

North Korea's Increasing Military Cooperation with Russia

Implications for India

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Since the beginning of the war in Ukraine in 2022, the military engagement between North Korea and Russia has significantly increased. Apparently, the signing of a 'Comprehensive Strategic Partnership' agreement with Moscow in June 2024 would further enhance the military capabilities of Pyongyang. On the other hand, India's diplomatic relationship with North Korea has continued under the 'Act East Policy' of the Narendra Modi government. Moreover, in the backdrop of New Delhi's new strategic alignment in the 'Indo-Pacific' with Quad partners, India has not abandoned Pyongyang. However, North Korea's nuclear proliferation activities with Pakistan has been an issue of deep concern to New Delhi. In this regard, the Russian space, nuclear and military technologies may reach Islamabad through Pyongyang. Russian support to North Korea can also complicate India's relations with the Quad members as New Delhi has a close partnership with Moscow. Therefore, there can be military and strategic implications for India as a result of the deepening military alliance between North Korea and Russia.

Keywords: North Korea, Russia, India, Act East Policy, Indo-Pacific strategy

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INTRODUCTION

The military alliance between the erstwhile Soviet Union and North Korea was built during the Cold War period due to their close ideological affinity.¹ In 2022, North Korea and Russia again drew closer when the conflict in Ukraine broke out. This has brought attention of the international media to North Korea, an isolated, impoverished country. In fact, there are commonalities between the current situation of both North Korea and Russia as they are under heavy sanctions from the Western powers. As a result, Kim Jong-un, the third-generation leader of the Kim dynasty regime has characterised the relations between North Korea and Russian Federation as ‘invincible ties between comrades-in-arms and a far-reaching strategic relationship’.²

While North Korea is in dire need for more sophisticated nuclear, missile and space technologies from Moscow, Russia needs conventional weapons and troops from Pyongyang for its ongoing war in Ukraine. In order to meet the Russian demand for weapons, North Korea has been expanding the manufacturing of military equipment and Kim Jong-un has been visiting the weapons manufacturing facilities in the country frequently.³ In fact, the Russia–Ukraine war has helped North Korea emerge as an exporter of weapons, and revitalise the economy of this reclusive state. According to the South Korean defence minister in 2024, ‘North Korea and Russia are believed to have traded enough weapons and other goods to fill about 10,000 shipping containers’.⁴

However, despite evidence of North Korean arms being used against Ukraine, the leadership in North Korea has denied exporting weapons to Russia.⁵ Nevertheless, the deepening military cooperation between Pyongyang and Moscow have raised serious concerns in South Korea and the United States (US). The June 2024 visit of the Russian President Vladimir Putin to North Korea and the signing of a ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’ agreement is again a testimony to the deepening military engagement between these two countries.⁶ Most importantly, this agreement envisages mutual military support in case of a foreign invasion on either of the signatories.⁷ Some reports in 2024 suggest that North Korea had dispatched thousands of troops to Russia.⁸ Notably, there are speculations that Moscow could also possibly recognise North Korea as a nuclear weapons state.⁹ This would indeed have far-reaching consequences for the Indo-Pacific region and the world.

The relationship between the Indian subcontinent and the Korean Peninsula goes back to historical times and both regions have a shared cultural

heritage.¹⁰ However, during the Cold War era, India's policy towards North Korea was based on the idea of 'non-alignment' as New Delhi followed a 'two-Koreas policy' and recognised the existence of the sovereign governments in both Pyongyang and Seoul. Also, India and North Korea shared similar perspectives on several global issues during the Cold War period and both were active members of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).¹¹ Ironically, during the Cold War, North Korea was involved in anti-India activities and supported China and Pakistan against India.¹² But New Delhi and Pyongyang went ahead to establish consulate-level relations in 1962 and built embassy-level diplomatic partnership with each other in 1973.

In the post-Cold War period, North Korea's nuclear proliferation activities with Pakistan shaped New Delhi's relations with Pyongyang.¹³ However, despite these serious differences, the Narendra Modi government (2014–present) in India has maintained its diplomatic relationship with North Korea. India under Modi has been providing food and medicines to this reclusive state and has also abstained from voting against the Kim dynasty regime on the issues related to the human rights at the United Nations Organisation. Moreover, till recent years India was one of the biggest trading partners of North Korea. The Indian government under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also not completely abandoned the idea of non-alignment for 'strategic autonomy'.

