

India-Republic of Korea Military Diplomacy : Past and Future Projections

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As the first decade of the 21st century ended, India-Republic of Korea (ROK) relationship has assumed robustness in almost all dimensions – political, cultural and economic. As both countries enter the new year, a new dimension – security and strategic – that began in the preceding decade is likely to be seen in the expanding military cooperation, that began in the closing months of the preceding year. The foundation for such a relationship is already in place as both countries have identified a convergence of interests. Closer military relations will not only strengthen the strategic dimension of the bilateral ties, but it will also yield economic dividends. This will take the form of collaboration in projects, development and production of defence technologies, etc. This paper attempts to identify the areas and scope for expanding this dimension of the relationship and projects the future scenario of the overall bilateral ties. The changing geopolitical environment in the region, the expectations that both will play a stabilising role in a volatile and turbulent Asian region will be examined. The political, economic and cultural dimensions of the bilateral ties are beyond the scope of this paper. The Sino-Indian rivalry and the China factor impacting in the evolution of India-ROK ties will also be discussed.

Background

The security environment of Asia has undergone a dramatic change. As a result, both India and the ROK face common challenges. Some countries of North East Asia such as Japan, China and the ROK are engaging with each other to address bilateral and regional issues. India and the ROK are therefore no exception. North Korea's nuclear development programme and its clandestine dealings with Pakistan are worrying for both. North Korea's role in the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the suspected nuclear deals with Myanmar are equally disturbing. The threat of terrorism and the fear of nuclear weapons in the hands of terrorists

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make the security environment in the region fragile. Again, a number of non-traditional security issues such as energy, climate change and environmental degradation, cross-border migration of people, the illegal drug trade, and sale of illegal guns across borders are some of the crucial issues that demand not only regional but global solution. Bilateral and regional issues are bringing India and the ROK closer and they see a common advantage in addressing them. Bolstering military cooperation is one of the means to address the common challenge that confronts them.

The dramatic rise of China economically and militarily, coinciding with the relative decline of the US, has created a new situation in which the balance of power in the region is altered and regional powers are beginning to realign their

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relationships with each other as a result. A new power configuration is emerging between countries with, China's rise in regional and global affairs. China's moves to set the norms of power relations on its own terms causes considerable disquiet in Asia. The challenge before other nations in Asia is, therefore, to make China a responsible stakeholder and that China respects the order established by the world community in the interests of regional and world peace. If China is seeking to become a 'superpower', other countries of Asia would expect it to behave as a 'responsible superpower' and that responsibility is, not to create turbulence in a region which is already volatile. China must not make the

region more volatile by its aggressive posture and assertiveness. Both India and the ROK are seeking to face the China challenge.

Unless China changes its course, it will indirectly contribute to the emergence of a 'US led alliance in North East Asia and the Asia Pacific region and will finally find itself surrounded. China will surely not welcome such a prospect The China factor is driving the countries in Asia to redefine their foreign policy priorities. A possible realignment of power relations in Asia can, therefore, be a possibility.

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The convergence of security interests between India and the ROK was demonstrated when India's defence minister A.K. Antony went on a two-day visit to the ROK in September 2010 to boost military ties. Antony's visit, the first ever of an Indian defence minister to that country, was significant. So far, bilateral military ties between the two countries had remained restricted to low-level naval exercises. Antony's visit was a part of India's 'Look

East' policy.

The Indian government's thrust in the 'Look East' policy, is to establish closer ties with South East Asian countries such as Singapore, the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand. India's expanding Look East policy now encompasses Japan and the ROK. So far, economic ties have taken precedence over the strategic. But now geo-strategic compulsions are promoting the strengthening of strategic and defence ties. Bilateral ties between India and the ROK are growing because both see China as a factor in the empowerment of their neighbours, both of which are nuclear powers. One can argue, therefore, that the China factor has led to the convergence of strategic interests between the two countries. Opinions may differ, however.

The non-traditional security threats, nuclear proliferation and the North Korea-Pakistan nuclear links, securing sea lanes of communications, need for peace and stability are some of the factors that reinforce the convergence of strategic interests between India and the ROK.

There is also an element of economic complementarities in this developing strategic convergence. At a time when India is strengthening its defence capability, collaboration on projects for defence equipment production with the ROK is an attractive option. This is because the ROK possesses higher technology and its capabilities in missile development, and manufacturing of Aegis class destroyers are greater than those possessed by India. Regrettably, however, neither India has taken a clear stand on North Korea, nor the ROK on Pakistan. This has not deterred either of them, from taking a holistic view of the deteriorating security situation in Asia. The non-traditional security threats, nuclear proliferation and the North Korea-Pakistan nuclear links, securing sea lanes of communications, need for peace and stability are some of the factors that reinforce the convergence of strategic interests between India and the ROK.

The three services have been engaging the armed forces of the region in different war games and exercises. Antony's visit is likely to boost defence cooperation in what is seen as the second phase of India's Look East policy. Indeed, a wide range of issues, including defence and bilateral cooperation in research and development for manufacturing of military equipment prominently figured in the discussions. It was a conscious effort by India to foster "military diplomacy by forging stronger military and strategic ties with foreign nations". Because, following his ROK visit, Antony also visited Oman and Seychelles in 2010 and also to Vietnam in October as a part of India's military engagement.

