



India's East Asian outreach

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ABSTRACT

India's ambitions in East Asia are evident and pragmatic. It has a growing bonhomie with Japan to collaborate with on bilateral level and within multilateral frameworks as well. In consideration of Japan's caution towards the US and China, it is looking for a sustainable partnership that has mutually appreciative policy axes and the capabilities to achieve bilateral objectives with it. It has repeatedly identified India as the most viable option to adopt this role. The author has taken into consideration multilateral arrangements and larger international relations with countries like China to understand the limitations to Indo-Japanese relations, with recommendations on how to overcome them. Furthermore, the article explores the possibility of a larger multilateral security regime with the Republic of Korea and Taiwan, in light of mutual interests and the latest trends of multilateralism that have swept Asia in the twenty-first century. Finally, the paper observes that India's role in East Asia does not have to be fundamentally defined by or structured on the basis of the actions of a third party.

KEYWORDS

India; East Asia; Japan; South Korea; Taiwan; maritime; trade

Introduction

India's ambitions have rapidly evolved ever since the culmination of the Cold War. Its idea of being a self-sufficient state has gone through various changes and the nuances that define this idea have expanded beyond the normative realms of non-alignment to multilateralism and larger strategic cooperation. In light of contemporary acceptance of the Indo-Pacific as a collective region in Indian maritime policy, it is important to note the various spheres of influence India will potentially project across the region.¹ There are three spheres in which India potentially will project influence-expanding from its littorals to the larger Indo-Pacific region, with influence and capabilities being inversely proportionate to this expansion.²

For the purposes of this article, the author will be focusing on India's serious drive towards East Asia and will explore the possibilities of development in India's maritime policy vis-à-vis Japan, the Republic of Korea (RoK; or South Korea) and Taiwan. India–Japan relations have been on the upswing since the latter period of the last decade, and have gained further momentum under the Modi government. Both these countries are natural allies as they do not share any security concerns, have mutual

arcs of interests and have complementary resources and assets that can facilitate a long-sustaining alliance.³ India and South Korea too are beginning to realise the confluence between their respective “Act East Policy” and “New Southern Policy” (NSP). South Korea’s NSP emerged in 2017 in the background of China’s boycott of the state’s technology and media-cultural export. The policy focuses on elevating relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states on economic and socio-cultural lines.⁴ Consequently, the two are now witnessing an augmentation in their bilateral ties – as evidenced by the formalisation of a “Special and Strategic Partnership” in 2015 – as they work towards a relationship marked by deep commitment and mutual development.⁵ Taiwan’s “New Southbound Policy”⁶ finds a distinct place for India in Taiwan’s foreign policy outlook. The economic relations between the two have also observed exponential growth.⁷ India and Taiwan are now progressing towards reinforcing people-to-people, trade and cultural ties.

There is a need for an Asia-centric security balancer to conventional and unconventional security issues plaguing these countries and India is strong, especially in consideration of the steady withdrawal of the United States (US) from its long-standing Indo-Pacific maritime postures.⁸ Therefore, the article shall address the following three aspects:

- (1) India’s bilateral relations with Japan, RoK and Taiwan individually.
- (2) The realities around the possibility of an Asia-centric security superstructure.
- (3) How India’s policies must evolve in the Far East.

India–Japan relations

India and Japan share a similar dilemma, with matching nuances and complimenting interests, which coincidentally comes at a time where both their economies could gain off of each other at the same time. India–Japan relations were cold, dormant and encumbered up till the end of the Cold War and the liberalisation of the Indian economy.⁹ However, in recent years, especially since the latter years of the previous decade, relations between the two states have improved exponentially, bringing both countries closer politically and strategically.¹⁰

India’s predominant fear of Chinese expansionism and Japan’s observed fears of China “changing the status quo of the region by coercion” has created ample room for bilateral security and strategic cooperation between the two states. The incentive for both these countries to share closer relations is, however, far beyond China or any other state operator. The economic benefits to be earned from Japan’s technology-rich economy and India’s youthful population are enormous. Indeed, as recent economic and trade trends have shown, this is a potentially rare and solid opportunity for long-term economic exchanges between Asian two powerhouses.¹¹ Therefore, the focus of bilateral relations should not be on politico-strategic or politico-economic partnership primarily, but strategic-economic, to safeguard the existing economic interests of both the states that are proportionally existent to the freedom enjoyed by entities in the high seas. The underlying incentive for India to evolve its East Asian policy is to address the burgeoning economy back at home, with a significant youth populace and

a quickly shrinking job market,¹² and take advantage of the vacuum being created by Japan's aging population, technological advances and a large technical employment base.¹³ To score further confidence from Japan in strategic terms, India needs to vehemently invest in track 2 diplomacy, including the exchange of students, scholars, technicians and industrial labour force with Japan, to facilitate the churning of the economic wheel between these two countries.