Nevertheless, due to the rapidly changing geopolitical situation in Asia, India has been supporting the 'Indo-Pacific strategy' along with the United States, Australia and Japan to counter China's rising hegemony in this part of the world. It is argued that India's approach towards the 'Indo-Pacific' reflects a continuity and change in New Delhi's foreign policy.¹⁴ Interestingly, Beijing is regarded as a close ally of North Korea and India is the only country in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue or the 'Quad' which has maintained full diplomatic relations with North Korea. This unique but low-profile engagement between India and North Korea has continued to this day.

The available literature on the recent development in North Korea's relations with Russia has mostly focused on the increasing cooperation between these two countries in the backdrop of the war in Ukraine and its impact on the East Asian region.¹⁵ However, there is a lack of literature that explores the implications for India as a result of the deepening military alliance between North Korea and Russia. There is a possibility that the Russian space, nuclear and military technologies may reach Islamabad through Pyongyang.

Further, the Russian support to North Korea can also complicate India's relations with the Quad members as New Delhi has close partnership with

Moscow. Therefore, there can be military and strategic implications for India as a result of the deepening military alliance between North Korea and Russia. This article is an effort to explain the possible impact of North Korea–Russia military partnership on India.

NORTH KOREA–RUSSIA MILITARY COOPERATION AND GEOPOLITICS IN EAST ASIA

The military cooperation between the erstwhile Soviet Union and North Korea goes back to the Cold War period. The Soviet Union played a significant role in installing the regime of Kim Il-Sung (1948–1994) in North Korea in September 1948. The declassified documents from the Soviet/Russian archives also reveal the involvement of Russians in the Korean War (1950–1953). In 1961, both Moscow and Pyongyang signed a treaty of ‘Friendship, Cooperation and Mutual Assistance’ which included ‘automatic’ military intervention in case of a foreign attack on either of them. Soviet aid and technological support was also crucial for the rapid industrialisation of North Korea.

Further, the Sino-Soviet conflict provided an opportunity for the North Korean regime to switch sides and extract aid and military support from both of its two giant neighbours.¹⁶ However, despite having close relations with the Socialist bloc countries, North Korea joined as the member of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1975.¹⁷ In order to reduce dependence on the foreign powers, the North Korean leader Kim Il-Sung also initiated *Juche* ideas to make the country autonomous and self-reliant in international relations.¹⁸ Paradoxically, despite *Juche*, the country remained dependent on foreign powers, particularly on the Soviet Union.¹⁹

In the post-Cold War period and with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, North Korea lost a patron and a close trading partner. Following which North Korea intensified its nuclear and missile development strategy for ‘self-reliance’ or *Juche* in defence.²⁰ However, unlike its Socialist colleagues such as China and Vietnam which liberalised their economies, North Korea continued with autarkic policies. During the 1990s, this ‘Hermit Kingdom’ faced famine and severe food shortages which led to the death of tens of thousands of North Korean people. Despite this situation, the leadership in Russia refused to export arms to North Korea at discounted or ‘friendly’ prices and demanded payments in hard currency. Also, the sale of sophisticated weapons by Russia to South Korea as a part of Moscow’s debt repayment to Seoul did not go down well with Pyongyang.²¹ Russian support to North

Korea subsequently declined as Chinese influence increased in North Korean affairs. As a result, the post-Cold War period saw dramatic shifts in North Korea–Russia relations. While the administration of Boris Yeltsin largely ignored Pyongyang, the leadership of Vladimir Putin tried to bring the bilateral relationship back on track through his visit to North Korea in July 2000. Although the bilateral military engagement between North Korea and Russia was restored, for Putin economic issues were more important than developing military relations with the Kim dynasty regime.²² After failing in the objective to prevent the nuclearisation of North Korea, the Russian goal was to expand its influence over the Korean Peninsula.²³

The recent intensification of the Beijing–Moscow–Pyongyang cooperation is pointing towards a ‘new Cold War’ like situation in the region. Notably, the mutual defence agreement between Vladimir Putin and Kim Jong-un in June 2024 resembles a North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) type alliance formation.²⁴ Regarding the treaty on ‘Comprehensive Strategic Partnership’, the North Korean official news agency *KCNA* reported that,

In case any one of the two sides [North Korea and Russia] is put in a state of war by an armed invasion from an individual state or several states, the other side shall provide military and other assistance with all means in its possession without delay in accordance with Article 51 of the UN [United Nations] Charter and the laws of the DPRK [North Korea] and the Russian Federation.²⁵