Antony's visit was planned as a follow-up to the joint declaration issued during the state visit of the ROK president Lee Myung-Bak to New Delhi in January 2010,

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when the bilateral relationship was elevated to a “strategic partnership”. Indeed, the foundation for bilateral defence cooperation was laid in 2005 when both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on cooperation in defence, industry and logistics. This was followed by another MoU in March 2006 on cooperation between the coast guards of the two countries. Indeed, the historical background for such defence cooperation was already in place as India had played a major role at the conclusion of the Korean War in 1953 when it deployed a brigade of troops to the UN peacekeeping mission that supervised the armistice ending the conflict.²

Antony and his counterpart Kim Tae-young discussed the modernisation programme of the Indian armed forces as many Korean companies were vying for the contracts to supply equipment such as the basic trainer aircraft and naval warships to the Indian armed forces. Antony also sought to tap ROK’s strong capabilities in ship-building technology.³

Two landmark MoUs that would give a huge boost to strategic defence cooperation between the two countries were signed. The first MoU envisaged an exchange of defence-related experience and information, an exchange of visits by military personnel and experts, including civilian staff associated with the defence services, military education and training and the conduct of military exercises. It also envisaged an exchange of visits by ships and aircrafts, as jointly decided between the two countries. The MoU – valid for five years - aimed to promote cooperation in humanitarian assistance and international peace keeping activities. The second MoU seeks to identify futuristic defence technology areas of mutual interest and the undertaking of research and development works in both countries. Co-development and co-production of defence products with Indian industry through DRDO are also envisaged. Hereafter, there will be a joint IPR on all the products developed through this mechanism. Some areas of immediate interest, e.g. marine systems, electronics and intelligent systems were identified as priority tasks.⁴ This is the most important aspect of the MoU and has important implications for the future direction of India-ROK military and strategic cooperation.

It, thus, transpires that both India and the ROK are keen to further their national interests by defining their strategic preferences and therefore seek wide-

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China Factor vis-à-vis Indo-ROK Ties

The strategic calculus of North East Asia underwent profound change after China enhanced its role in Asia following its rapid economic growth and rapid military modernisation. As a result, ROK and some of the South East Asian countries started looking at India with hope and expectation. Interestingly, even before the disintegration of the Soviet Union and during the later phase of the Cold War, it was the Soviet Union which had urged India to cultivate and build a robust relationship with the ROK. It was possible that the Soviets then believed that close Indo-ROK ties may facilitate ROK’s compliance to a Soviet-sponsored regional collective security arrangement as India and the Soviet Union had friendly relations. This was Soviet Union’s “containment” strategy for China. The Soviet assumption was that both Japan and South Korea in the North East Asia and India in the Southwest Asia will endorse its idea to keep China under check. India’s lukewarm stance however did not allow this vision to become a reality.⁶

The deepening of relationship between Pakistan and North Korea during the 1990s and their trade in missiles and nuclear weapons technology always had China’s tacit support. Indeed, the Pakistan-North Korea arms supply relationship dates back to 1971 when Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, then foreign minister under General Yahya Khan visited Pyongyang and sought North Korean arms supplies to strengthen Pakistan’s armed forces as Pakistan was preparing for a conflict with India. At that time, Pakistan did not have diplomatic relations with North Korea. Bhutto’s visit led to the signing of an agreement on September 18, 1971, ten weeks before the war started with India, facilitating Pakistan’s purchase of artillery ammunition and spare parts from North Korea.⁷ Under another agreement signed same day, both agreed to set up consular relations. This was upgraded to full-fledged diplomatic relations on November 9, 1972. In the 1980s, Pakistani and North Korean experts worked together on the Iranian missile programme and Pakistan acted as an intermediary to facilitate arms supply agreements concluded by North Korea with Libya and Iran.⁸ When North Korea emerged as the principal arms supplier of weapons to Iran through Pakistan during the Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, it faced sanctions from the Western countries. Throughout these, both Pakistan and North Korea enjoyed China’s tacit support. To escape detection, Pakistan received North Korea’s arms shipments meant from Iran at its Karachi port and from there transported them

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in Pakistani trucks to Iran across Baluchistan. This way, North Korea sold “100 Scud-B (known as the Hwasong 5 in North Korea) ballistic missiles and equipment for the assembly, maintenance and ultimate production of these missiles on Iranian territory”.⁹

What was more disturbing was that President Zia-ul Haq played a dubious game. On the one hand, Pakistan collaborated with the US Central Intelligence Agency and Iraqi intelligence in destabilising operations directed at the Sunni Balochis living on the Iranian side of the border. On the other, Pakistan clandestinely allowed the transport by road of North Korean arms and ammunition meant for use by the Iranian army against the Iraqis.¹⁰

When China refused to supply long-range missiles in compliance with the missile technology regime (MCTR), Pakistan looked for other suppliers to meet its defence needs. Pakistani officials visited North Korea to view a Rodong prototype as early as 1992 and when North Korea conducted a Rodong launch test at Musudan-ri, many Pakistan engineers and scientists were present. Pakistan wanted to develop a ballistic missile force as the appropriate alternative to deter the growing Indian military might.¹¹

In December 1993, Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto visited both China and North Korea. She sought assistance from Pyongyang for the development of ballistic missiles.¹² The next month in January 1994, the three countries – Pakistan, China and North Korea – signed a formal technical assistance agreement that formalised cooperation in missile and guidance systems.¹³ Subsequently, China provided assistance in the form of technology, engineering and components for guidance systems to North Korea. In turn, with North Korea’s help, Pakistan was able to test a modified version of a Nodong missile in April 1998.¹⁴ Pakistan-North Korea ties

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deepened further when in 1997 Pakistan shared nuclear weapons technology with North Korea¹⁵ and “provided North Korea with prototypes of high-speed centrifuge machines, data on how to build and test a uranium-triggered nuclear weapons, and intelligence advice on how to hide its nuclear programme from the US and South Korea”.¹⁶ A.Q. Khan, the father of the Pakistani bomb, visited North Korea 13 times as of July 2002 to facilitate the transfer of such technologies. Both Pakistan and North Korea deny such strategic cooperation but there is much evidence that suggest that Pakistan-

North Korea nuclear relationship continues to flourish even today.