It is important to note that Japan already has a strong, and currently stable, ally in the US. India's addition to its "strategic circle" on a bilateral basis will be a marginal gain to the security regime it currently enjoys, but as various scholars have indicated, India could be a "potential" balancer.¹⁴ The South Asian country needs to mobilise larger cooperation with multiple tracks of diplomacy with the sole purpose of facilitating substantial movement in the maritime domain. Infrastructure, defence technology, weaponry, technical experts, software, etc., are some areas of possible economic exchange that could be pursued by Indian lobbyists via private channels, that is, multinational corporations. An example of such initiatives moving in the right direction is the collaboration between Mahindra and ShinMaywa Industries to move the production of US-2 amphibious aircraft to India, along with maintenance, repair, and overhaul (MRO) units.¹⁵ While the possibility of this collaboration was first noted in 2018, the conversation around it stagnated for an array of reasons. However, at DefExpo 2020, a high-level defence delegation from Japan met with the Indian Ministry of Defence to put this project back on track.¹⁶ With increasing competition with China and more maritime security-oriented initiatives emerging between the two states, projects like these could gain priority status.

In light of Indo-Japanese relations during the Cold War, it is interesting to note that a vaguely similar scenario is formulating in the Indo-Pacific maritime sphere between the US and China, where countries are being pushed to take a hardline stance in favour, and against, the two dominant powers in the region.¹⁷ The evolution of Indo-Japanese relations now provides a new path of strategic development for Japan, where it does not again have to operate at the behest of the US, or be (detrimentally) dependent on it, especially in consideration of the irregular vacillations present in the policies the Trump administration. India's strong will and competent capabilities provide a figurative third door, and the most appealing one, for Japan to help create an Asian-centric strategic security structure that can sustain itself, alongside a larger multilateral regime involving extra-regional powers like the US. The main remaining question is: where should this structure reside?

India and Japan, in the Indo-Pacific context, have undertaken strides forward in the maritime domain. The JIMEX 2018 proves the latest willingness of both countries in cooperating and conducting operations in coherence with one another for a mutual purpose. Yet, these exercises have not sealed the figurative deal that solidifies this Asiatic relationship to the extent it can be; and this can majorly be attributed to India's mixed signalling and incoherent approach to interacting with the East Asian island state.¹⁸

The two countries, in recent times, have started to align their larger security goals for the Indo-Pacific. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), for example, has picked up immense momentum since the latter years of the previous decade. Japan was the original proponent of this grouping back in 2007, but India and Japan were dissuaded from pushing the agenda forward in 2007 due to China's vehement opposition to this

multilateral grouping.¹⁹ The East Asian state issued demarches, but there was simply not enough political will in the national policy circles of the US and Australia for the Quad to fully materialise. The dialogue has re-emerged as Quad 2.0, which also has seen a national leader's-level meeting being held in 2021.²⁰ Furthermore, India–Japan strategic partnership's focus is on adopting common strategies to address China's role in the Indo-Pacific.²¹ The common goal of a “Free and Open Indo-Pacific” has turned into the fundamental base and driver for the relations between these two Asiatic states.

India–RoK relations

The geopolitical realities of the RoK and India are such that the two face similar challenges in their neighbourhood. Both have an often belligerent nuclear-capable neighbour with which each shares a bloody past: for RoK, it is the Democratic People's Republic of Korea; and for India, it is Pakistan. Furthermore, both India and RoK are worried about the relationship of influence and patronage China shares with their respective neighbours. Their relationships with China also suffer from checkered pasts.