This agreement also envisions collaboration in nuclear science and space technology. This North Korea–Russia partnership has the potential to challenge the existing international order.²⁶ These two countries along with China may also be cooperating on the issue of navigation in the Tumen River to open a new route of international trade through the Arctic region.²⁷ In June 2024, Russian warships visited Cuba, which is reminiscent of the Cold War-era kind muscle flexing by the superpowers.²⁸ In this milieu of heightened tensions on the Korean Peninsula and within weeks after Putin’s trip to Pyongyang, a delegation from Kim Il-Sung Military University of North Korea was reported to have visited Russia. During the visit of the Russian Vice-Minister of Defence Aleksey Krivoruchko on 18 July 2024, Kim Jong-un reiterated the necessity for the militaries of the two nations ‘to get united more firmly’.²⁹ There are also reports that North Korea has sent thousands of troops to support Russia in the ongoing war between Moscow and Kyiv.

In return, Pyongyang has possibly received some technological support relating to its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) named Hwasong-19 from Russia, which was launched on 31 October 2024.³⁰ It is also speculated that North Korea is building its nuclear-powered submarine with Russian technical assistance.³¹

On the other hand, the United States, Japan and South Korea have also been deepening their strategic and economic cooperation. More recently, Washington, Tokyo and Seoul agreed to initiate a multi-domain, trilateral military exercise from 2024 to be named as 'Freedom Edge'.³² In July 2024 these three nations signed an agreement on the 'Trilateral Security Cooperation Framework' to further deepen their security cooperation. Interestingly, quite similar to North Korea, the ongoing war in Ukraine has also given South Korea an opportunity to emerge as a major exporter of weapons in the world.³³ Also, South Korea is probably the only country from Asia to have provided wide-ranging support to Ukraine including aid and non-lethal military items, as Seoul strives to strengthen its alliance with the Western Powers.³⁴

The armaments produced in South Korea are finding markets in Poland and other European nations anxious of Russia and supporting Ukraine. Earlier, in 2022 Putin had warned South Korea against supplying lethal arms to Kyiv.³⁵ But the signing of a mutual defence agreement between North Korea and Russia triggered a strong reaction from South Korea as Seoul even threatened to directly supply weapons to Ukraine.³⁶ This has reignited the debate in South Korea regarding the acquisition of nuclear weapons to counter rising security challenges from North Korea, Russia and China.³⁷ As a response to the North Korea–Russia mutual defence treaty, South Korea and the United States during the annual NATO summit in Washington signed an agreement on 11 July 2024 regarding the 'Guidelines for Nuclear Deterrence and Nuclear Operations on the Korean Peninsula' in order to integrate South Korean conventional armaments with the American nuclear weapons.³⁸ This would further enhance the United States–South Korea combined deterrence against the North Korean nuclear threats.

INDIA'S 'ACT EAST POLICY' TOWARDS NORTH KOREA

During the Cold War period, India's interactions with the Asia-Pacific region remained limited. But with the dissolution of the Soviet Union, India started building new partnerships with the Southeast and East Asian countries and initiated a 'Look East Policy'. The importance of the Asia-

Pacific region gained significance for India in the post-Cold War phase and this region has emerged as the biggest trading partner of India. In the context of the Korean Peninsula, India's relations with South Korea have grown leaps and bounds in the post-Cold War period.³⁹ China's rapid rise as an economic and military power has further increased the importance of this region in New Delhi's strategic calculations. The China–Pakistan alliance and their 'all weather friendship' has also been an issue of profound concern to India. Therefore, China's activities in the Indian Ocean region and in India's neighbourhood are being closely monitored by the Indian security establishment.