The three-way agreement enabled North Korean missile experts to visit Pakistan to train their counterparts in the use and maintenance of missiles supplied by North Korea and for the supply and development of mobile erector launchers

for the missiles.¹⁷ Subsequently, Pakistan test fired North Korean Rodong missile (renamed in Pakistan as Ghauri) on 6 April 1998 and projected this project as an indigenously developed one.¹⁸ When Pakistan conducted its Chagai nuclear tests in May 1998, North Korean scientists were there to witness the tests.

Throughout these developments, China continued to facilitate trade in missile and nuclear technology between Pakistan and North Korea, though China has carefully blacked out any visible evidence related to this issue. Ever since the signing of the three-way agreement between the three countries in January 1994, Chinese involvement in Pakistan's nuclear programme as well as nuclear trade between Pakistan and North Korea is an open secret.¹⁹

The US state department declared the growing North Korea-Pakistan missile development and technology transfer cooperation as a violation of the MTCR and imposed sanctions on Pakistan's Khan Research Laboratories and North Korea's Changgwang Trading Company.²⁰ It remained unclear how Pakistan whose economy was in a bad condition was able to pay for this trade. Why North Korea was arming Pakistan as it had no strategic reason like China which was involved in strategic

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Both Pakistan and North Korea had and have even today adversarial relations with their neighbours: Pakistan with India and North Korea with South Korea. Neither seems to have any broader strategic reason but their nuclear and missile development programmes have been motivated by their immediate security concerns. China too has its own agenda. Like the Soviet Union's 'containment' strategy for China during the post-Cold War years, China has adopted a similar strategy of befriending Pakistan and North Korea to check the powers of Japan and India. By facilitating Pakistan-North Korean transactions on nuclear technology trade, China was creating low-cost, local nuclear restraints on both India and Japan and maintaining some

degree of deniability at the same time.²¹ China has also viewed growing India-Japan and Indo-US relationships as a part of larger game plan to check its aspiration as a major player in the Asian theatre. Its policy towards North Korea and South Asia's regional affairs can be seen from this perspective.²² China's strategy of using North Korea to create tension over nuclear development with the intention of heightening Japan's vulnerability is no different from China's similar strategy of using Myanmar and Pakistan in South Asia.²³ Viewed from this perspective, the China factor is propelling India and the ROK to look for building a strong military relationship.²⁴

China is an ambitious power and has a desire to redefine international rules on its own terms and therefore wants to challenge the existing balance of power that now favours the US. Colluding with Pakistan and North Korea seems to be a deliberate Chinese design to challenge US hegemony in the region and check the growing Indian influence in South Asia. From this perspective, the Sino-North Korea-Pakistan nexus is different from North Korea's cooperation with Pakistan.²⁵

Strategic Dimensions

The economic dimension of India-ROK relationship is deepening in recent years and has drawn the attention of scholars. In recent years, there have been noticeable developments in the political and strategic dimensions of the relationship between the two countries as well. In the initial phase of India's "Look East" policy in the first two decades of its enunciation by Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao in 1990s the focus was mainly on economic issues. It has since been expanded to include the political and security dimensions in its second phase.

While the economic ties between ROK and India have grown since the signing of a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement that took effect from January 1, 2010, the bilateral trade has ballooned to cross \$13 billion in 2009 and the figure jumped over 70 per cent during the first year of CEPA taking effect. The target is to take the total bilateral trade volume to \$30 billion by 2013, which seems achievable in view of current trends.

ROK's Foreign Minister Lee Jung-binn during his visit to India in August 2000, stated that "India and South Korea are now fully conscious of the new security linkages between the subcontinent and the Korean peninsula. There have been disturbing reports, over recent years, of nuclear and missile cooperation between Pakistan and North Korea". He further said that both India and the ROK are already moving to strengthen cooperation "for mutual reinforcement of peace and stability between our respective regions".²⁶ When the ROK President Roh Moo-hyun visited New Delhi in October 2004, an annual foreign policy and security dialogue was included in the joint declaration. Entitled a "Long-term Cooperative Partnership for Peace and Prosperity" the dialogue was "broad-based and covered, inter alia, regional and international security issues, bilateral, defence and service-to-

service exchanges and counterterrorism.”²⁷ It was also agreed that this dialogue will be held alternately in India and the ROK beginning from the year 2005. Both sides noted the useful exchanges and interaction in the defence field and agreed to further promote such exchanges and interaction. They agreed on the need for cooperation in matters pertaining to safety and security of international maritime traffic. They also agreed to promote cooperation between their navies, coast guards and related agencies in areas like anti-piracy and search and rescue operations.²⁸

What cannot be missed is the simultaneous development of political and security relations between India and South Korea on the one hand and India and Japan on the other and each successive visit of heads of state have taken the bilateral ties to a much higher level. The ROK seems to be in a hurry to catch up with Japan in this strategy. On its part, China will not spare any effort, to either make these ties unworkable or create hurdles. China exploits Japanese vulnerability by playing the history card to throttle any burgeoning security partnership between India and Japan. China is also capable of playing spoilsport by raising Japanese domestic sensitivities on the nuclear issue and thus frustrates Japan’s possible supply of defence technologies. In contrast, however, the ROK has no such difficulty in entering into a solid security and defence relationship with India as it can play the North Korean card in its favour.