Current ties between the two states saw upgradation to that of a “Special and Strategic Partnership” during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's state visit to the RoK in 2015.²² The NSP, launched by President Moon Jae-in in 2017, awards significance to exploring and developing economic and strategic relations with the states of South and Southeast Asia in general, and India in particular.²³ Furthermore, India concluded a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA) with RoK in 2009, following which bilateral trade rose by 70 per cent.²⁴ Today, Korean products have become common household names for various types of products. In the Indian market big Korean names like Hyundai and Samsung have been principal go-to technological brands since the 1990s. Since December 2018, the Korean e-tailer “Korikart” has created a gateway to a wide spectrum of Korean products and services to the Indian population.²⁵ Ranging from food, home and kitchen, personal care, and lifestyle products to cultural and pop-culture international events, the e-tailer has opened up various avenues for economic and e-commerce engagement. They have also begun participating in government initiatives, such as “Make in India” and “Skill India”.²⁶ Such partnering of large Korean companies with Indian initiatives like Make in India could help increase employment and manufacturing capacity of India. This might help ease the economic dependence that India has on China, and perhaps even lessen the trade deficit between the two. However, it has been noted that legal and regulatory hurdles have often impeded or stopped the inflow of foreign direct investments (FDIs) from RoK. For example, the case of the single-largest foreign investment from any country in India, that is, the \$12 billion investment by Korean firm POSCO in India, which has been unable to reach fruition; also, the impediments faced by the firm in Odisha have discouraged it from investing in a similar proposed plant in Karnataka.²⁷ The onus falls on the domestic governments to smooth over the administrative hurdles so that the two states may be able to realise the benefits that the natural confluence in their initiatives and interests seek to provide.

India and the RoK have observed noteworthy defence industry cooperation through joint development ventures, such as in self-propelled artillery and mine countermeasure vessels.²⁸ Furthermore, in 2017, the South Korean Defense Acquisition Program

Administration visited India to conclude a memorandum of understanding (MoU) in shipbuilding.²⁹ The two countries have also taken steps towards increasing interoperability capacity in the Indo-Pacific by organising a joint exercise, Sahyog-Hyeoblyeog 2018, between their coast guards.³⁰ Although the South Korean government has not overtly advocated the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Policy of the Trump administration, it has reaffirmed the significance of “freedom of navigation and unimpeded lawful commerce”.³¹ The South Korean administration remains wary of Chinese retaliation through economic measures should it look like its endorsing practices that may threaten Chinese interests, as a result of which it has adopted a somewhat ambiguous stance on Indo-Pacific politics. However, there has been a shift in their focus towards Southeast Asia and India, signalling a possible cooperative role in the Indo-Pacific.

The two countries have also implemented a free trade agreement to intensify bilateral economic relations. The CEPA, implemented in 2010, has gone through a second round of revision.³² While the agreement has improved economic exchange between the two states and opened up transnational avenues for private sector cooperation, it is believed that it has still not been exercised to its optimum capability. Sectoral trade is one of the areas that remains riddled with barriers. India has proven itself to be a significant player in the global computer and information services, focusing on software and information technology (IT). This sector continues to attract FDIs from around the world and has even brought Samsung India Software Operations to its shore, but there definitely remains more space for mutual cooperation. Furthermore, there is also the possibility of India exporting its highly technically educated human resources to the emerging IT markets in Korea, where English-speaking, highly skilled IT professionals are in great demand.³³

Additionally, Korea’s automobile and transportation sector model has proven to be extremely efficient in tackling various domestic economic goals. South Korea was ranked fourth and eighth in the World Trade Organization’s (WTO) list of leading exporters and importers of transportation services in 2012; and it ranked 23rd on the World Bank’s Logistics Performance Index. While a robust automobile sector exists in India, its efficiency on an international scale still appears to be below average. There are very few Korean logistics and cargo firms present in the Indian market. Considering the expertise, network and experience that these firms possess, their model and culture will prove to be a strong combination, given the expansive scope of India’s potential market for Korean firms.³⁴

India–Taiwan relations

Taiwan’s relation with India, as with most states, has grown under the influence of the People’s Republic of China’s (PRC) firm interpretation of the “One-China Policy”. As a result of this, India does not have any official diplomatic relations with Taiwan, and the relations between the two are defined by the commercial, economic and people-to-people links. In 1995, Taiwan and India’s relationship observed a digression in its benign trajectory when Taiwan established the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Centre (TECC) in New Delhi, and India responded by establishing the India Taipei Association (ITA) in Taiwan, owing to the increasing economic and socio-cultural ties between them.³⁵ India–Taiwan relations, therefore, have been underscored by informal ties,

with a higher focus on economic cooperation and propagation of socio-cultural interactions. As the twenty-first century has progressed, so has the relationship between the two, occasionally venturing into more formal capacities, such as the 2011 visits by Taiwan's education minister, planning and development minister and deputy minister of foreign affairs, as well as Taiwan's deputy defence minister and vice minister of economic affairs, all while carefully managing a complicated relationship with the PRC.³⁶

