and reduce IUU fishing in the Indo-Pacific, has a clear implication for China. China has been consistently ranked first in the IUU fishing index for several years, so this concern on IUU fishing clearly has a China connection.⁸ Nonetheless, the issue of IUU fishing is one of those important examples in how the rules-based order can be managed in the maritime domain, as in the case of the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Not to mention the QUAD's IPMDA, other minilateral coalitions such as the Australia-

India-Indonesia Trilateral also exist to preserve the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.⁹ In the future, South Korea's interactions between these bilaterals, minilaterals and multilaterals on the shared goals to preserve maritime rules-based order could promote its effort's legitimacy vis-à-vis China and serve as a cooperative venture to achieve inclusive regional order.

Prospects on Future Cooperation

South Korea's expanded regional interests in the Indo-Pacific demonstrates its understanding that the stability of the Indo-Pacific is crucial in maintaining peace and prosperity on the Korean Peninsula. For instance, any crisis escalation across the Taiwan Strait, might not be resolved without inflicting collateral damage to those US allies and partners in the region— especially South Korea, Japan, and the Philippines. Furthermore, North Korea might take opportunistic action during any contingencies, with or without any acquiescence of China. Countless types of contingencies are being considered when it comes to the Taiwan Strait issue.

The same goes for the case of the South China Sea. Therefore, it would be expected of Seoul to claim that peace and prosperity of the Taiwan strait and other regional hotspots is important for South Korea. South Korea may not be able to undertake a strategic balancing as India does vis-à-vis China and Russia, while remaining as a key defence partner

of the US because of the North Korea issue. However, when it comes to bilateral cooperation between India and South Korea, it can be expected further in the future to accomplish the common goal of building a maritime rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific.

“The imperative for India and ROK is to create a comprehensive roadmap with which they can consolidate their maritime partnership.”

Half-a-Handshake: India-South Korea Cooperation in Critical and Emerging Technologies

Shimona Mohan

Introduction / 소개

India and South Korea's celebration of 50 years of diplomatic ties in 2023 has reignited conversations around further and deeper collaborations on various fronts. The two nations share a peculiar host of common geopolitical features – formerly colonised countries that achieved independence within a few years of each other, emerging Asian economic powerhouses, recognised information technology (IT) hubs, bordered by hostile nuclear-powered neighbours, and more recently navigating the ripple effects of the tensions between the United States (US) and China. Given this clear congruence in their positioning within the global dynamic, it is curious that collaborations between the two countries have remained minimal in proportion to their potential.

This might be on the path to change, especially considering South Korea's new Indo-Pacific Strategy, titled *Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region*,¹ released in late 2022. The Strategy highlights South Korea's renewed attention towards India as an important strategic partner, especially in the domains of tech, foreign affairs, and defence. This strategy comes at a time when both nations have registered slow progression in their bilateral trade volume,² and share a largely lukewarm outlook towards each other's geopolitical interests. While India and South Korea's previous commitment to establishing a special strategic partnership³ in 2015 has been little more than an aspirational statement, the new era of South Korea's Yoon Suk Yeol presidency and his subsequent focus on building stronger Indo-Pacific linkages presents the two nations an opportunity to up the ante in their collaborations.

An increasingly important area for the countries to focus on is critical and emerging technologies: both have prowess in the domain and there is greater recognition of the importance of technological ties between strategic partners, in general. While India and South Korea's history of tech-related associations is sparse, there are also certain challenges that have hampered the full and effective realisation of their tech partnerships. This chapter unpacks both the opportunities and challenges that have been observed in the tech collaborations of the two countries in the recent past, and makes a case for enhanced cooperation in the domain going forward.

Opportunities for Collaboration / 협업의 기회

India has quickly emerged as a lucrative technological hotspot for its Western allies, especially acting as a buffer to the burgeoning rise of China on the tech front in Asia and globally. In 2022 alone, India and the US established the initiative of Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)⁴ while the European Union (EU) partnered with India over common interests in the newly established EU-India Trade and Technology Council (TTC).⁵ India's size, copious tech talent, and pro-tech government agendas have led it to become a

feasible destination for many countries looking to diversify their tech supply chains. South Korea is not a stranger to this phenomenon, and given its wariness around the instability of the US-China power balance, has collaborated with India, albeit fleetingly, on a number of critical technologies.

It is clear to see that India's tech collaborations with South Korea have broadly been on the basis of three sets of opportunities—investments, joint programmes, and common regulatory considerations. The Indian startup ecosystem has boomed in the past few years, and India saw the 5th highest investments into its AI-oriented startups, trailing behind only the US, China, the UK and Israel.⁶ This means India is the only Asian country apart from China in the top 5 fastest growing AI markets, which makes it an attractive choice for investments and collaborations for many countries, including South Korea. Korean companies and startups have taken note and been keen to invest in India specifically for electronics, IT, automobiles, and defence tech products.⁷ Some, like Samsung, are already heavily investing in India for electronics and looking into new tech like semiconductor manufacturing.⁸

Apart from investments, India and South Korea have also collaborated on a number of joint projects. In 2018, the two countries inaugurated the India-Korea Technology Exchange Centre as a platform for tech enterprises from both to identify and exchange the latest technologies, and to share management expertise, product development and technology applications for product development.⁹ This was followed by the signing of five memorandums of understanding (MoUs) between the governments, specific ministries and research hubs, which established a Future Strategy Group and indicated new avenues of work around several technologies.¹⁰ Through developments and partnerships in the subsequent few years, it became clear that both countries saw value in retaining their tech relations with each other.