In this regard, the Narendra Modi government (2014–present) has taken new initiatives in India's economic and foreign policies. Prime Minister Modi has been supportive of India's rise as a major power in the world, and has been promoting the 'Make in India' initiative to make the country a manufacturing hub. In the realm of foreign affairs, the Modi Government has introduced the 'Act East Policy' to further enhance India's economic, cultural and strategic relations with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region. More recently, India along with the United States, Japan and Australia has formed the 'Quad' and has been pursuing 'Indo-Pacific strategy' to counter Beijing's desire to emerge as a dominant power in the region. Moreover, India under the Narendra Modi government has been opposed to the Chinese 'Belt and Road Initiative' as this mega-project violates India's sovereignty in the Kashmir region.⁴⁰

Although there were some efforts to improve India–North Korea relations by the Modi government as some of its ministers reached out to the Kim dynasty, there has not been much success in this regard. In September 2015, Kiren Rijiju, the then Minister of State in the Indian Ministry of Home Affairs made a visit to the North Korean embassy in New Delhi and in May 2018 General V.K. Singh, the then Minister of State in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs visited North Korea, but there has not been much improvement in the India–North Korea relations. Therefore, it can be said that India's new 'Act East Policy' under Modi government for more active engagement with the countries of the Asia-Pacific region has remained marginal when it comes to New Delhi's relationship with Pyongyang.⁴¹ Unfortunately, North Korea's reluctance to liberalise its economy and Pyongyang's nuclear-missile development programme has been detrimental to India–North Korea relations. Notably, the current government in India under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has also taken a harder stand on the North Korean nuclear proliferation activities. In the recent years, India has

been more vocal against the proliferation of the weapons of mass destruction (WMDs) by North Korea and following the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) resolutions the Indian government brought official notifications in 2017 to severely curtail trade relations with Pyongyang.⁴² As a result, trade between India and North Korea has dropped significantly (Table 1). However, despite substantial pressures from the United States in 2017 to sever ties with the Kim dynasty regime, Modi government in India did not close its ‘small embassy’ in Pyongyang.

Table 1 India–North Korea Bilateral Trade in Recent Years
(Values in US\$ millions)

Year	2019– 2020	2020– 2021	2021– 2022	2022– 2023	2023– 2024
India’s exports to North Korea	8.97	2.79	0.34	1.77	2.04
India’s imports from North Korea	3.47	1.41	5.26	2.48	1.41
Total trade	12.44	4.21	5.60	4.25	3.45

Source: ‘Export Import Data Bank’, Department of Commerce, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, Government of India, available at <https://tradedat.commerce.gov.in/eidb/iecmt.asp>, accessed on 7 June 2024.

Following the policies of the previous governments in India with regard to humanitarian assistance to North Korea, the Modi government has shown generosity in providing food aid worth US\$ 1 million in 2016, and anti-tuberculosis medicines worth US\$ 1 million in 2020 to Pyongyang.⁴³ Soon after coming to power in May 2014, the Indian government under Prime Minister Narendra Modi even abstained from voting against the North Korean human rights related issues in the United Nations in November 2014. During the visit of the North Korean Foreign Minister Ri Su Yong to New Delhi in April 2015, the Modi government expressed the importance of ‘peace and stability’ between the two Koreas for India’s Act East Policy.⁴⁴ India under Modi has also been supporting the peaceful reunification of the two Koreas.⁴⁵ In the milieu of reconciliatory approach between the two Koreas and rapprochement between the United States and North Korea in 2018, the Modi government extended its support for ‘peace and stability’ in the Korean Peninsula.⁴⁶ Overall, India’s diplomatic relationship with North Korea has remained normal and no effort was made by the Modi

government to completely break relations with Pyongyang. North Korea even congratulated Prime Minister Modi for his third re-election into the office in 2024.⁴⁷ Later, in December 2024, it was reported that New Delhi would re-open its embassy in Pyongyang, which was temporarily closed in 2021 in the milieu of the outbreak of COVID-19 pandemic.

INDIA'S EMERGING 'INDO-PACIFIC STRATEGY' AND NORTH KOREA

The fast-changing geopolitical situation in the world as a result of 'China's rise' has led to an expansion of the strategic significance of the Asia-Pacific region into Indo-Pacific.⁴⁸ The idea of a new strategic alignment in the 'Indo-Pacific' was floated by the former Japanese Prime Minister, Shinzo Abe during his historic speech at the Indian Parliament in 2007.⁴⁹ On the other hand, China claims Quad as similar to that of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) or 'the Asian version of NATO'.⁵⁰ At the same time, arguments are also being made for greater role of NATO in the Indo-Pacific region.⁵¹ However, C. Raja Mohan claims that India's growing closeness with the Quad members could also be interpreted as the continuation of New Delhi's policy of maintaining 'strategic autonomy' in the midst of the rapidly changing geopolitical situation in the Indo-Pacific region.⁵²

India's desire to pursue independence in its foreign affairs is evident from the fact that despite India being a member of the Quad, New Delhi is still apprehensive of becoming an ally of the United States.⁵³ In June 2023, Indian Minister of External Affairs categorically rejected the American proposal of India joining as a 'NATO Plus' member.⁵⁴ Moreover, India's primary strategic interest lies in the Indian Ocean region and not in the 'Pacific' component of the Indo-Pacific.⁵⁵ Nonetheless, the only country in the Quad which has maintained diplomatic relations with North Korea is India. Notably, China has been the closest ally of North Korea and Beijing remains the major source of food and fuel to this reclusive country.

