



Centre for Air Power Studies

REPORT

CAPS-ISDP Joint International Seminar

on

India and South Korea in the Age of the Indo-Pacific: Why Minilateralism Matters?

2023 is a landmark year for India-South Korea relations, as it marks 50 years of their diplomatic ties. On this occasion, the Centre for Air Power Studies (CAPS) and the Institute for Security and Development Policy (ISDP), Sweden, are jointly organising an International Seminar on “**India and South Korea in the Age of Indo-Pacific: Why Minilateralism Matters?**” on **25 August 2023** at Conference Hall, Air Force Auditorium, Subroto Park, New Delhi. The seminar featured distinguished speakers, including stakeholders from the diplomatic fraternity. In a day of proceedings, the conference participants deliberated on various dimensions of bilateral relationships between India and Korea.

Inaugural Session

Dr. Jagannath Panda, Head of Stockholm Centre for South Asian and Indo-Pacific Affairs (SCSA-IPA), in his welcome remarks, highlighted the aspirations of joint initiatives by ISDP and CAPS. Furthermore, he mentioned the endless possibilities that exist for an effective partnership between India and South Korea.

Air Marshal Anil Chopra, DG CAPS, in his introductory address, gave a brief introduction of ISDP and thereafter covered the dimensions of India-South Korea relations. South Korea is India's 5th largest trading partner, and recently, Samsung inaugurated a facility in Noida. The cultural links of this relationship go back to Buddhism, while the political relations have been due to the China factor. On the diplomatic front, both states have found themselves amidst two aggressive nuclear powers. India's policies in recent times have tried to push for alliances with like-minded democracies, and sees South Korea as an apt partner for the same. Defence and Security cooperation is an area both countries can explore together and collaborate on submarines, lithium batteries and other technologies.

General Anil Chauhan, the CDS remembered the importance of India and South Korea's relationship since mythological times. The tale of a Korean princess to Buddhism contributed to a close relationship between both countries. Both countries have multidimensional relationships, and CDS highlighted the popularity of Korean Brands. The Cholas and Sri Vijay Empire strengthened the trade ties between both nations. CDS stated that India and South Korea have similar geopolitical goals, and due to China's aggressiveness Asian landscape has become the center point of geopolitical activities. Speaking about the Importance of the Indo-Pacific region, he said that this region hosts 62% of the global GDP, and this has become the world's busiest trade route in the past few decades. On the other hand, the region has 7 out of 10 biggest militaries in the world.

Shri Saurabh Kumar, the secretary, heightened the importance of the forward-looking title of the seminar. He stated that the Indo-Pacific is the reality of this integrated world. The Republic of Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy is a foresighted attempt to make Indo-Pacific more peaceful. We welcome the formation of such a strategy, in which South Korea and India are accorded ample scope to work with each other. He also stated that in Indo-Pacific minilateralism, the Quad is a beacon which is a value-based grouping of democracies to address the challenges and opportunities to solve regional security challenges.

During the inaugural address, H.E. Chang Jae-bok, the Ambassador of ROK to India, focussed on India-ROK ties and remarked that both nations are trying to strengthen their partnership in multilateral and minilateral frameworks. He emphasised the strategic global importance of the Indo-Pacific region, as the region consists of 63 per cent of the worldwide GDP. For Korea, too, the Indo-Pacific region carries greater significance. He further added that South Korea's comprehensive strategy in December 2022 reflects Korea's aspiration of becoming a global partner, focussing on maintaining the regional order based on norms and rules.

He also remarked that India is a thriving society, and the India-Korea partnership faces certain challenges together, such as the pandemic, food insecurity and supply chain disruptions. Such challenges call for an effective collaboration between the two nations. Both nations should further enhance their cooperation through the minilateral frameworks and should call for like-minded countries to cooperate.

Amb. Amit Kumar, the Ambassador of India to South Korea, Seoul, spoke about the positive appraisals in the India-Korea partnership, including people-to-people exchanges, which is an important aspect of their partnership. He explained that both India and the ROK are robust and vibrant democracies and free-market economies, too. The COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukraine invasion are the issues that have increased the importance of having supply-chain resilience. Therefore, he mentioned that the technology partnership between both nations is vital for growth and prosperity. He further remarked that South Korea is a recent Indo-Pacific partner, and perhaps India's G20 Presidency will open up more opportunities for both countries. During the G7 summit in Japan, leaders of both India and Korea met and laid out their joint commission and explored areas of cooperation such as science and technology. He mentioned that regarding their bilateral trade, there is a need to upgrade the CEPA for higher investment, leading to more avenues for bilateral economic cooperation. He added that both nations should expand their cooperation on automobiles and semiconductors.

Amb. Kumar explained that Korea's Indo-Pacific strategy aims to enhance maritime security resilient infrastructure, and focus more on the Pacific Island countries and ASEAN. He also spoke of the importance of ROK's participation in the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) for shared objectives and common pursuit of progress and prosperity. He emphasised the utility of having mini-laterals for greater cooperation between the two nations and concluded by remarking that their special strategic partnership is encompassing.