The two nations established the India-Korea Joint Program of Cooperation in Science and Technology in 2020, with the Ministry of Science & Technology of the Government of India and the Ministry of Science and ICT (MSIT) of the Republic of Korea as key agencies.¹¹ Several specific workstreams have emerged from this Program, including the India-South Korea Joint Network Centre in Cyber Physical Systems,¹² a project on artificial intelligence (AI) utilisation in biotechnology,¹³ and joint development and joint production initiatives in the defence sector on critical technologies and supply chain resilience.¹⁴

AI as a tactical critical technology for defence has also simultaneously surfaced as a domain of particular interest for both India and South Korea. While the latter has employed some amount of military AI within systems like its SGR-AI sentry guns along the 38th Parallel for more than a decade,¹⁵ India initiated a concerted effort around AI in defence only in 2018 through the establishment of its Defence Artificial Intelligence Council (DAIC) and Defence AI Project Agency (DAIPA).¹⁶ Both countries have accelerated their military AI development and deployment since, with India focusing on base considerations of developing these systems and diversifying their applications while South Korea also additionally tinkers with upgrading its military AI systems. In 2020, the Indian Defence Minister stated that there would be a possible collaboration with South Korea to develop AI-enabled military equipment, and the agreement would leverage their mutual strengths.¹⁷

The two countries also share a distinct interest in AI regulation, and in particular, advancing the cause for responsible and trustworthy AI systems within different contexts. In India, this has been in the civilian domain through NITI Aayog's two-part report in 2021 on approaches toward and operationalisation of responsible AI principles,¹⁸ and Indian tech industry body NASSCOM's responsible AI Hub and Toolkit released in late 2022.¹⁹ South Korea, for its part, co-hosted the first global conference around responsible AI in the military domain (REAIM) in the Netherlands in 2023, and will be hosting REAIM 2024 in Korea to continue the dialogue.²⁰ Both countries are also founding members of the exclusive international multi-stakeholder initiative, Global Partnership on AI, for which India has the rotating presidency in 2023.²¹

Challenges to Cooperation / 협력의 도전

While both India and South Korea are middle powers who share similar geopolitical considerations, a crucial reason for the scarcity of their collaborations on critical technologies can be chalked up to their divergent approaches towards the common denominators between them, namely China and the US. The two are the biggest trading partners for both India and South Korea, but share very different security ties with them.

The China factor is a glaring example of this: Despite points of friction like the THAAD issue,^a South Korea has had no direct military confrontation with China and can thus take a more neutral approach to it vis-à-vis its all-weather ally, the US. India's relations with China, on the other hand, have swung from hostile to barely civil at best, and it has undertaken a spate of actions in the past couple years to unsuccessfully decouple (and now consider de-risking) itself from China.²² With the US, India has been building a delicately balanced security partnership essentially opposed to China, as it also tries to maintain some semblance of its relationship with Russia.

This difference between security priorities is what allows India to join groupings like the Quad and the I2U2 for strategic security and technology transfers, while South Korea has so far taken a more cautious approach and stayed on the fringes of such alliances, if it is at all present. Although President Yoon Suk Yeol has stated that he would "positively review" joining the Quad if invited in the future,²³ South Korea has so far avoided taking a hardline stance against China, which has in turn limited its collaborations with India over critical and emerging technologies.

a China and South Korea have had bilateral tensions since 2017, when South Korea installed a missile battery employing the U.S. Terminal High-Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD) on its territory following heightened nuclear threats from North Korea. China took this as a potential provocation from South Korea and its all-weather ally, the US, since the anti-missile system could be reconfigured to peer into its territory. A flurry of economic retaliations and appeasement policies ensued, with alternating peaks and troughs, and the issue has not yet been definitively resolved.

Conclusion / 결론

Much of India's current security and technology relations have stemmed from an urgent need to ensure its own territorial integrity or economic well-being in the face of imminent danger from unfriendly powers. However, such urgency is absent in its relations with South Korea. This is perhaps why strategic collaborations between New Delhi and Seoul, whether on technology or in other domains, have been few and far between. Despite this, continued cooperation within the tech domain is clearly mutually beneficial for both nations in terms of filling the lacunae of their indigenous tech development, diversifying their supply chains, and lessening their reliance on bigger powers like China.

Today the world grapples with the uncharted waters of new technologies like generative AI and quantum computing, as well as (re-)emerging security challenges like the Russia- Ukraine war, North Korea's tactical nuclear weapons, and

China's meteoric rise to economic and political dominance in the Asian backyard. It will thus become essential for like-minded countries and friendly powers to ensure that their cooperation on various fronts is not only to their benefit, but also reins in unchecked forces within their common geopolitical spaces. Both India and South Korea are already in congruence over many points, and have the resources and opportunities that each needs to effectively engage and live up to the 'special strategic partnership' that they envision for themselves within the critical tech domain. India and South Korea have shared half-a-handshake for long; the hope is that the renewed vigour stemming from the fresh South Korean willingness to embed itself more deeply in geopolitical coalitions away from China will ultimately make it a full one.