North Korea's nuclear weapons development programme is also a threat to all the countries of the Quad. North Korea's WMD programme is now being considered as a security threat to India as well, and New Delhi joined the United States, Canada, France, South Korea and Japan in the 'Vancouver dialogue' in January 2018 to control and investigate North Korean nuclear proliferation activities.⁵⁶ Later, the joint statement which emerged after the first-ever virtual meeting of the highest level leaders of the Quad on 12 March 2021 called for a total denuclearisation of North Korea

and settlement of the issue of abduction of Japanese civilians by the Kim dynasty regime.⁵⁷

For its part, North Korea has criticised the Indo-Pacific strategy as a tool of the United States to maintain its global hegemony through containing the rise of China and targeting North Korea. According to the North Korean state news agency, KCNA,

As the U.S. [United States] specially defined the DPRK [North Korea] as a 'major threat destabilizing the region' for no ground while mapping out Indo-Pacific strategy aimed at containing China, the joint military exercises staged by the U.S., Japan and South Korea in the Asia-Pacific region can be said to target the DPRK in the first instant.⁵⁸

In recent years, the Kim dynasty regime has been bolstering its nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities to counter the strategy of the United States in the Indo-Pacific region. As a result, in response to North Korean belligerence, the United States deployed the anti-ballistic missile system or the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD) in the South Korean territory. It is argued that the North Korean provocations have increased in the recent times due to the rising Sino-American hegemonic competition in the region which Pyongyang has been exploiting for its own advantage.⁵⁹ Nevertheless, in the backdrop of the new strategic alignment in the Indo-Pacific, India has not abandoned North Korea. Remarkably, while North Korea has made verbal threats against the United States, Japan and Australia in the past, Pyongyang has never made any direct threat to India.

North Korea has also supported India's candidature as a permanent member in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), but has been staunchly opposed to the Japanese bid to become permanent member in this international organisation. Despite the rapprochement between North Korea and United States under the former Donald Trump administration (2017–2021), Pyongyang's relations with Washington have again deteriorated in the last four years as the Kim dynasty regime has carried out a large number of ballistic missile tests and has been advancing its nuclear weapons capabilities. Although the second Donald Trump administration after coming to power in January 2025 has also called for 'complete denuclearisation' of North Korea, it seems that Pyongyang would not denuclearise.⁶⁰

North Korea's strained relations with the United States and Japan suggest that this reclusive state would certainly not accept the Indo-Pacific strategy. But India's presence in the Quad may open up a channel of communication

for North Korea with the United States, Japan and Australia. On the other hand, compared to the other members of the Quad, North Korea has probably shown more trust in India as a 'friend'.⁶¹ Arguably, the United States could also use the Indo-Pacific strategy to control North Korea's nuclear belligerence.⁶²

THE NORTH KOREA–RUSSIA ALLIANCE AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA

The rising military ties between North Korea and Russia may have implications for India and New Delhi's strategic ties with the Quad member countries. North Korea's nuclear and ballistic missile development programme has been a matter of concern to New Delhi. Remarkably, India has raised the North Korean nuclear proliferation issue at various international forums and also supported resolutions against the North Korean nuclear weapons and missiles development programme by the international community. Given the history of North Korea's proliferation activities with Pakistan with regard to nuclear and missile technologies, Russian space, nuclear and military technologies may also reach Islamabad through Pyongyang (Table 2). Remarkably, in the past, some Russian ballistic missile technology went to Pakistan via North Korea.⁶³

Apparently, the Kim dynasty regime in North Korea may not shy away from sharing technologies needed for building WMDs with any nation eager to pay for them. According to K.P. Nayar, 'New Delhi would want to ensure that Pyongyang's new and bigger arsenal of hypersonic and short-range weapons does not have any place in Pakistan's offensive military thinking'.⁶⁴ Therefore, there is a need for constant vigilance against the proliferation of the nuclear and missile technologies across the world, particularly in India's neighbourhood and in the Indo-Pacific region. Earlier, India had taken actions against North Korean cargo ships on suspicion that they might be transporting materials for the nuclear proliferation activities.⁶⁵