The launch of the New Southbound Policy initiative by the Tsai Ing-wen administration has refocused the Taiwanese government's attention towards Southeast Asia, with such objectives within its ambit as increasing bilateral trade, FDI and strengthening people-to-people ties through education and tourism.³⁷ This policy has directly resulted in the launch of flagship programmes in agriculture, industrial innovation and overseas development assistance (ODA) in India.³⁸ Additionally, bilateral trade between the two has risen by 27 per cent since the launch of the policy in 2017.³⁹ The New Southbound Policy offers India a vital platform that could be used to launch initiatives of tremendous value towards capacity building in India and Taiwan. A joint report by Chung-Hua Institution for Economic Research (CIER) in Taiwan and the Indian Council for Research on International Economic Relations (ICRIER) speaks of the incredible opportunities for cooperation in fields like information and communication technology, food processing, logistics and automobiles.⁴⁰ This would help foster deeper economic engagements of high economic utility that could help offset their economic dependence on the PRC as a trading partner, therefore assuring greater economic security.

The policy also offers a strategic dimension for cooperation. The Tsai administration has been keen to point towards the convergences in New Southbound Policy and the Free and Open Indo-Pacific Policy announced by the Trump administration.⁴¹ Taiwan's relevance in the maritime areas of the South China Sea and the larger Indo-Pacific is unmissable: its geography places it in a precarious position and it too has unresolved territorial disputes in the South China Sea. Its promotion of the concept of a Free and Open Indo-Pacific aligns it, and offers opportunities for cooperation, with other proponents of the same, such as Japan and India.⁴²

However, for India, dealing with Taiwan is akin to walking on eggshells as the slightest mistake could antagonise China. India's reluctance towards engaging in overtly strategic and formal arrangements with Taiwan is then prudent, but the same should be supplemented with economic capacity building and reinforcement of bilateral ties. This would allow for deeper entrenching of Indian presence and influence in East Asia in a manner non-antagonistic to China and without further accentuating the security dilemma between India and China. For now, it would behove the two states to capitalise on the complementarities of their native policies – New Southbound Policy, Make in India and Act East Policy.

Possibility of Indian multilateralism

Despite it being an ideal scenario to have India–RoK–Japan–Taiwan cooperate in unison with one another and share the strategic burden of balancing conventional and unconventional threats in the region collectively, every party has its limitations in policies and international relations that prohibits it from materialising this scenario. India's hesitancy towards any multilateral structure in the region is twofold: (a) strategic autonomy; and

(b) Chinese reaction. Addressing the first aspect, ever since its independence, India has preferred strategic autonomy as its cornerstone in foreign policy; and it has been on display in the Indo-Pacific context ever since former Japanese Prime Minister Abe Shinzo had suggested the Quad back in 2007. The country was vocally in favour of such a grand idea, but in policy remained hesitant and ambiguous.⁴³ It is an unalterable reality of Indian foreign policy that strategic autonomy is of paramount importance and it does not wish to “bandwagon” to a multilateral structure that includes countries like the US.⁴⁴ This trend has remained static in Indian behaviour despite the change in government in 2014. Considering how India’s maritime security strategy currently notes the South China Sea and the Western Pacific as a secondary area of interest,⁴⁵ any form of politico-military venture in that region is bound to be drowned with scepticism around the absolute protection of its strategic autonomy around operations and control of its assets. Furthermore, the general hesitancy displayed by the other parties to a conducive multilateral superstructure in no way enforces confidence amongst the policymakers in New Delhi.

Addressing the second factor, every party, including India, is wary of a Chinese reaction to any politico-military ventures being undertaken that can potentially change the balance of power of the region, and perhaps present an Asiatic challenge to its dominance. The Chinese have continuously presented an aggressive *modus operandi*, with multiple unresolved and potentially deadlocked territorial disputes,⁴⁶ aggressive arms expansion,⁴⁷ flagrant disregard for international law,⁴⁸ and genuine distaste for multilateral military cooperation.⁴⁹ Any formal and constitutionalised superstructure would be taking an unprecedented step in the direction of possibly initiating further Chinese aggression. This hypothetical leap of faith within these mutually agreeing states could prove to be a permanent and incorrigible decision that could cascade into a severe division between major powers in the region, fracturing the uneasy stability for the foreseeable future. The response ladder of multilateral cooperation within China’s backyard is bound to be steep and frigid, with little control over the hypothesised escalation China might enforce in response to India’s outreaching approach of what it most likely will assume to be a direct action to curtail the East Asian giant’s influence in close proximity to its littorals.