“Tech cooperation could fill the lacunae of their indigenous tech development and diversify their supply chains.”

Enhancing Trade, Investment, and Cooperation Between India and South Korea

Arpita Mukherjee and Eshana Mukherjee

Trade, investment, and economic relations between India and South Korea have seen many significant milestones over the last 15 years, including the signing of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) in 2009,^a and several memorandums of understanding (MoUs) and cooperation agreements in sectors such as energy, electronic and shipbuilding. During Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to South Korea in May 2015, the bilateral relationship was elevated to a 'special strategic partnership,' a key component of which is enhancing trade, investment, and cooperation.

Bilateral Trade and Investment: An Overview

In 2005, the total trade between India and South Korea was US\$5.93 billion, with exports from India accounting for 25.62 percent of the total bilateral trade.¹ Despite fluctuations, the total trade between the two countries has grown over the years (see Figure 1). Total merchandise trade between India and South Korea grew from US\$16.91 billion in 2011 to US\$24.18 billion in 2021, at a compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of 3.64 percent. Despite a smaller share in total trade, the export of goods from India saw a CAGR of 4.56 percent over the same period.²

a As per the CEPA, South Korea was to phase out/reduce tariffs on 90 percent of Indian exports, while India would phase out/eliminate tariffs on 85 percent of Korean exports. For more details, see <https://www.indembassyseoul.gov.in/india-rok-trade-and-economic-relations>

Figure 1:
India-South Korea Trade, 2005-2021



Source: Compiled from UN Comtrade Database.

Between 2011 and 2021, the major Indian exports to South Korea were mineral fuels, mineral oils, and products of their distillation, bituminous substances, and mineral waxes (HS code 27); iron and steel (HS codes 72 and 73); organic chemicals (HS code 29); aluminium and articles thereof (HS code 28); cotton (HS code 52); nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery, and mechanical appliances, and parts thereof (HS code 84); and ores, slag, and ash (HS code 26). These products accounted for 74

percent of India's total exports to South Korea in 2011 and 70.5 percent share in 2021.³ South Korea was India's nineteenth-largest export destination in 2011-12 (with a 1.5 percent share), and became the seventeenth-largest destination in 2021-22 (with a share of 2 percent).⁴

On the other hand, imports from South Korea have been more diverse. The main products exported to India include electrical machinery and equipment and parts thereof, sound recorders and reproducers, television image and sound recorders and reproducers, and parts and accessories of such articles (HS code 85); iron and steel (HS code 72); plastics and articles thereof (HS code 39); nuclear reactors, boilers, machinery and mechanical appliances, and parts thereof (HS code 84); mineral oils, and products of their distillation, bituminous substances, and mineral waxes (HS code 27); organic chemicals (HS code 29); vehicles, other than railway or tramway rolling stock, and parts and accessories thereof (HS code 87); and rubber and articles thereof (HS code 40). These import products accounted for 77.5 percent share in India's total imports in 2011 and 81.1 percent in 2021.⁵ Among India's top import source countries, South Korea's ranking improved from fourteenth largest in 2011-12 (with a share of 2.7 percent) to tenth in 2021-22 (with a 2.9 percent share).⁶

There is no published data on bilateral trade in services, making it difficult to estimate the changes in trade after CEPA came into effect in 2010. Many Indian companies, such as Tata Consultancy Services, Wipro, Mahindra and Mahindra, L&T Infotech, and Nucleus Software have established a presence in South Korea. Indian banks such as the State Bank of India and Indian Overseas Bank

have branch offices in South Korea. Similarly, several Korean banks, such as Shinhan Bank, Woori bank, KB bank, Hana Bank, NH Bank, have opened branches in India.

Although bilateral investment flows have increased over time, it remains below potential. Between April 2000 and December 2022, the cumulative foreign direct investment inflows from South Korea to India was US\$5.40 billion (a share of 0.87 percent).⁷ While companies like Hyundai Motor Group, Samsung Electronics, and LG Group have significant investment in India, South Korea is not among India's top 10 investors. Indian investment in South Korea was US\$0.91 billion between 2009 and 2019, with companies like Tata Motors Limited having invested in that country.⁸

Tackling Areas of Concern through Cooperation and Collaboration

While bilateral trade is growing, there are several concerns. India has a large negative trade balance with South Korea, which has increased after tariff liberalisation under the CEPA. The negative trade balance was US\$9.97 billion in 2021.⁹

^b Information provided by Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA).

Similarly, exports have not diversified. The CEPA has limited product coverage for goods, there is a large negative list, and there continues to be tariff and non-tariff barriers. Unlike the recent CEPA between India and the United Arab Emirates, the India-South Korea CEPA does not cover several areas of cooperation, such as digital trade or to increase trade and investment opportunity for micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).

Still, some of these concerns can be addressed through a greater understanding of the entire supply chain and collaboration and cooperation, and by attracting more investment from South Korea to India. For example, the negative trade balance may be due to the increased inflow of some intermediate goods like zinc or steel, which may have been used for manufacturing in India. The imports of zinc and zinc alloys (HS code 7901) to India have increased manifold, especially since 2013-14, when the duty was phased down to zero for South Korea, leading to a trade deficit of US\$149.89 million during April-November in fiscal year 2021-22.¹⁰ Although the trade deficit increased, this may have facilitated the growth of manufacturing in the country and created jobs.