Notably, India has also been cooperating with the United States to prevent North Korea from sharing nuclear technologies in the South Asian region and in other parts of the world. In this regard, American officials have acknowledged the importance of India's role in countering North Korea's nuclear proliferation activities, and have discussed North Korean issues with New Delhi at the bilateral and multilateral summits between the United States and India.⁶⁶ Therefore, India needs to further cooperate with the United States and other Quad members to control the proliferation

of nuclear weapons and ballistic missiles technology in the Indo-Pacific region.

Table 2 Probable Missile Trade between North Korea and Pakistan

	North Korean series of missile	Range and payload capacity	Pakistani version of missile
1.	Nodong	1300 km and 500–750 kg	Ghauri-I or Hatf-V
2.	Nodong	2000 km and 700 kg	Ghauri-II
3.	Taepodong	2000+ km and 1000 kg	Ghaznavi or Shaheen-II

Source: B. Raman, 'Pakistan's missile-rattling', *Business Line: The Hindu*, 10 June 2002, available at <http://www.thehindubusinessline.com/2002/06/10/stories/2002061000080900.htm>, accessed on 29 September 2017.

Second, the mutual defence pact between North Korea and Russia would certainly make the Kim dynasty regime more belligerent and aggressive. This is evident from the fact that on the occasion of Korean War Armistice Day or the 'Victory Day' in North Korea in 2024, North Korean regime even threatened to 'totally destroy' its enemies.⁶⁷ Earlier in 2024, the Kim dynasty regime in Pyongyang branded South Korea as an 'enemy state'. Notably, the validity of June 2024 treaty between Pyongyang and Moscow is claimed to be 'permanent' and for an 'indefinite period'.⁶⁸ The United States has been 'incredibly concerned' about the possible supply of Russian arms to North Korea.⁶⁹ The outgoing American Secretary of State, Antony Blinken during his visit to South Korea on 6 January 2025 also claimed that Russia may provide 'advanced space and satellite technology' to North Korea.⁷⁰

The threatening posture by North Korea against the United States, Japan and South Korea may also impact India. Washington, Tokyo and Seoul are New Delhi's strategic partners and they all have close economic engagement with India. Similarly, India's close partnership with both Russia and the United States may put India in a difficult position if an armed conflict breaks out on the Korean Peninsula. India along with other Quad members in their summit in September 2024, raised concerns about the countries strengthening military alliance with North Korea and called for total denuclearisation of the Korean Peninsula.⁷¹ While Russia remains a major source of weapons and petroleum to New Delhi, strategic partnership between India and the United States has also been deepening.

Notably, India has remained reluctant to blame Moscow for the ongoing war in Ukraine. The United States has already voiced apprehension about

India's relations with Russia.⁷² Although Russia shall remain a key exporter of defence hardware to India for the foreseeable future, New Delhi has also been striving to diversify its sources of arms import and promote indigenisation of arms production through its 'Make in India' strategy. Nevertheless, any major military action between the two Koreas in future would definitely bring India's 'strategic autonomy' in the international affairs under strains.

CONCLUSION

It can be inferred that the growing strategic engagement between North Korea, Russia and China on the one hand, and South Korea, United States and Japan on the other reflects the revival of the Cold War kind of bloc formation in the East Asian region. This would have a significant impact on the regional and global politics. Moreover, the implications of this regional development would indeed be more serious for the Korean Peninsula and it appears that the two Koreas shall remain divided for a long time to come. The rising sophistication and lethality of North Korean weaponry might also increase the public support for South Korea developing its own nuclear weapons and Japan's remilitarisation as a 'normal nation'.

As already discussed, deepening of North Korea–Russia military engagement may have implications for India and its strategic partnership with the Quad member countries. The transfer of sophisticated space, nuclear and ballistic missile technologies from Moscow to Pyongyang would not only make the Kim dynasty regime more aggressive, but may also lead to the proliferation of these technologies to other countries by North Korea. Therefore, India along with the Quad nations and South Korea needs to be vigilant against the proliferation of WMDs in the Indo-Pacific and work together to maintain peace and stability in the Korean Peninsula.

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