A major point of consideration pursuant to an analysis of China’s reaction is the trade link between all parties involved. China’s regional distribution of international trade displays the ubiquitous predominance it enjoys in the Western Pacific Ocean. In the trade spectrum, 6.2 per cent of its exports are to Japan, which constitutes 25.8 per cent of Japan’s imports;⁵⁰ 4.5 per cent of its exports are to RoK, which constitutes 21 per cent of RoK’s imports;⁵¹ India imports 17.7 per cent of its total imports from China, Japan, RoK, Australia and New Zealand;⁵² and Taiwan receives 1.8 per cent of China’s exports.⁵³ The dominant and asymmetric economic trade link that China controls poses a strong centre of impact if the balance of tension in the region is affected to a point of high Chinese concern. There is a distinct possibility that a politico-military structure between India–Japan–RoK–Taiwan will be seen as hostile and antagonising by China to its trade interests and economic presence in the Western Pacific Ocean. In consideration of the country’s predominance in that region, any contemporary alliance is bound to instil a fear of change in hegemony, causing a vacuum of understanding between China and other players. In consideration of this possibility, the trade

dependency that exists between Japan–China, RoK–China and India–China will be the pinch point that the East Asian giant will press upon. It is important to note that the Chinese faced a genuine dilemma away from its littorals in the Malacca Strait, in South-east Asia.⁵⁴ As it did not possess any direct or substantial control or influence in the region, it needed to conjure other mechanisms to try and bypass this dilemma.⁵⁵ However, any change in the balance of tensions so close to its area of dominance and littorals is inevitably going to instil another serious dilemma amongst the policymakers. The only difference being that they will be equipped with substantial control and force to tackle this dilemma.

Lastly, in consideration of this aspired multilateralism, an important point of analysis would be the clear impact of this structure on the bilateral relations of these East Asian states. Japan's aversion to a strategic superstructure is due to the economic dependency it has on China, and the proximity it shares with it as well. Japan's primary interest in the region is securing the sea lines of communication (SLOCs). A strong alliance with India and other allies to guarantee the safety of energy imports from the Persian Gulf sailing through the Indian Ocean falls well within Japanese interests.⁵⁶ However, such an alliance close to its littorals and more importantly close to the littorals of China, which is continuously challenging the hegemony and normative stability of the Western Pacific, is bound to cause definite hesitancy in the minds of Japanese policymakers. The tension between the two countries has minutely subsided with an agreement finally being reached upon about a mechanism to avoid maritime skirmishes in disputed waters.⁵⁷ The establishment of a hotline and both parties wishing to build on this development for safer East Asian waters are noted, but there is immense scepticism around the tangible benefits of these developments on the frosty relationship between the two oriental states.⁵⁸ The still-unresolved Senkaku Islands dispute coupled with China's disregard for international law and abhorrence for multilateral strategic cooperation in the region are the principal factors of consideration for Tokyo while addressing the possibility of an Asiatic security superstructure, devoid of whether this structure's nature includes balancing China or not.

Furthermore, the recent South Korean Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) deployment and the subsequent Chinese response exposed South Korean economic dependence upon China and left South Korean policymakers in a scramble to repair the bilateral relationship and reassure the Chinese leadership of its intentions. The South Korean administration has also been unambiguous about its disinclination towards joining a security framework, especially with regards to containing China. South Korea's station in the sea then paints a convoluted picture, a resultant of ideal geographic positioning and military support from the US frustrated by governmental reticence. On the other hand, despite the Taiwanese government's ample hints towards its willingness to join an Indo-Pacific framework, it has not received an equivalent response from other states due to the nature of its disputed sovereignty and a bull-ish PRC at its back. Additionally, since most states do not recognise Taiwan's sovereignty as a separate state, its inclusion into a regional strategic framework may be imprudent and impractical.