In 2018, during South Korean President Moon Jae-in's visit to India, the countries set a target of growing bilateral trade to US\$50 billion by 2030.¹¹ However, by 2021, only 48 percent (US\$24.18 billion)¹² of the target has been achieved. As such, there is a critical need for a deeper understanding of the trade flows and synergies across the two countries' businesses, and how to diversify the trade basket and successfully build business partnerships.

There are three key potential areas for collaborations, especially in light of South Korea's recent Indo-Pacific strategy,^c which looks to diversify economic partnerships, build resilient supply chain networks, and work closely with existing and potential trade partners. Notably, South Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy stresses upon collaboration with India in cutting-edge information technology (IT) services and space technologies.¹³

c For more details about South Korea's Indo-Pacific Strategy, refer to <https://www.mofa.go.kr/viewer/skin/doc.html?fn=20230106093833927.pdf&rs=/viewer/result/202306>

1. Collaboration in technology-based services and digital trade:

Globally, South Korea is the eighth largest IT services market in terms of revenue. It was valued at US\$23.04 billion in 2020,¹⁴ and is projected to grow to US\$28.8 billion by 2025.¹⁵ Meanwhile, India's IT services market is projected to reach US\$18.85 billion in 2023 and US\$28.64 billion by 2027, at a CAGR of 11.02 percent.¹⁶ South Korea's export basket has changed over the years, from primary goods and light engineering products to high technology-knowledge based sector. With a large educated and skilled workforce, India wants to develop as a knowledge-based economy. In the past, India primarily focused on the export of IT services, but now the focus has shifted to technology-based goods and services. In this context, there is scope for collaboration between businesses of the two countries in 4IR technologies like Internet of things, artificial intelligence, Big Data, smart factories, and 3D printing. South Korea has been fast adopting automation in manufacturing and is a strong market for IT products, potentially offering Indian startups many opportunities. Due to automation, a huge amount of data is generated in South Korea across multiple industries and in services sectors like banking, which can be processed in India at a low cost. This will require a structured framework for 'data sharing with trust', and this can be an area for collaboration and partnership.

Information communication and technologies (ICTs) are a key component of the ongoing Korea-India Joint Program of Cooperation in Science and Technology. The India Korea Center for Research and Innovation facilitates collaborative research between India and South Korea in the field of science, technology, and innovation, which also covers digital transformation, future manufacturing, future utilities, and healthcare. While these and many other such initiatives focus on joint research, there are very few structured initiatives to facilitate business-to-business (B2B) partnerships and collaboration. This needs to be strengthened. There is scope for B2B partnerships in areas like health tech, fintech and edtech.

The Indian government has signed an MoU with South Korea in the field of ICT and telecommunications; for cooperation in development, modernisation, and expansion of state-of-the-art telecommunication/ICT services and next generation wireless communication networks such as 5G and cloud computing.^d The private sector in both countries should be encouraged to jointly work to deliver positive results from such MoUs and collaboration agreements.

d For more MoUs between India and South Korea, see <https://pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=1538303>

Additionally, Korean companies can be encouraged to be a key part of the Indian Government's Digital India campaign and Smart Cities Mission. Within IT services, while IT outsourcing and business process outsourcing services occupy the largest share of India's exports, Indian companies have not been very successful in establishing their presence in the Korean market. This is due to a lack of knowledge about the language and culture, and inability to find likeminded partners. The Korean Trade Investment Promotion Agency and Invest India have developed an India-Korea Startup Hub.^e Developing the webpage of the startup hub in a collaborative model can provide investment-related information and policies in both countries, and can improve market knowledge. Some large Korean companies like Samsung, Hyundai and LG have IT development, research and development, and innovation centres in India. More companies must be encouraged to set up such centres in India. While there are a few working groups in select sectors,^{f,17} more joint business working groups, with clear targets and work plans, can be formed to identify gaps in market knowledge, skill shortages, and training needs on both sides, which can be mitigated through collaborations.

2. **Collaboration to increase trade and investment opportunity for MSMEs:** SMEs account for the bulk of enterprises in both countries, and play a crucial role in global value chains (GVCs). In India, approximately 63 million MSMEs constitute around 30 percent of the GDP, 50 percent of exports, and have a major share in employment.¹⁸ Under the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* (self-reliant India) policy, to link India to GVCs, the central government intends to enhance the share of MSMEs in GDP to 40 percent¹⁹ and in exports to 60 percent²⁰ in the next five years. In South Korea, as of 2018, SMEs accounted for 99 percent of all companies, 83 percent of total employment, and 48 percent of the country's exports.²¹ Given the importance of MSMEs in both countries in terms of their contribution to GDP, employment and exports, there is scope for collaboration to (a) address the barriers to trade faced by MSMEs in each market, (b) help them integrate in digital and ecommerce platforms, (c) facilitate cross-border investment for MSMEs, and (d) connect MSMEs to large firms in each market. India and South Korea can consider establishing a joint working group for MSMEs to achieve these goals.

e The India-Korea Startup Hub is a one-stop platform to bring the Indian and South Korean startup ecosystems closer, and to facilitate joint innovation between the two economies. For more details, see https://www.startupindia.gov.in/content/sih/en/international/India_Korea_startup_hub.html

f Such as for auto, infrastructure, services, electronics and it and startups and innovation ecosystem, and defence manufacturing.