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In the first-ever consultations in May 2007 in New Delhi, the defence ministers of both countries sought to identify areas where their mutual interests converge. A.K. Antony, India’s defence minister, however, wanted military cooperation to develop along side economic cooperation. According to his counterpart, Kim-Chang Su, the talks would facilitate India-ROK ties to be upgraded to a “strategic partnership”, which was achieved during President Lee’s visit to India in January 2010 when he was the chief guest during the Republic Day celebrations.

The post-2005 period has seen substantial up-gradation of cooperation in the defence sector between the two countries. This has led to joint development of self-propelled artillery and mine-countermeasure vessels. The talks in March 2007 on the development and purchase by India of 5,000-ton frigates, armoured vehicles and military trucks further enhanced the bilateral defence cooperation between the two. The ROK also sees substantial potential in the Indian market for selling its KT-1 jet trainers.

India’s approach to ROK’s desire for closer defence cooperation was initially cautious. Probably India was sensitive to the concerns of other countries about

India's increased presence far beyond its neighbourhood. But China's rising profile and concerns stemming from its unpredictable behaviour changed the

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geopolitical landscape in the region in which the forging of closer ties with India by such as the ROK, Japan, Vietnam, and Singapore etc. became inevitable. Also, in view of India's naval capability to provide maritime security in vital sea lanes of communication in the Indian Ocean area, including through the Malacca Strait, countries like Japan and South Korea saw merit in forging closer naval cooperation with India. Following the signing of the MoU in March 2005, the coast guards of the ROK and India conducted joint exercises in July 2006. This was expanded to holding joint naval exercises and regular military consultations. India is receptive to ROK's approach to accept and recognise India's predominant security role in the Indian Ocean region.

However, India's role in the Korean peninsula is going to remain limited as the issue now is far more complicated than what it was during the Korean War when India successfully played the role of an honest broker between the two Koreas. It is often

argued that in view of its "special status" of maintaining diplomatic relations with both the Koreas, India can be "a legitimate dialogue partner in any future settlement with North Korea".³¹ It is argued, therefore, that "any future policy to confront North Korea's nuclear and missile capability has to be broad-based and must go beyond the purview of the US-South Korea-Japan axis".³² However, the complexities of the North East Asian security issues do not allow India to get involved in the Korean Peninsula. India was an arms supplier to North Korea in the 1990s, supplying Soviet-made weaponry and using its expertise in Soviet weapons to assist North Korea in up-grading MiG-21 planes and thereby extending life of other Soviet supplied equipment.³³ North Korea had taken a decision to modernise its air force and decided to collaborate with India, which had considerable experience in upgrading MiG-21s and maintained close relations with Pyongyang. North Korea too made overtures to New Delhi with hope of gaining access to other Russian military equipment such as the "Tunguska" anti-aircraft system, the S-300 missile defence system, 2S19 "Msta-S" howitzers, etc. On its part,

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Pyongyang had been “studying Indian experience in maintaining Russian-made weapons under hard weather conditions”.³⁴ Apart from sourcing its arms supplies from India because of the Soviet link, Pyongyang was also searching for the advanced types of armoured equipment from Pakistan and China. Pyongyang also approached Russia for joint production of advanced armoured equipment and subsequent exports of a portion of the product. Moscow demanded payments in cash but Pyongyang requested for credit. As a result, the deal fell through. The

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situation in the 2000s changed dramatically and it will not be in India’s interests now to get embroiled in a complex security environment by having arms deals with North Korea. China too will never welcome any Indian role in the region.

The very fact that India refrained from criticising North Korea when it conducted the ballistic missile tests in April 2009 and similar tests the following month shows that India’s role as a regional security partner in East Asia remains limited.³⁵ It is a different matter that India’s position on these tests may have pleased North Korea but any attempt by South Korea to forge a security relationship must not be seen as a strategy to balance China. India security strategy should be seen as part of a US-led multilateral coalition in which Japan and

South Korea are key players and the North East Asian security issue should be seen from such a perspective.

The increasing bonhomie between India and the ROK for cooperation in the field of defence and military affairs needs to be evaluated in context of the “hub and spoke” system of separate bilateral alliances that the US maintains with its regional allies. In the wake of the acceleration of the strategic relationship between India and the US after the 2008 nuclear deal and after President Barack Obama’s visit to India in November 2010, and following the deteriorating security environment in the Korean peninsula, the US’ regional allies such as Japan, Australia and South Korea are also under pressure to review their relationships with a rising India. In this process of balancing power relations, the China factor has been accelerating this new power configuration.

Indeed, military expenditure in Asia and Oceania increased by 8.9 per cent in real terms in 2009 and reached \$276 billion. China is the biggest military spender in the region: its expenditure of \$100 billion in 2009 was 15 per cent higher in real terms than in 2008.

