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Framework for India,
Australia
&
South Korea

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Abstract

This paper examines the strategic logic and policy architecture of a trilateral cooperation framework among India, Australia, and South Korea. It argues that the convergence of three middle powers across the Indo-Pacific creates an opportunity to strengthen maritime security, logistics access, intelligence sharing, defence industrial collaboration, supply-chain resilience, cyber defence, and space cooperation. The paper suggests that trilateral minilateralism can supplement rather than replace existing bilateral and multilateral arrangements by generating practical interoperability and a denser web of strategic trust.

Keywords: India – Australia - South Korea, Indo-Pacific, Trilateral Cooperation, Minilaterals, Shipbuilding

Introduction

The strategic environment of the Indo-Pacific is increasingly shaped by distributed maritime power, technological competition, and pressure on critical supply chains (Dei, 2025). In this context, India, Australia, and South Korea share several structural interests: preserving freedom of navigation, safeguarding sea lanes, improving situational awareness, diversifying defence-industrial inputs, and reducing dependence on coercive market or security practices (Corcoran, 2025). These shared interests can be translated into a practical trilateral agenda across hard security, technology, and capacity-building domains.

The paper's central proposition is that India–Australia–South Korea cooperation should be understood as a form of middle-power minilateralism: a flexible, issue-based arrangement designed to create operational gains without the institutional burdens of a formal alliance. Such a framework is especially relevant because the three states already possess a limited foundation of bilateral defence arrangements, maritime exercises, logistics understandings, cyber dialogues, and industrial links. The challenge is not the absence of overlap, but the absence of a coherent trilateral design.

Strategic Rationale

The case for a trilateral format rests on complementarity. India brings scale, geographic centrality in the Indian Ocean, and growing defence-industrial ambition (Lukaszuk, 2025). Australia

contributes geographic depth, access to the southern approaches of the Indo-Pacific, advanced maritime surveillance infrastructure, and a mature network of operational partnerships (Saha, 2026). South Korea offers sophisticated industrial capacity, advanced electronics, missile and shipbuilding expertise, and a strong technology base (Park, 2026). Together, these assets can generate collective effects that none of the three can achieve alone.

A second rationale concerns risk management. Each country faces different but overlapping uncertainties: maritime coercion, cyber intrusion, supply-chain disruption, and the strategic use of economic leverage. Trilateral cooperation can therefore function as a hedging mechanism, improving resilience while remaining politically less escalatory than an overt alliance structure. This is particularly important in a region where many states seek strategic autonomy and prefer cooperation that is practical, modular, and reversible. The main recommendations for trilateral cooperation framework are as follows:

Maritime Security Cooperation

- **Trilateral Naval Patrols & Exercises (Short term):** Establish a rotating “**IndAusKor Joint Patrol**” in the eastern Indian Ocean and South China Sea. Using combined fleets (frigates, P-8 Poseidons, Korean destroyers), this patrol would practice anti-piracy and anti-submarine drills. It builds on India–Australia AUSINDEX exercises. A pilot could be a week-long coordinated patrol with one ship/unit from each country.
- **Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) Fusion (Short/Medium):** Create a **trilateral MDA coordination center** where real-time data (AIS ship tracks, surveillance radar, satellite imagery) is shared. India’s Information Fusion Centre–Indian Ocean Region, Australia’s and Korea’s multiple space/Radar assets could interlink. For instance, a Memorandum of Understanding could stipulate sharing of helicopter/UAV/Sat imagery from Indian Ocean patrols. This enhances collective monitoring (as called for in AUS-India talks and helps all monitor Chinese naval movements).
- **Joint Exercises in High-Tech Scenarios (Medium term):** Expand existing drills to three parties. For example, transform AUSINDEX into a tri-nation exercise by inviting Korean ships/submarines. Include complex scenarios leveraging Korea’s advanced capabilities (e.g. South Korea’s air defense missiles) with Indian and Australian forces. Such exercises increase interoperability and send a strong regional signal of solidarity.

2. Logistics and Basing Access

- **Trilateral Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement (Short term):** Upgrade existing bilateral pacts into a three-way agreement: India–Australia’s Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement, Australia–Korea logistics MoU and India–Korea LSA (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2021). A trilateral MoU could allow warships and military aircraft to access supply points in any of the three countries. For example, Indian Navy vessels could refuel at Australia’s HMAS Stirling base, and Australian P-8s at India’s INS Kadamba.

- **Regional Logistics Hub (Medium term):** Develop a joint-use logistics hub in the Indian Ocean (e.g. upgrade facilities in Port Blair or a Korean lease in Australia). This could involve co-investment in port upgrades or pre-positioned stockpiles of fuel/parts. A model is the Korea–Australia artillery project (Hanwha’s Geelong factory): here, trilaterally stock strategic spares and fuel, enabling rapid support (Corcoran, Canberra Needs Fewer Partners, Better Focus – And a Team-Up With Seoul and Delhi Offers Just That, 2025).

3. Intelligence and ISR Sharing

- **Tri-lateral ISR Fusion (Short term):** Establish a secure **Information-Sharing Network** linking national defence intel agencies. Initially this could focus on maritime ISR (sharing submarine sightings, satellite imagery).
- **Combined Surveillance Deployments (Medium term):** Arrange coordinated deployments: for instance, Australia’s P-8 patrol aircraft could operate from a Korean airfield under an agreed schedule, with Korean or Indian support. This builds on recent India-Aus Maritime Domain Awareness activities and shows commitment to a shared operational picture.