The objective of the Indo-Korea Technology Exchange Centre^g is to improve capacity building and develop policy and the institutional framework to boost MSMEs in both countries. Specifically, there is need to collaborate to provide capacity building for MSMEs' integration into digital platforms in certain industries in India, connect Indian MSMEs with business partners in South Korea, and facilitate the exchange of business delegations and cross border trade and investment flows. Showcasing products from Indian districts and towns of economic excellence in South Korea, as has been proposed in India's 2023 Foreign Trade Policy,^h can also be part of the initiative. Since SME integration in GVCs using digital technology and their digital financial inclusion are core topics for discussion in G20, and as the current G20 president, there is immense scope for India to heighten the importance of these issues with South Korea, for increased partnership and collaboration in this aspect.

3. Collaboration to build resilient supply chains:

As the world recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, and amid heightened geopolitical tensions, it is crucial to focus on building resilient supply chains to diversify risks and minimise potential disruptions. The pandemic provided India with an opportunity to attract investments from foreign countries and help

diversify their supply chains. To reduce dependency on any one nation and improve the resilience of supply chains, India launched the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative jointly with Japan and Australia in September 2020.²² Another way to build resilient supply chains is to strengthen the India-South Korea CEPA by improving its utilisation, scope, and coverage. India's strengths lie in IT, and as a part of its Indo-Pacific strategy, Korean companies can consider investing in India in sectors that are also incentivised by the Indian government through the production-linked incentive scheme, such as semiconductors. Strengthening cooperation in the domains of technology and services can also help close the digital gap in the Indo-Pacific.²³

India has also proven resilience in other sectors such as pharmaceuticals and healthcare, where B2B partnerships and collaborations can be explored. For example, in the healthcare industry, mutual recognition agreements (MRAs) and regulatory collaborations can be considered for uniformity of standards, processes, and recognition of degrees.ⁱ There is scope for MRAs in traditional medicines, which have a strong heritage in both countries.

g For more details on Indo-Korea Technology Exchange, see <http://iktec.in/about-partnerships.asp>

h India's Foreign Trade Policy (FTP) 2023 has been launched to promote exports and facilitate ease of doing business for exporters. For more details, see <https://www.dgft.gov.in/CP/?opt=ft-policy>

i For more details refer to Arpita Mukherjee, Eshana Mukherjee, Ramneet Goswami, "Trade, Investment and Cooperation in Health Product and Services in the Asia-Pacific Region", ARTNeT Working Paper Series No. 214, August 2022, Bangkok, ESCAP, <https://artnet.unescap.org/>

Facilitating organic product trade is another potential area for collaboration. With an increasing focus on sustainable development, and a growing focus on organic food and clean energy, there is scope for collaboration across multiple Indian

and Korean stakeholders, including research organisations and commercial companies. In the ‘International Year of Millets’ (2023), industry bodies such as the Korean Food Industry Association and companies in the food processing sector can also enter partnerships with Indian firms for product development and marketing.

The authors would like to thank Ramneet Goswami, Anupam Gaur, and Athira Thomas for their contribution.

Exploring the Potential of Enhanced Economic Cooperation between India and South Korea

Jeong Gon Kim

South Korea has been seeking to strengthen its ties with India through the important momentum of the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) and the New Southern Policy. In general, South Korea's common view has been that with the world's largest population, India is a huge market and has high growth potential. Furthermore, the fact that India is actively improving its business environment and easing investment barriers, and that it has excellent industries and manpower in information technologies (IT), research and development (R&D), and business services are also widely recognised as its strengths. India's strong will to promote manufacturing industries is also an important reason for South Korea's interest in the country.

However, progress in bilateral economic cooperation has been slow. In comparison to ties with the US, some European countries, and Japan, South Korea's relationship with India is weak. Compared to countries that have been engaged in comprehensive cooperation with India through investment, official development assistance, and trade, South Korea has a shorter history of bilateral cooperation and less funding capacities. Moreover, there is a perception among Korean companies that the transaction costs and risks of trade and investment with India are high due to India's relatively weak industrial bases and infrastructure, complexity of the legal system, trade barriers, and cultural distance.

The bilateral trade imbalance is a persistent obstacle to economic cooperation between South Korea and India. While bilateral trade has not increased significantly, the trade imbalance has continued to widen. In the absence of a clear solution, the negotiations on revising the CEPA, which was agreed upon at the bilateral summit in 2016, have stalled. Moreover, Korean companies have been critical of India's trade barriers.¹

In sum, South Korea's economic cooperation with India has been lacking in terms of responding closely to both sides' conditions and demands. There has been insufficient effort to build bilateral cooperation considering both sides' comparative advantages and needs.

However, the geopolitical and geoeconomic changes triggered by the US-China conflict provide an opportunity for South Korea and India to broaden their perspectives on economic cooperation. Basically, South Korea and India are natural economic partners whose needs are aligned. In the wake of COVID-19 and the US-China conflict, South Korea has realised the need to diversify its production networks and supply chains, which are concentrated in China and Southeast Asia. India, too, needs to break away from its high economic dependence on China and build its own industrial bases to actively participate in the global production network. This situation means that the basic conditions for bilateral cooperation are in place.