Recommended evolution of India's far East policy

India's policy in the Far East has a defined goal of securing the SLOCs, maintaining the rule of law and deterring military and adversarial growth away from its region of predominance in a defensive-realist manner. However, to achieve this goal, the current methodologies of New Delhi often have seemed confusing, ambiguous and simply figurative in nature. India has repeatedly tried to balance its activities vis-à-vis China to ensure it does not cause an aberration to the delicate balance it has with its neighbour. Major maritime policies of India have been China-centric in all its spheres of influence. Around its littorals, for example, India's policies are doused with paranoia due to the "String of Pearls" theory, which in reality does not have significant substance to genuinely pose a threat to Indian sovereignty or interests, and also lacks an understanding of the Chinese perspective behind this hypothesis.⁵⁹ As policies start to orient themselves towards specific countries with no mutually agreeing axis of interests, automatically they are imbued with scepticism and paranoia to a detrimental level. Furthermore, the stark compartmentalisation occurring in the Indo-Pacific between the US and China raises more questions of how India should adapt to the upcoming geopolitical scenario.

Similarly to the situation in 2007 and the Quad,⁶⁰ India's policymakers are plagued with the question of how do they justify and place the idea of a security structure in East Asia, so far away from its littorals, within the spheres of the fundamental doctrine of non-alignment and strategic autonomy. The answer lies within the realms of identifying where the South Asian country finds itself in the regional maritime order: (a) a part of the existing US-led order as a "responsible stakeholder"; or (b) in consideration of seeing China as a potential challenger to the West, a regional player to ensure it isn't too provocative; or (c) be reasonably authoritative and confident with its substantial capabilities and its bilateral diplomatic relations with other players to mould the existing order in its favour without disrupting the balance of tension to a detrimental level.

In the opinion of the author, India should be assertive in its bilateral relations with all the three East Asian states and look to culminate the benefits reaped from each relation collectively. More importantly, its presence needs to be economic-strategic in nature, rather than politico or military. Therefore, the next frontier of evolution needs to come about in two parts.

Bilateral benefits

In regard to Japan, India has seen incredible economic growth in bilateral trade and FDI since the end of the Cold War. However, currently, there exist various impediments to bilateral relations that are preventing it from reaching its optimum potential. By 2017, Indian exports to Japan had almost shrunk to \$3.85 billion compared to its exports of \$6.81 billion in 2013,⁶¹ with the trade deficit increasing from \$2.7 billion to \$5.9 billion in the same period.⁶² In future, this stagnation of trade could significantly hamper the currently growing bonhomie between the two Asian states and cause strategic and industrial ventures to be shelved. What India should be pushing for is lower tariff rates imposed on India's agricultural goods imported by Japan, as the island state is a large market for agricultural produce⁶³ and the tariff rates on agricultural goods are the highest amongst all categories of goods imported (13.1 per cent).⁶⁴ Indian

exporters have noted the rates to be too high for mass exports, and therefore chosen to move towards alternate markets within the continent itself,⁶⁵ thereby driving down the rate of commercial trade. However, a positive note in their industrial relations is the Mahindra–ShinMaywa MoU signed at DefExpo 2018. The MoU, as mentioned earlier, brings the production of MRO services, manufacturing and assembling of structural parts and components for US-2 amphibian aircraft to Indian shores, further paving a concrete path for the procurement of amphibian aircraft US-2 by the Indian Navy.⁶⁶ This development will further facilitate more extensive bilateral and multilateral exercises by the Indian Navy,⁶⁷ and allow more elaborate grade-2, unconventional issue-tackling capabilities⁶⁸ in joint operations. The benefits of such equipment are already noted in the ShinMaywa US-2 fleet, where it provides surveillance and emergency medical transport services around Japanese littorals.⁶⁹

India–South Korea relations have survived through the Cold War and continue to thrive in the twenty-first century. The two states observed a spike of almost 70 per cent in bilateral trade following the conclusion of a CEPA in 2009.⁷⁰ Additionally, South Korea is also the source of the single-largest foreign investment in India⁷¹ and a proponent for Indian membership in the Nuclear Supplier’s Group.⁷² The economic relationship between the two states could draw immense value from the formalisation of governmental bodies on either side, which seek to understand and develop frameworks for the exploitation of the convergences between the “NSP” and “New Sud-Politik” policies of South Korea and the “Act East” and “Make in India” initiatives of India. The two Asian states would benefit from the expansion of the scope of their joint naval exercises as the two seek to promote a peaceful environment in the Indo-Pacific based on similar ideologies of the regulation of the seas through international mechanisms, such as the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). As mentioned earlier, India and South Korea have previously jointly developed self-propelled artillery and mine countermeasure vessels,⁷³ and have also concluded an MoU on cooperation in shipbuilding.⁷⁴ The South Korea–India maritime relationship, therefore, promises tremendous opportunities for joint capability building, interoperability development and defence equipment acquisition and export for both states.