Military Build-up and Sino-Indian Rivalry Defence/R&D Collaboration

As India modernises its military, its expenditure is too rising. Indeed, military expenditure in Asia and Oceania increased by 8.9 per cent in real terms in 2009 and reached \$276 billion. China is the biggest military spender in the region: its expenditure of \$100 billion in 2009 was 15 per cent higher in real terms than in 2008.³⁶ China justifies this increase as a means of improving the living conditions facilities of the troops, to develop information and communications technology within the armed forces, to improve equipment and supply facilities, to improve disaster-relief capabilities, and to rebuild infrastructure following the 2008 Sichuan earthquake.³⁷

Similarly, India's military expenditure totalled \$36.3 billion in 2009, an increase of 13 per cent in real terms over 2008. India's military spending has risen by 67 per cent since 2000. As its economy continues to register a sustained growth rate of 8-9 per cent, its ambition to be a regional power also becomes stronger. India

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also faces an assertive China³⁸, continuing conflict with Pakistan, and the threat of terrorism that is spreading more fiercely in recent years. "India plans to spend at least \$30 billion by 2012 on military modernisation, although this may be affected by continuing delays in procurement processes".³⁹

Indeed, the long-term rise in global military expenditure accelerated in 2009 and was unhampered by the global financial crisis and economic recession. Though local conflicts generally drive spending in some cases, it is difficult to link the rising trend to any increase in major global security threats. Rather, it seems to reflect the long-term strategies of the world's major global and regional powers.⁴⁰

The Sino-Indian rivalry shows no sign of resolution. Distrust and suspicions run deep and these shape their policy formulation towards each other. These have not prevented both from exploiting

the economic opportunities to their mutual advantage. The bilateral trade looks robust, exceeding \$50 billion in 2010 and projected to touch \$60 billion soon. Yet, there lurks a continuing fear and concern in India regarding Chinese encirclement and its recent activities in the Indian Ocean region. India suspects China's increasing ties with Bangladesh, Myanmar and Pakistan. In particular, China's role in helping Pakistan to build the port in Gwadar on Pakistan's Balochistan coast is viewed with suspicion. India feels that Pakistan's argument of developing Gwadar for commercial purpose lacks conviction as Pakistan has adequate civil

port capacity in Karachi and Port Qasim. There is a view in India that is gaining wide acceptance in academic circles and among naval strategists that China is deliberately implementing a “string of pearl” maritime strategy to protect its energy lifeline and put pressure on India.

The challenge for India was to balance relations with China in such a manner that the competition for strategic space in the Indian Ocean leads to cooperation rather than conflict.

While delivering the T S Narayanaswamy Memorial Lecture in Chennai on 21 January 2008 the former head of the Indian Navy, Admiral Suresh Mehta said that the development of Gwadar port had “serious strategic implications for India”.⁴¹ Since Gwadar is only 180 nautical miles from the exit of the Strait of Hormuz, it would enable Pakistan to take control of the world energy jugular and interdict Indian tankers. Admiral Mehta argued, therefore, that the challenge for India was to balance relations with

China in such a manner that the competition for strategic space in the Indian Ocean leads to cooperation rather than conflict. Therefore, it is necessary for the countries in the region to cooperate in the maritime domain to ensure smooth flow of energy and commerce on the high seas.

Mehta said China’s “String of Pearls”, strategy as per which it seeks to set up bases and outposts across the globe, that are strategically located along its energy lines, to monitor and safeguard energy flows. He also expressed concern over China’s efforts to set up a container port at Chittagong in Bangladesh, along with surveillance, repair and refit facilities in Myanmar, which he saw as a deliberate Chinese maritime plan where “each pearl in the string is a link in a chain of the Chinese maritime presence”. He further argued that “the string moves northwards up to the Gwadar deep sea port on Pakistan’s Makran coast.

A highway is under construction for joining Gwadar with Karachi and there are plans to connect the port with the Karakoram highway, thus providing China a gateway to Arabian Sea,” he said, and added that “this could pose a problem for India”.⁴² Admiral Mehta repeated the same concern while delivering the National Security Lecture in the Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses on August 13, 2008, where he underlined the critical role of the Indian navy in securing maritime commerce. He stressed that “the maritime security of India and its environs is central to the functioning of the Indian navy”.⁴³

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to the Strait of Malacca.⁴⁴ Tensions on the borders continue with both accusing the other of incursions. Some select analysts even see a conflict being imminent between the two countries following the launch of an attack by China against India as early as 2012 as the former would want to “divert attention from brewing internal dissent ... by manipulating their [the Chinese people’s] nationalistic feelings”.⁴⁵ As in South Korea, the public perception of China in India is one of concern than of opportunity as Chinese power continues to grow and the Chinese leadership continues to be assertive on bilateral and regional contentious issues.

Complementarity between India’s Defence Needs and ROK’s Defence Industry

The Sino-Indian rivalry has drawn the ROK towards India as the latter has similar apprehensions about China’s rise. Defence and military cooperation is defined as a means to forging a bond to face the China challenge and also other challenges (such as NTS threats) in the region. The fear of China and increasing Sino-Pak bonhomie has led India to start a massive military and naval build-up to deter the threat from sea as well as to secure maritime commerce and thereby maintain its dominance in the Indian Ocean which is its top priority.