India's strategic interests in the US-China conflict present opportunities for South Korea. As the decoupling over technology, which is at the heart of the US-China conflict, is in full swing, India is taking a stand against China through its participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad; with the US, Australia, and Japan), and the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative (jointly launched with Australia and Japan). India has made it clear that it will work with the Quad countries in areas such as 5G network development and deployment, technical standards, and ensuring the security of the supply chain for critical technologies, including semiconductors. South Korea has a considerable potential as a partner for India in these areas.

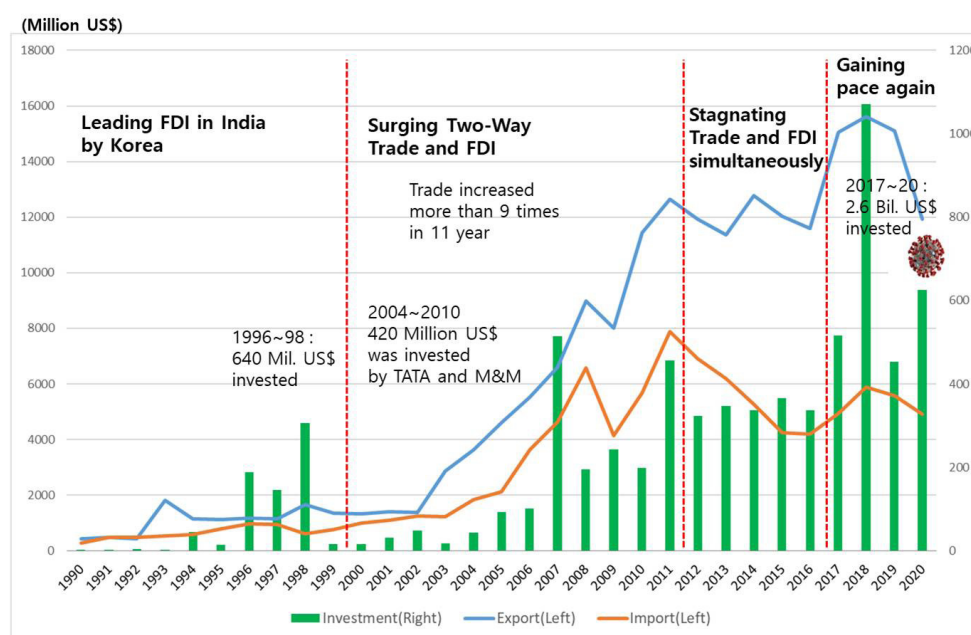
In light of the above, the following key issues are potential areas for cooperation between South Korea and India.

Prompt Conclusion of Negotiations to Improve CEPA

The CEPA's entry into force in 2010 was a milestone in South Korea-India economic cooperation. It was expected to serve as an important momentum for economic cooperation as it increased the level of trade openness between the two countries. From South Korea's perspective, the effectiveness of bilateral trade liberalisation has been questioned as key export sectors such as automobiles have been excluded from concessions. A look at bilateral trade trends shows that there has not been a significant increase in bilateral trade since the CEPA came into

effect (see Figure 1). Moreover, India provides a lower level of market openness to South Korea through the CEPA than it does to Japan through a similar agreement. Therefore, the prevailing view in South Korea is that the challenge is to increase India's level of market openness, or at least match the level of openness provided through the India-Japan CEPA.

Figure 1:
Outline of South Korea-India Trade and Investment
(1990-2020)



Source: Choongje Cho²

However, the Indian perspective is very different. The Indian government has raised its “serious” concerns over trade deficit with South Korea in the CEPA up-gradation negotiation.³ As a result, negotiations to improve the CEPA have been very different from the Korean intentions, and there seems to be no clear solution. The reasons for this divergence of views between the two countries can be traced to a variety of factors, but fundamentally, it is due to a lack of understanding of each other.

The negotiations to revise the CEPA have been stalled for far too long since the two countries’ leaders announced its launch. This, in turn, adversely affects both countries’ trust in each other. If a breakthrough to reduce the trade imbalance through further market opening is not easy, the solution is to actively utilise the CEPA as a platform for bilateral cooperation in fields other than market liberalisation. It is necessary to use the CEPA as a major platform for bilateral economic cooperation by including infrastructure, energy, and new technologies in the areas of cooperation. This will help both countries understand each other’s needs and build trust as partners.

Establishment of Intergovernmental Dialogue Channel for Strategic (Economic and Security) Cooperation

The New Southern Policy, launched in 2017, was the first policy to include India in South Korea’s regional strategy, marking a significant turning point in the two countries’ perception of each other. With the escalating US-China conflict, South Korea has recognised the need for a new paradigm in its foreign economic strategy, especially in response to the recent convergence of security and economics. In this respect, the Indo-Pacific Strategy announced by the South Korean government in 2022 faces the challenge of evolving into a more advanced regional strategy. The detailed report on South Korea’s Indo-Pacific strategy devotes around one page to India and South Asia,⁴ but there are many tasks behind it—the main challenge is to reposition South Korea’s relationship with India as a partner in the international community in a strategic framework. This means that South Korea needs to move away from viewing India as an economic partner only and re-establish its status as a strategic partner.