India and Taiwan relations have been slow to take off. However, the implementation of the Taiwanese New Southbound Policy vision offers a prospective boom in economic relations between the two, as evident in the \$5 billion investment by Foxconn in India.⁷⁵ The New Southbound Policy of Taiwan attempts to diversify Taiwan’s economic basket and lend it a competitive edge in the overseas market by specifically concentrating on areas where Taiwan enjoys a comparative advantage over PRC.⁷⁶ The policy aims to promote FDI, ODA and cultural ties between Taiwan and states such as India, who are starting to reap the benefits of this policy as it has led to the launch of programmes in India in fields such as agriculture, industrial talent entrepreneurial development, industrial innovation and ODA.⁷⁷ Furthermore, the two stand to gain from the effective exploitation of the complementarities of their resources, such as in the IT field, where Taiwan boasts a hardware manufacturing industry and India an established software industry base.⁷⁸ Taiwan’s relationship with China has been fraught with clashes, resulting in a prevalence of Taiwan-based institutions and think tanks that focus on China, which could potentially be valuable sources for India to gain insight into Chinese foreign policy and policymakers.

Multilateral diplomacy

India's push needs to be around multilateral forums, like the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC). India joining APEC with the support of Japan, the RoK and the US will contribute to reel back Chinese economic influence in the forum, while also enabling Asia's three biggest economies to gain streamlined access to the continent's economic avenues, thereby facilitating room for further economic reform within the state itself.⁷⁹ Its inclusion will be a pivotal step forward in increasing free and open trade; India's normative behaviour towards underlying modern principles of open SLOCs and free trade would be a strong signal and boost in favour of these principles being enforced within these forums on a multilateral basis. Japan, the RoK and the US, being part of APEC, have noted the sluggish economic growth of all members.⁸⁰ In their search for new opportunities for growth and market, India poses as the most suitable and viable candidate for the forum to move towards. India's inclusion in the forum would augment regional trade and investment, and expedite India's integration in the larger Asian region. The economic interests of a majority of members clearly line up with the overt political goals of the three stated countries, thereby creating immense room for the momentum behind a push for India's immediate membership.

Strategically, India's outreach in East Asia from a military-political avenue remains highly unlikely, unless it is under a new configuration that is based on the emerging Quad 2.0. An avenue that requires future exploration is including South Korea as a "Quad-plus" member, as is being touted for other occidental states, such as the United Kingdom, France and Canada. India does not have assets, nor enough influence, to bilaterally push for stronger military relations or security agreements with South Korea or Taiwan; indeed, doing so would break its hedging position vis-à-vis China. India's only strategic interest in the region emanates from common spirit that is being considered under the Quad. India's significant trade interest flowing through the region as has been highlighted earlier, and also for the purposes of strengthening its industrial and economic sector in collaboration with these East Asian states, has opened space for strategic cooperation that focuses on the protection of these exchanges and the global common of the high seas. It is, however, important to note that these states will also be very circumspect while cementing their position through strategic and/or military partnerships with a state that is naturally being seen as a competitor of China in Asian geopolitics.

Finally, an important question for policymakers in New Delhi to ponder upon is whether China is inherently hostile to the very prospect of India's cooperative expansion beyond its littorals and Indian Ocean Region to the larger Indo-Pacific? India's inculcation into Asia's larger economic structure, expanding its economic and trade reaches whilst allowing more foreign investment and paving the road for trade reforms, is in the interest of all states, including China.⁸¹ China has never overtly stated its distaste of India's economic aspirations in East Asia, and on multiple accounts has welcomed it, including its presence at the East Asia Summit.⁸² Nonetheless, the question remains around the probability of China's attitude and actions changing upon the realisation of further dominance in the region, and the vulnerabilities of its neighbours that can be exploited. In such a hypothesis, India's reach into the East may seem detrimental to China's interests and extremely beneficial to all other players.

Notes

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