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Indian has the fifth largest fleet in the world. But the Indian navy continues to face procurement problems with delays in both domestically produced weapons systems and foreign purchases, which potentially impacts its role of sea control and sea denial. In the mid-1990s, Indian navy had a fleet strength of 100 combat vessels, of which 15 were submarines, 2 aircraft carriers and another 23 destroyers and fast frigates. Lack of funding and lack of spare parts meant that only 50 per cent of

The situation began to change in the 1990s, when India launched a major modernisation programme. In fiscal 2003-04, the Indian navy was allocated approximately 18 per cent (\$3.57 billion) of the total defence budget as it was struggling to find replacements for a fleet that had vessels being decommissioned due to old age faster than they could be replaced. Indeed, Indian navy’s “strategic assets will determine its future role and power projection capability, particularly with regard to China”.⁴⁶

While delivering a lecture on Navy’s vision for the future in October 2008, Admiral Mehta said India wanted to create and sustain a three-dimensional,

technology-enabled and networked force capable of safeguarding maritime interests in the high seas and projecting combat power across the littoral. He stated that India's expanding maritime responsibilities and interests would necessitate enhancement in force levels too. Mehta said, "By 2020, we plan to have a 160-plus ship navy, including three aircraft carriers, 60 major combatants, including submarines and close to 400 aircraft of different types. This will be a formidable three dimensional force with satellite surveillance and networking to provide force multiplication".⁴⁷ In July 2009, India launched INS Arihant, its first indigenously built nuclear submarine.⁴⁸ Apart from Indian navy's perspective plan for the next 15 to 20 years that would provide sustained business incentive to invest in naval systems, ships and aircraft for the Indian industry on their own or with overseas collaboration and thereby give an impetus to the indigenous defence and ship-building industry, Indian army too needs to upgrade its weapons systems. Though the Indian army operates around 3,000 heavy tanks, much of that force still lacks modern night-vision equipment.⁴⁹ Indian air force too needs serious upgrading as a large number of old Soviet-built aircraft will retire within the next few years.⁵⁰

Apart from Indian navy's perspective plan for the next 15 to 20 years that would provide sustained business incentive to invest in naval systems, ships and aircraft for the Indian industry on their own or with overseas collaboration and thereby give an impetus to the indigenous defence and ship-building industry, Indian army too needs to upgrade its weapons systems.

In July 2009, the Indian government announced an increase in the country's defence budget by 34 per cent in fiscal 2009 to \$30 billion, replacing Italy as the 11th largest spender and challenging South Korea for a position in the world top 10 by 2012.⁵¹ India, thus, has emerged as a key market for overseas defence companies.

India imports 70 per cent of its military equipment, making it the world's largest arms importer next only to China.

India imports 70 per cent of its military equipment, making it the world's largest arms importer next only to China. If defence deals worth over \$50 billion were inked in the decade since the 1999 Kargil conflict, the majority of them with foreign suppliers, it will spend more than double that amount in the current decade.⁵² The government is conscious of the fact that it needs to make changes in its defence system and has initiated a number of measures that are enshrined in the defence procurement procedures. Its defence spending in

the years between 2001 (\$13.81 billion) and 2009 increased by 137 per cent. Both the deteriorating external security environment (perceived threat from Pakistan

and China) as well as the preparedness to maintain internal security (Mumbai terror attack of November 2008 as a trigger) demand increased defence allocation to maintain credible deterrence against external threats.⁵³

The Indian market for arms is already crowded, with Russia, France, Britain and the US meeting the bulk of its requirements and thus ROK will have to work hard to penetrate the market.

The ROK is well positioned to meet many of India's military needs because it has created a robust arms industry given the perpetual threat from North Korea and its reluctance to depend entirely on the US, besides developing military cooperation with Japan. Graduating from meeting as much as 70 per cent of the equipment that its own army needed,⁵⁴ the ROK began aspiring to be a major player in the global arms market by 2007.

The ROK has begun mass production of the world's first-ever supersonic trainer jets, named T-50s (a \$6.2 billion project), at its Korea Aerospace Industries (KAI) in Sacheon, and the first T-50 jet rolled out in August 2005, making the ROK the 12th

country to produce supersonic aircraft.⁵⁵ India can replace its aging British-built Jaguar fighters by importing the T-50 jets from the ROK.⁵⁶ The Indian market for arms is already crowded, with Russia, France, Britain and the US meeting the bulk of its requirements and thus ROK will have to work hard to penetrate the market. Yet, as India upgrades 39 of the 80 airfields along its borders with Pakistan and China, there is scope for the ROK to sell some of its military products to India. Shipbuilding is one area where the ROK enjoys competitive edge over others and is therefore worth exploring.

Notwithstanding the competition that the ROK may face in the Indian market, it can still hope for a slice of the India's naval modernisation pie. In July 2009, ROK's Hyundai Heavy Industries and America's Lockheed Martin announced a joint venture to build a medium-sized 4,000 to 6,000-ton Aegis-class warship for export. This was following their successful joint development of the KDX-III Aegis destroyer for the ROK navy. While Hyundai will build the hull, Lockheed will provide its Aegis Combat System. As India seeks to introduce high-tech Aegis ships designed to track incoming missiles and shoot them down, it is the first target customer for this joint venture.⁵⁷

If the ROK succeeds in entering the Indian arms market, the biggest loser could be Russia. India has had a bitter experience in acquiring the 44,570-ton aircraft carrier *Admiral Gorshkov* as Russia is demanding escalation costs and therefore the ROK as a source of supply may look attractive. India may also consider acquiring the unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) from the ROK for its military, which is cost effective and would add some teeth to the combat power of its armed forces.⁵⁸

The navies and coast guards of both countries have established excellent service-to-service contacts. Both have felt the need to enhance these further. Officers from both countries' armed forces attend middle/high level courses of instruction in each others countries. A field that remains unexplored is possible visits by academics and security experts, defence analysts and delegations from premier think tanks to either country so that their mutual security concerns and perceptions are shared.