South Korea-India cooperation in the economic sphere needs to be viewed from a strategic perspective rather than a narrow one, such as market expansion. In addition to the geopolitical aspect of the US-China hegemonic rivalry, it is difficult to exclude the field of technology from the strategic cooperation between South Korea and India. As democracies with shared values, the two countries can strengthen their strategic relationship through cooperation in key technology areas. This has been argued by Indian researchers as well.⁵ It is worth noting that South Korea and India have already recognised that science and technology has great potential for bilateral cooperation and included it in the New Southern Policy.⁶

Against this backdrop, South Korea and India need to establish a regular high-level and comprehensive economic and security consultation channel for bilateral cooperation centred on key technologies. In particular, this should focus on cooperation in areas where the interests of the two countries are likely to coincide, such as critical minerals, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, 5G and 6G wireless communications, aerospace, and defence. These high-level strategic consultations should be used to refine the tasks of the bilateral technical cooperation platforms already in place: the Korea-India Future Strategy Group, the Startup Fund, the Technology Exchange Centre, and the Korea-India Startup Centre.

Potential Areas of Korea-India Cooperation

Startups: New and emerging technologies will be a key area of cooperation between the two countries, and was already included in the Joint Vision Statement in 2018. The New Southern Policy Plus has also identified future industries such as 5G, artificial intelligence, 4IR, and contactless businesses as one of its seven initiatives.⁷

Startups are an important area for bilateral technology cooperation. India has a world-class startup ecosystem centred in Bengaluru, Delhi, Mumbai, and Hyderabad. There is a high demand for investment in Indian startups, with a large proportion of funding going to new sectors such as e-commerce, fintech, healthcare, education, cloud services, and agriculture.⁸ Korean large firms are already leveraging Indian startups and talent, but it is not yet as active as other countries.⁹ In the case of the semiconductor industry, where South Korea is globally competitive, it is worth noting that India has a number of companies with excellent competitiveness in specialised skills such as design. The potential for cooperation between the South Korean and Indian startup ecosystems is very high.

Production Network and Supply Chain: The establishment of production networks to meet the needs of both countries and promote mutually beneficial development is important. This is in line with India's need to reduce its dependence on trade with large countries. In recent years, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) countries such as Vietnam and Indonesia have emerged as major import routes for India's intermediate goods.¹⁰ As such, it is conceivable to link ASEAN production bases with India to operate global value chains across Asia, and South Korea and India should continue to work together to share this potential.

One of the keys to expanding bilateral cooperation is to increase Korean investment in India. Expanding production networks centred on investment will contribute to reducing bilateral trade imbalances and trade frictions. South Korea is increasing its presence in India with major firms investing in the country, but the scale is still relatively small compared to the US, some European countries, and Japan. Recent foreign investment in India has been centred on sectors such as services, computer software and hardware, and telecommunications. The US, European countries, and Japan are all showing this trend. In addition to manufacturing, Germany, the US, and China are strengthening their links to India's services sector, particularly in wholesale trade, business services, and finance.¹¹ Moreover, investment in agriculture and fisheries, an important part of the

Indian economy, is also promising. However, South Korea's investments in India tend to be concentrated in the manufacturing sector, and diversification is essential to expanding economic ties with India.

To accomplish this task, it is necessary to establish the so-called 'Korea-India Joint Initiative' as a channel for trade and investment support involving various economic actors, including Korean and Indian companies, governments, and institutions. It should identify the specific needs of both countries, such as upgrading industrial structures, improving the business environment, improving physical and institutional infrastructure, transferring technology, and developing MSMEs and human resources. By serving as a comprehensive platform for bilateral cooperation, the joint initiative can be used to identify the specific needs of both countries, match companies, and serve as a channel to communicate business challenges to both governments.


In addition, the ‘Korea-India Cooperation Fund’ should be established in conjunction with the joint initiative. Currently, even when bilateral cooperation projects are identified, there is no fund available to pursue them. Therefore, the Korea-India Cooperation Fund should be utilised to support projects and research related to bilateral cooperation. For example, the fund could be used to support business matching projects between companies in the two countries, support for companies involved in the CEPA, and joint research to promote trade and investment. Regular business surveys should also be promoted through the above initiative and fund. These surveys will be used to identify the status and challenges of companies in the other country, which can then be used to formulate government policies. In particular, regular business surveys are important for developing effective response strategies in the event of an economic shock.

Infrastructure: In the field of infrastructure, South Korea has a wealth of experience in areas such as roads, railways, subways, and ports, and in urban development such as smart cities. South Korea is also globally competitive in e-government, e-customs clearance, and logistics. In the case of hard infrastructure, South Korea’s limited capacity to mobilise resources on a large scale compared to countries such as Japan, and its inability to secure sufficient information on India’s needs

are limiting factors for bilateral cooperation. To overcome these limitations, it is necessary for South Korea to strengthen cooperation with India’s state governments to discuss infrastructure development needs. In the case of soft infrastructure, the Indian government should actively consider collaborating with South Korea to spread digital public goods, as the latter has successful experience in overseas projects in Southeast and Central Asia. For example, South Korea could be an ideal partner for paperless trade projects, which the Indian government is actively promoting with its 2023 Foreign Trade Policy.