4. Joint R&D and Defence Industrial Cooperation

- **Trilateral Defense R&D Projects (Medium/Long term):** Launch joint development programs in high-priority areas. Possibilities include:
- **Autonomous systems:** Cooperative development of unmanned surface and underwater vehicles, combining Korea’s AI/autonomy R&D with India’s shipyards and Australia’s naval testing ranges.
- **Secure Communications:** Development of tri-nation encryption and networking standards for secure maritime operations, leveraging India’s IT sector and Australia’s cyber labs.
- **Shipbuilding & Submarines:** A “Naval Architecture Consortium” where Korean firms (HD Hyundai, KAI) share design technology with Indian shipbuilders (Cochin, Mazagon Docks) and Australia’s defense shipyards. Indeed, Korea–India already signed an MoU on shipbuilding technology, this could be extended to three-way co-production of frigates or non-nuclear submarines.
- **Missile Technology (defensive):** While no long-range offensive missiles are on the table, collaboration on missile defense (e.g. tracking radars, anti-ship missiles with limited range) is viable. For example, Korea’s precision guidance tech could improve India’s ABM programs, tested with Australia’s long-range radar ranges.
- **Industry Exchange & Joint Ventures (Medium term):** Encourage cross-investment and JV formation. E.g., Australian high-tech firms could invest in India’s defence corridors, Korean companies setting up factories in India or Australia for electronics and sensors. The

trilateral **Defense Industry Roundtable** (called for in recent statements should include representatives from all three governments and private sectors to seed such projects.

5. Supply-Chain Resilience & Critical Technologies

- **Trilateral Critical Minerals Partnership (Short/Medium):** Formalize a three-way working group to secure rare earths, lithium, cobalt, etc. Build on the India–Australia 2022 Critical Minerals Investment Partnership and the Australia–Korea Minerals Working Group. This could involve joint exploration projects (e.g. Africa or Australia mines), shared financing, and synchronized export controls. For example, a trilateral fund might stockpile strategic minerals for rapid release to allied industries.
- **Semiconductor and High-Tech Alliance (Medium term):** Initiate cooperation in chip manufacturing and AI hardware. Akin to the US-led *Pax Silica*, India (with its chip ambitions), Australia (its resources and design firms) and Korea (world leader in memory chips) can form an “Indo-Pacific Semiconductor Partnership (US Department of State, 2025).” Concrete steps: a seminar to align chip export controls; co-investment in a fab in India/Australia; shared R&D in AI accelerators. This builds on India–Korea’s new “industrial ambition” initiative in semiconductors.
- **Energy and AI Technologies (Long term):** Collaborate on strategic technologies like nuclear energy safety (non-weapons), autonomous systems, quantum computing. For example, a joint research center on safe microreactors (India’s and Korea’s nuclear experience, Australia’s resources) could be envisioned. Or trilateral R&D in AI applied to logistics, combining India’s AI talent with secure handling of military data.

6. Cybersecurity and Space Cooperation

- **Tri-Lateral Cyber Security Initiative (Short term):** Establish a joint **Cyber Defence Cell** for shared threat intelligence and exercises. This could expand the India–Australia Cyber Implementation Arrangement (Ministry of External Affairs, 2020) and Korea–Australia Cyber MOU (Government, 2024) into a three-way forum. For example, set up regular tri-nation cyber wargames focusing on critical infrastructure protection.
- **Space Domain Collaboration (Medium term):** Launch a trilateral Space Policy Dialogue. All three countries operate satellites and have growing space programs. They can agree on norms (e.g. debris mitigation, anti-satellite threat sharing) and share non-classified EO imagery for maritime surveillance. Australia and Korea already agreed to start a Space Policy Dialogue (Australian Government, Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, 2022); India should be included in this stream.

7. Training and Capacity Building

- **Officer Exchanges & Education (Short term):** Expand military education exchanges. For instance, institutionalize annual spots for Indian officers at Australia’s ADFA and vice

versa, and create a Korean armed forces attachment program. Technical courses in AI, cyber, and electronic warfare should include all three nations.

- **Joint Training Programs (Medium term):** Host combined courses for specialized skills. E.g., a trilateral “Submarine Rescue Exercise” (building on Australia’s subs need and India’s rescue capabilities) or joint anti-IED training for army engineers. Humanitarian assistance and disaster relief (HADR) drills such as earthquake, tsunami or cyclone response could also involve all three, sharing best practices from each region.
- **Capacity Building Assistance (Long term):** Pool resources for a **Trilateral Defence Scholarship Fund**, sponsoring research (PhDs) in strategic-tech fields. Australia, India and Korea could fund joint university labs (e.g. in robotics or material science) that serve defence innovation goals.

Conclusion

India, Australia, and South Korea possess the ingredients for a meaningful trilateral partnership: strategic complementarity, technology depth, and convergent interests in a more secure and resilient Indo-Pacific. The paper outlines an ambitious but coherent agenda across maritime security, logistics, ISR, defence industry, supply chains, cyber, space, and training. The value of such a framework lies less in the symbolism of alignment and more in the accumulation of practical gains - better awareness, faster interoperability, stronger industrial capacity, and reduced vulnerability to disruption.

A durable trilateral will not emerge overnight. It will require disciplined sequencing, political patience, and careful attention to the sensitivities of each participant. Yet precisely because the three states are not bound by a formal alliance, they have room to innovate. If designed as a modular, issue-based architecture, India–Australia–South Korea cooperation could become an important middle-power pillar in the Indo-Pacific’s evolving security order.

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