At present, the defence attache based in Indian embassy in Tokyo has dual charge for the ROK also. Although there have been several exchange visits among higher military officials, only one ROK defence minister, Kim Jang-su, visited India in 2007. His visit was returned by Antony in September 2010. While two military officers from India attended the ROK military schools, about 40 officers from the ROK studied in the Indian military schools.

If both India and the ROK exchange the relevant lists, purchase the necessary products from each other and implement joint research, these may facilitate the defence industry to enter the fray and thereby contribute to the establishment of a strong foundation for military cooperation between the two countries.

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The ROK fondly remembers the important role played by the 60th Parachute Field Ambulance Platoon, a mobile army surgical hospital that treated more than half of the wounded soldiers, an average of 250-300 civilians a day, during the UN operation in late 1951. The current military cooperation according to ROK should start with this historical fact as guide.

Developing closer military cooperation is different from expanding economic relations. Forging strong military cooperation requires political and diplomatic decisions. Real transactions for an end item like an aircraft, tank or warship are determined by what a country's weapon system requirements are as the concept of warfare is different from country to country. Exchange of military personnel, already in progress in a modest way, could be the gateway for bigger deals in the future. Collaboration on technology transfer for both civilian and military application looks promising. As India has already a civil and military collaboration programme, exchange of dual use technology between the two countries could be a viable proposition. If both India and the ROK exchange the relevant lists, purchase the necessary products from each other and implement joint research, these may facilitate

the defence industry to enter the fray and thereby contribute to the establishment of a strong foundation for military cooperation between the two countries.

Defence R&D cooperation between India and the ROK is another area that remains unexploited. The MoU of September 2010 envisages this. International cooperative R&D is defined as “a cooperative R&D procedure where a domestic and a foreign R&D organisation cooperatively invest to achieve a collaborative objective”.⁵⁹ To quote Seok Cheol Choi:

The objective of international technology collaboration in the defence sector is the efficient acquisition of new-technology and expansion of defence exports. Especially, international technology collaboration is used as a method of competitive technology exchange and reduction of development cost among developed countries. Presently, Korea has relations in defence science and technology collaboration with 15 different countries including the US. Technology collaboration has many different forms, such as cooperative R&D, interchange of technology human resource, and exchange of technology information, etc. Korea is expected to continuously expand the international technology collaboration

The first condition to facilitate such cooperation is to find commonality in each country’s regional, diplomatic and economic policy approaches. This already exists. If this is so, it is logical for both to mutually construct a collaborative programme for defence R&D cooperation.

through various channels, like DAPA (Defence Acquisition Program Administration), ADD (Agency for Defence Development), etc.”⁶⁰

If this is the result of ROK’s policy towards international cooperative R&D, what could be prospects for such collaborative programmes between India and the ROK? The first condition to facilitate such cooperation is to find commonality in each country’s regional, diplomatic and economic policy approaches. This already exists. If this is so, it is logical for both to mutually construct a collaborative programme for defence R&D cooperation. The next step could be to identify the technology levels in each country and assess where they complement each other. Once this is done, laws, regulations, procedures and decision-making process would need to be simplified for smooth execution of the project. Budgetary allocation should not be a constraint from either side to execute the project to its logical conclusion. If this proposal is to be examined seriously, both the

countries must establish a defence R&D cooperation committee, which can fine tune aspects of defence R&D cooperation such as requirement generation estimation, technology development, defence acquisition process of weapons system and finally cooperative production and deployment. Once this is achieved, the export and marketing can take the bilateral relationship to a higher trajectory.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This paper does not suggest that India and the ROK should form a military alliance. What is argued is that both countries should leverage their commonalities to expand military exchanges and deepen military cooperation. The bright sign of this aspect of the relationship is that both have already signed an MoU for the National Defence Development Cooperation. The next logical step is to institutionalise high ranking military officers' meetings. Cooperation to address transnational threats such as maritime terrorism and piracy also needs to be strengthened. The Indian government should seriously consider posting a defence attaché in its embassy in Seoul, instead of allocating dual charge to its attaché posted in Tokyo. India and the ROK have no conflict of interests. Enhancing defence and military cooperation can put both countries in a win-win situation and thereby bolster both nations' standing in regional and international forums.

India and the ROK have no conflict of interests. Enhancing defence and military cooperation can put both countries in a win-win situation and thereby bolster both nations' standing in regional and international forums.

In view of the growing relations with the US, India might find it prudent to forge similar ties with the ROK, which is a major US ally in North East Asia. For the US, it would be strategically convenient to encourage the relationship as it will be another means to expand the US sphere of influence within the Asia Pacific

China might feel uncomfortable with the strengthening of ROK-India military cooperation but it would be far less uncomfortable with direct India-US military cooperation. As mentioned earlier, China is already wary of India getting closer to the US after the Indo-US civilian nuclear agreement. In view of the growing relations with the US, India might find it prudent to forge similar ties with the ROK, which is a major US ally in North East Asia. For the US, it would be strategically convenient to encourage the relationship as it will be another means to expand the US sphere of influence within the Asia Pacific region. Seen from another perspective- as the ROK-China economic ties are strong, any military engagement between the ROK and India will not create any misunderstanding in China that it is a US-led strategy to keep China under check. On the other hand, a strong India-ROK military cooperation that also accrues economic dividends will be welcome as it would contribute towards deepening economic interdependence in the Asian region. Also, a multilateral security cooperation framework that takes on board India, the ROK, Japan, the US, Russia, Australia and China

similar to the OSCE may be worth-exploring. It will advance peace and stability in the Asian region. Such cooperative strategy by a consortium of powers can check (not contain) China's claims over disputed islands in South China Sea and its maritime expansionism strategy and thereby halt China's influence in the Indian and the Pacific Oceans.