Session I: Why Indo-Pacific Matters to India and South Korea

, Prof. Ahn Choong Yong, Professor, Chung-Ang University, the Chair of the session mentioned that South Korea is particularly serious about supply chain initiatives in which it sees India as a partner. The two countries have great potential to cooperate and South Korea recognize India as the most populous and youngest nation in the world. The question arises of how the Quad Plus will perform in the years to come. Largely supply chain resilience is the core issue for the Indo-Pacific.

Ms Mahima Duggal, the first Speaker of the session, spoke on various aspects of “India’s Indo-Pacific Strategy: Where does South Korea stand?”. India, handling the G-20 presidency, has emerged as a critical power amid US-China competition. Indo-Pacific region is significant for India. India’s policy is based on inclusiveness and respect for sovereignty and integrity. India’s SAGAR initiative is holistic and is carefully created considering the economy and security of the region. After the Galwan crisis, the divide between India and China is visible. India has posed itself as a major player.

India in 2018 in a joint statement stated that India views South Korea as an indispensable partner in the region and there is a synergy between both nations. Both are middle powers and have the capacity to build and foster security in the region. There are four areas of cooperation between both nations 1) Deepening economic and developmental goals 2) Enhancing security partnership 3) Third-party cooperation 4) Regional Forums. The core focus must be on the defence sector where lies a lot of scope for cooperation.

Minister Lim Sang-Woo, Deputy Chief of Mission, Embassy of South Korea in India, focused on ‘India in South Korea’s Indo-Pacific Strategy’, and highlighted that Korean strategy rests on three pillars making the Indo-Pacific free, peaceful, and prosperous. Freedom denotes the commitment to promote the liberal international order. A peaceful Indo-Pacific means a dispute-free region, and prosperous means economic progress based on sharing experience and technology. Mini-laterals are important for the security of the region.

Dr Manpreet Sethi, Distinguished Fellow, CAPS, speaking on ‘Identifying Common Nuclear Concerns’, said that both shares common nuclear concern as both nations are situated in a very tense nuclear environment. Neighbours of both the countries are nuclear power, and speaking in respect of Pakistan and North Korea both these neighbours have very negative image when it comes to nuclear weapons or otherwise.

Session II: Minilateralism and the New Supply Chain Connect: India & South Korea

Ambassador **Ujal Singh Bhatia**, the Chair of the session mentioned that pointed out the developments in the global economy and the pattern of supply chain re-alignment, which has stirred concern in the global environment. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerabilities of the supply chain and indicated the economic and military power of China. In addition, newer concerns regarding liberal global trading order, and economic nationalism. In a situation like this, it could be disastrous to decouple with China which is too large and too important to be fully isolated. Indo-Pacific has become an important area, and the US has started to focus on sensitive sectors. The Republic of Korea and India are important pivotal states, and their collaboration can yield positive externalities.

Dr Jojin John, Assistant Professor, School of International Relations and Politics, Kerala, the first speaker of the session, focussed on ‘India-ROK Ties in the Indo-Pacific: An Economic Security Perspective’, highlighted that there has been significant securitization of the economic interest. Post-Cold War, economic security was seen in the context of human security, income security and freedom from wants. Whereas, in the current discourse, the geo-political and economic aspects have become more related, and are a threat to national security. Critical sectors and critical infrastructures are driving the foreign policy of many countries. Because of the economic sector considerations, India and South Korea can be major partners for cooperation, especially in the Semiconductor industry. Mini and Multilateral cooperation was missing due to the absence of a regional framework. Therefore, these challenges need to be addressed.

Prof. Cho Choong Jae, Director Delhi Office, Korea Institute for International Economic Policy (KIEP) focussed on 'India in South Korea's Supply Chain Diversification Strategy' and highlighted that India and ROK have natural and strategic cooperation, and trade between the two has increased significantly over the years, especially after India's reform. While the Indo-Pacific is accelerating and China remains the target of decoupling, Korea continues to rely heavily on it. To break this, India and ROK's mutual strategic cooperation is important for both; the foundation for this has been the shift to 'Indo-Pacific' from 'Asia-Pacific.' The Indo-Pacific Era covers batteries, semiconductors, vaccines, defence, and aerospace. There needs to be more cooperation between the public sector and private sector of the countries. A solution can be to have an India-ROK version of ICET (Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology).

Ms. Eerishika Pankaj, the Head, of Org for Research on China & Asia (ORCA), New Delhi, and the third speaker of the session, spoke about 'Quad Plus and Korea Inc. in the Future of Supply Chain Diversification'. She added Korea Inc. includes companies like Samsung, Hyundai, and LG covering shipbuilding, finance, and automobiles. ROK's domestic economy has several strong points, it can leverage the global influence over supply chains, ROK is well positioned to help QUAD members especially India to produce smartphones, and they can collaborate on Research, AI, and Quantum Science. India in return can provide access to large-scale markets, and both can strengthen diplomatic ties, enhance soft power, and introduce collaborative ventures. To pivot globally, both countries would be required to facilitate technology transfer and share challenges emerging from climate, cyber and maritime domains. In order to compete with China, they need to put a strong hold on Research, and reliability and have a competitive edge.