In infrastructure cooperation, South Korea and India need to broaden their regional outlook. India has been emphasising the importance of its neighbourhood countries and is pursuing policies to increase its connectivity with them. This is embodied in the India’s Act East and Neighbourhood First policies, which aims to expand economic and security ties with South Asian countries, and include cooperation in fields such as economy, technology, transportation, energy, security, and environment.

India also seeks to strengthen geographical connectivity and security between countries in the region through bilateral and multilateral cooperation with South Asian countries, and to build infrastructure through the provision of loans. In particular, India is promoting the Master Plan for BIMSTEC Transport Connectivity, which aims to strengthen connectivity among member countries.¹² Already, through the Act East Forum in collaboration with Japan, India is leading projects to strengthen connectivity with third countries such as Bangladesh and Myanmar, centred on Northeast India.¹³ At the time when India's willingness to cooperate with South Asian countries is increasing,

it is important to find a space for South Korea to participate in. In addition to infrastructure, BIMSTEC is pursuing various cooperation projects related to trade facilitation, investment and tourism promotion, technical cooperation, and energy resource development. As the potential for BIMSTEC's activation is now very high, South Korea and India should explore the possibility of cooperation in various fields. 

Endnotes

Editor's Note

- 1 The Republic of Korea, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, *Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region* (Seoul: Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022), https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/brd/m_5676/view.do?seq=322133
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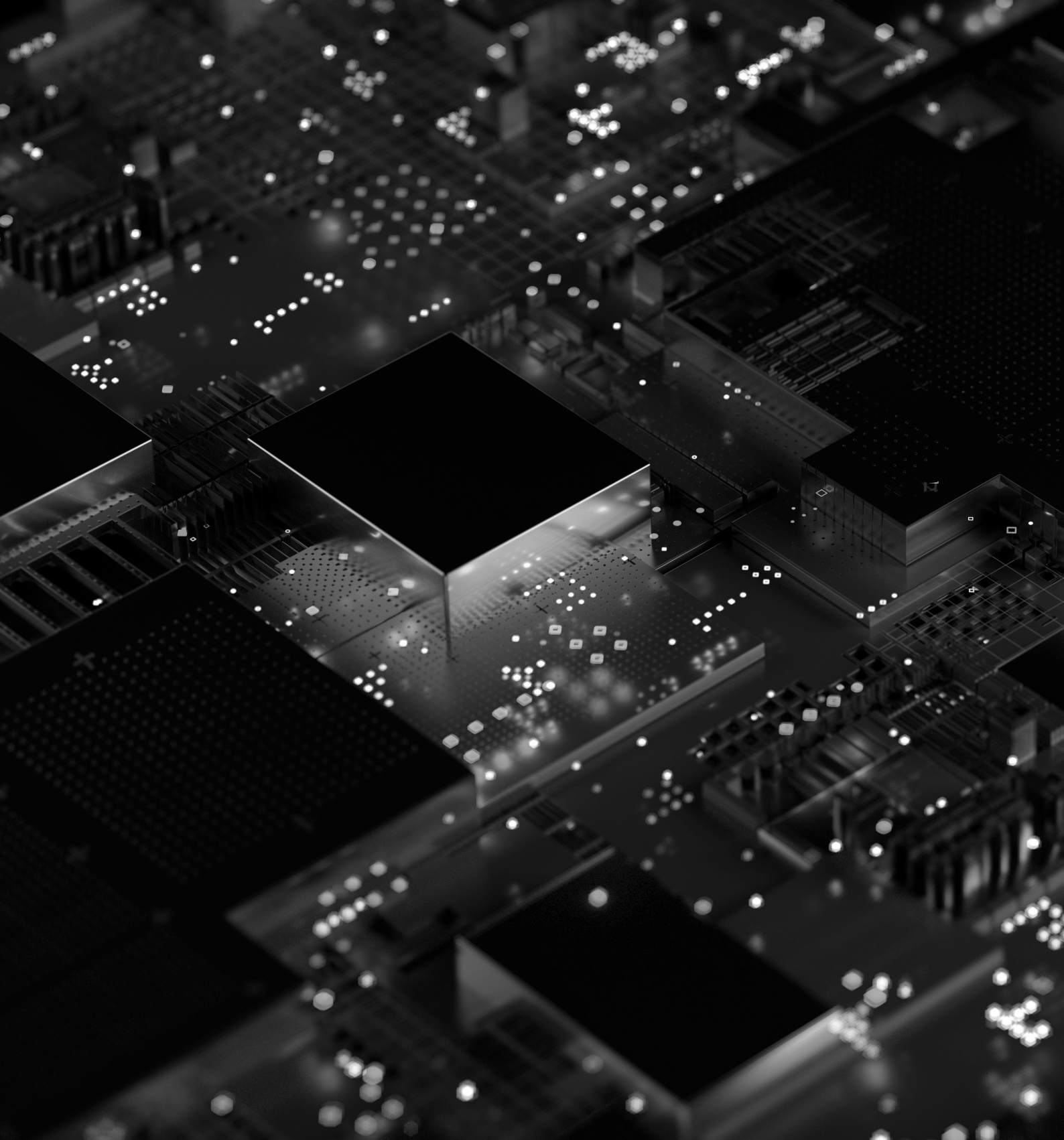
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