China may use its trade card with the ROK to lure the latter away from India. Beijing also may use North Korea as a strategic tool to deter the ROK from forging a deeper military relationship with India.

If the China factor is driving the ROK to sculpt a partnership with India, China will surely try to frustrate such an initiative. While not trying to disturb the flourishing economic ties between India and the ROK, China's strategy would be to limit India's influence beyond the Malacca Strait. But if the security ties start becoming more robust, China might feel the heat. If the Hyundai-Lockheed shipbuilding venture comes to fruition, China might feel that the dominance of its navy in the South China Sea is being threatened. China may use its trade card with the ROK to lure the latter away from India. Beijing also may use North Korea as a strategic tool to deter the ROK from forging a deeper military relationship with India. Notwithstanding the deepening of naval cooperation between India

and the ROK, it is doubtful if India will be willing to dispatch its warships to the Yellow Sea to support the ROK if Chinese fishing boats make unauthorised entry. The attention of the Indian navy will remain concentrated on watching Pakistan and monitoring Chinese moves in the Indian Ocean region and safeguarding the Malacca Strait to secure maritime commerce. If India engages too closely with the ROK and deploys its navy, China might perceive the Indian move as "string of pearls" strategy in reverse.

Given the complexities of geopolitics of the region, it would be prudent of India not to be too ambitious and drift militarily towards northwards. It would not be in the ROK's interest either to engage India militarily so that the fragile security situation in its neighbourhood is not complicated further. It would be in their mutual interests to exploit the advantages in reaping more economic rent than the CEPA has already carved out. As there is no imminent crisis that lurks on the horizon at the moment, an economics-first approach would be the right strategy for both India and the ROK. But should a crisis occur at anytime, both may be compelled to review their options. 

As there is no imminent crisis that lurks on the horizon at the moment, an economics-first approach would be the right strategy for both India and the ROK. But should a crisis occur at anytime, both may be compelled to review their options.

Notes:

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15. Seymour M. Hersh, "The Cold Test", *New Yorker*, vol. 78, no. 44, 2003, p. 42.
16. Brewster, n.14, pp. 407-408.
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18. It is widely believed in India that while North Korea supplied Pakistan with Ghauri II, the guidance system for both the Ghauri I and II originated in China. In addition, due to the short length of time for its production before launch, the Shaheen missile appears to have been based on a proven design, most likely the Chinese M-9. The Shaheen is produced in a factory near Rawalpindi, which was reportedly designed and equipped by China. For more see, "Pakistan Tests Chinese-North Korean Missiles", *Jane Intelligence Review*, /99, p. 3, 5.
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hardware and software and therefore global armament giants made a beeline for the country to hawk their fighters, helicopters, submarines, missiles, howitzers and the like.

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54. *Jane's World Defence Industry*, n. 52, p. 101.
55. "South Korea launches its T-50, the world's first supersonic trainer jet", <http://times.hankooki.com/lpage/200508/kt2005083017262210230.htm>. The T-50s are one of the world's best trainer jets, whose capability and stability have been proved. ROK's Air Force will acquire a state-of-the-art weaponry system when A-50 attack planes are developed and the procurement projects of next-generation fighter jets and the airborne early warning and control system are completed in the future. The KAI produced and delivered 2 jets to the Air Force in 2005 and planned to deliver T-50s more by 2011. The 13.13-meter-long, 9.45-meter-wide and 4.94-meter-high plane can fly at a maximum speed of Mach 1.4 and as high as 14,630 meters. The T-50 is equipped with a range of advanced systems to train pilots in both current and next-generation combat jets, as well as featuring sophisticated anti-air and anti-ground weapons systems. The ROK is expected to sell about 800-1,200 T-50s by 2030, accounting for 27-41 per cent of the world trainer jet market. Each trainer costs \$22-23 million, higher than other competitive trainer jets.
56. For a list of military equipment that ROK has thrown open to the global market, see <http://z9.invisionfree.com/21c/index.php?showtopic=8559>
57. Jung Sung-ki, "S. Korea, US to Build Medium-size Aegis Ship", *The Korea Times*, 21 July 2009, http://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/news/nation/2010/11/205_48819.html The Aegis Combat System, built by Lockheed Martin, is the world's premier surface-to-air and fire-control system, capable of conducting simultaneous operations against aircraft, ballistic and cruise missiles, ships and submarines. The Aegis weapon system includes SPY-1 radar, the world's most advanced computer-controlled radar system. When paired with the MK-41 Vertical Launching System, it is capable of delivering missiles for every mission and threat environment in naval warfare. The envisaged Korea-US medium-size Aegis ship for India will be equipped with SPY-1F radar, a modified version of the AN-SPY-1D radar system. The Aegis system is currently deployed on more than 75 ships around the world, with more than 30 additional ships planned. In addition to the US and Norway, Aegis is the weapon system of choice for Japan, Korea and Spain among other countries.
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