Dr Manoj Kumar Panigrahi, Asst. Professor, Centre for NE Asian Studies, OP Jindal University, focussed on 'Taiwan Flashpoint: India-Korea Joint Options in the Region', Taiwan matters mainly because of its Semiconductors industry, the digital journey that helps in military expansion. Indo-Pacific is affected by the breach of the first island chain and influences the second chain as well. The pandemic has pushed countries towards self-reliance and paved the way for techno-nationalism. The Chip 4 alliance between the US, ROK, Japan and Taiwan is a step in the right direction.

Prof. Yoon Young-Kwan, Emeritus Professor, Seoul National University, and former Foreign Minister of South Korea gave the Special Address. Prof. Yoon widely spoke about the challenges faced in the rules-based international order in the Indo-Pacific region. He mentioned that Korea and India both condemned the violation of territorial integrity and gave an example of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Korea was a poor nation in the 1950s and eventually developed itself democratically as well. He remarked that it is imperative for South Korea to uphold the rules-based international order, and escalating US-China competition is also a challenge for Korea, as South Korea is in dilemma due to being diplomatically surrounded by big powers. Yoon explained that the US-South Korea alliance is vital for the international order, and China too is one of the top trading partners of Korea. Under President Yoon's administration, India and South Korea have upgraded their ties to a special partnership and aim to maintain a rules-based order. He also briefly mentioned the recent trilateral summit held in Camp David between the US, Korea and Japan. He added that India and Korea can cooperate in the defence industry as well.

Session III: Minilateral Security Framework and India-South Korea Ties

Air Vice Marshal Anil Golani (Retd), Additional Director General, CAPS, chaired the third session and remarked that India-ROK relations have completed 50 years of diplomatic bilateral relations. He also explained that China is the elephant in the room and China is also the largest trading partner of ROK. Therefore, studying the minilateral frameworks has become vital.

Dr. Sriparna Pathak, Asso. Professor, Centre for NE Asian Studies, OP Jindal University, focussed on 'India, South Korea, and the Security Architecture in the Indo-Pacific. Sriparna's remarks revolved around various influences in the Indo-Pacific region. She explained that both India and the ROK have benefitted through the existing rules-based international order. However, there are several key challenges that both countries face due to China's expansionist behaviour. She further went on to explain India-China clashes over the Galwan Valley. Moreover, South Korea's alignment with the US has deteriorated Korea-China relations. Therefore, Dr Pathak mentioned common challenges for both India and Korea, which include the Chinese perception and alternative trade routes, to mention a few. India-Korea cooperation is vital in the current security environment.

Prof. Wooyeal Paik, Asso. Professor Yonsei University, South Korea, the second speaker of the session, focussed on 'India and the Indo-Pacific in South Korea's Security Landscape'. Prof. Wooyeal remarked that India-Korea bilateral relations were upgraded to their special strategic partnership; it is an era of convergence and technological order. He explained Korea's strategic position in the Indo-Pacific strategy and that Korea's engagement with Europe and NATO is on the way. He also spoke widely of the potential of the US-Japan-Korea trilateral and the recently conducted summit at Camp David. Furthermore, minilateral and multilateral partnership in the Indo-Pacific is vital for economic as well as technological security. Prof. Paik also mentioned that India is a reliable partner for Korea.

Air Cmde SP Singh, Senior Fellow, CAPS, spoke about the Air-Power balance in the Indo-Pacific and India-ROK ties and mentioned that India is geographically in a challenging situation. He explained several trilaterals within the Quad and also regarding the Indo-China military balance. He further went on to explain the Air-Power and its need to secure the Indo-Pacific region and also spoke about the importance of the scope for joint programmes.

Prof. Ahn Choong Yong, a Distinguished Professor Chung-Ang University, in Concluding Remarks, highlighted that South Korea should strengthen its bilateral relationship at all costs with India. India and the ROK should work on strengthening their ties in security and economic aspects. He also spoke about the need for renewed trilateral partnerships such as US-Japan-ROK, US-Korea-India, US-Korea-Australia and US-Korea-ASEAN. Regarding the Indo-Pacific vision, both India and the ROK can exercise their strategic autonomy and work on strengthening their maritime cooperation through joint naval exercises. Furthermore, he was also very keen on India joining the RCEP and exploring further areas for cooperation, such as critical and emerging technologies.

The joint seminar, convened by CAPS-ISDP, came to an end with a 'Vote of Thanks' delivered by Air Marshal Anil Chopra, DG CAPS. The speaker expressed gratitude towards all the individuals serving as panellists and participants, acknowledging their enthusiastic engagement in the proceedings.