

Outcomes of the ROK-India Defense Ministers' Meeting and Development of Bilateral Defense and Defense Industry Cooperation

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The Republic of Korea (ROK) Minister of National Defense Jeong Kyeong-doo made an official visit to India from February 3 to 6 at the invitation of his Indian counterpart, Minister Rajnath Singh. Korea and India both seek expansion of free trade and investment, share the values of democracy and the market economy, and hold a common desire for peace and prosperity. Based on these common aspirations, the two countries have steadily developed bilateral relations, broadening the scope of exchanges and cooperation. In 2010, the ROK established a strategic partnership with India, having taken note since the 2000s of India's rising potential as a cooperative partner for diplomatic diversification and entrance into foreign markets. Later in 2015, the bilateral relationship was officially elevated to a "Special Strategic Partnership," creating momentum for further development of the ROK-India relations.

The Moon Jae-in administration is actively endeavoring on all fronts to strengthen ties with India, a key partner of its New Southern Policy. In 2018, President Moon visited India and in turn, Prime Minister Modi visited Korea in 2019 as the two leaders agreed to dramatically strengthen bilateral relations. Such amicable and intimate relations between the two leaders have led to the development of security cooperation between the two countries. Minister Rajnath Singh, who took office as India's Minister of Defense following the country's May 2019 general

election, has shown a keen interest in Korea. Minister Singh was invited as the keynote speaker of the Seoul Defense Dialogue held in September 2019 and on this occasion also participated in a ministerial meeting with Minister Jeong. During the talks, Minister Singh invited Minister Jeong to visit India, to which the recent Defense Ministers' Meeting was held in response.

The meeting held in New Delhi on February 4 further addressed various items discussed at the 2019 Defense Ministers' Meeting and served as an opportunity for deepening the close cooperative relationship between the two countries in the defense sector. The main outcomes and implications can be summarized as follows:

First, in evaluating the ROK-India relationship, the two Ministers agreed that the 'Special Strategic Partnership', which was built upon the robust friendship of the two leaders, needed to be tangibly expanded in scope with regards to the defense sector. Moreover, the two sides agreed to increase efforts so that the harmonizing effects of cooperation and development between the ROK's New Southern Policy and India's Act East Policy might also be realized in the defense and defense industry sectors. As the successor to its Look East Policy, India's Act East Policy seeks to develop relations with East Asian and Pacific countries such as the ROK, Japan, and ASEAN member states. Hence, the two ministers shared the view that the New Southern Policy and the Act East Policy share a common understanding in terms of foreign policy goals.

Second, the two Ministers exchanged in-depth opinions on the security situation in the Indo-Pacific region and around the Korean Peninsula. In particular, both sides acknowledged the importance of denuclearizing North Korea and establishing peace on the Korean Peninsula. Minister Jeong emphasized that the denuclearization of North Korea and the establishment of peace on the Korean Peninsula are important tasks for the international community and requested India's continued support and active assistance so that North Korea might swiftly return to the negotiation table. In response, Minister Singh praised the ROK government's efforts to resume dialogue with North Korea and assured the Indian government's continued and active support for achieving peace on the Korean Peninsula.

Third, the two sides also formed a consensus on strengthening defense exchange cooperation. The two Ministers assessed that bilateral defense exchanges had progressed steadily since the ROK-India Defense Ministers' Meeting held in September 2019. Hereupon, the two sides decided to further promote exchanges through hosting the ROK-India vice-ministerial 2+2 meetings, operating regular service-to-service consultative bodies, and invigorating military educational exchange. In addition, the two Ministers exchanged thoughts on cooperation in combined exercises, education, medical assistance and international disaster relief, peace keeping operations, and cyber security.

Fourth, in sharing the view that industrial cooperation was the leading element within defense cooperation between the two countries, the two Ministers agreed to strengthen defense industry cooperation in various fields. Accordingly, the two Ministers finalized the “Roadmap for ROK-India Defense Industry Cooperation” (henceforth “Roadmap”), first proposed by Prime Minister Modi at the 2018 ROK-India Summit, and agreed that through implementation of this Roadmap the two sides would work together to ensure that Korea's New Southern Policy and India's Act East Policy could be realized in the defense industry sector.

The key features of the Roadmap are i) Specified areas of major defense industry cooperation, including land, maritime, aviation, research and development, and certifications, ii) The Indian government's provision of relaxed regulations and other administrative support to prospective Korean defense firms entering the Indian market, in accordance with the Make in India domestic manufacturing initiative, and iii) Formation of a working committee to manage implementation of the Roadmap. Minister Singh expressed his hope that the Roadmap would open a new chapter in the defense industry cooperation between the two countries, adding that he would actively support Korean firms participating in the Make in India initiative. In return, Minister Jeong responded that such opportunities would bolster mutually beneficial defense industry cooperation, particularly in the areas of joint R&D, production, marketing, and exports.

After the ROK-India Defense Ministers' Meeting, Minister Jeong attended the DEFEXPO 2020, held on February 5 in the city of Lucknow, which is located in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The DEFEXPO is one of the largest defense exhibitions in Asia, and during his visit,

Minister Jeong met with key Indian figures, including Chief Minister of Uttar Pradesh Yogi Adityanath, to discuss measures to expand bilateral defense industry cooperation. In addition, he visited booths set up by Korean companies participating in the exhibition, including Hanwha Defense, Korea Aerospace Industries, and LIG Nex1. While holding a meeting with personnel from these corporations, Minister Jeong explained the government's initiative to advance inroads into the Indian markets. Also, he received suggestions and turning an attentive ear to some of the difficulties facing the companies.

On the evening of February 5, in commemoration of the war's 70th anniversary, Minister Jeong hosted an event for the families of Indian veterans of the Korean War. The event was held in New Delhi and was attended by families of 35 veterans, including the granddaughter of Lieutenant Colonel A.G. Rangaraj, the commanding officer of the 60th Parachute Field Ambulance of the Indian Army. This medical unit was deployed to Korea in November 1950 and served on the front lines until withdrawing in April 1954. During this time, the unit played a crucial role in maintaining the combat power of the ROK Armed Forces, engaging in dedicated medical support for approximately 20,000 inpatients and 195,000 outpatients, as well as 2,324 cases of surgery. The families who attended the event expressed their gratitude to the ROK and its military for remembering the past dedication and sacrifice of the Indian veterans, and expressed their hopes for the continued development of bilateral relations between the two countries. Following this event, on February 6, Minister Jeong visited the 60th Parachute Field Ambulance Platoon and the affiliated 50th Parachute Brigade to encourage Indian service members and express his deep gratitude for the sacrifices and dedication demonstrated by the Indian forces, while reiterating the significance of the 70th anniversary of the Korean War.

The ROK defense minister's visit to India came as the two countries reached a consensus on the need to expand the growing special strategic partnership to the defense and defense industry sectors. The ROK-India Defense Ministers' Meeting provided an opportunity to broaden the scope of defense cooperation and exchange between the two countries. Furthermore, the finalized Roadmap for Defense Industry Cooperation is expected to provide new motivation for invigorated bilateral cooperation in the areas of R&D, test evaluation, and quality assurance, among others. In addition, the event for families of Indian veterans and the

visit to the 60th Parachute Field Ambulance Platoon hold great significance in that they were opportunities to deepen friendly and cooperative relations between the two countries in commemoration of the 70th anniversary of the Korean War.

In conclusion, Minister Jeong's official visit to India is expected to contribute to further expanding defense and defense industry cooperation with India, reflective of its growing profile as the key partner of the New Southern Policy. Furthermore, the relationship between the two countries is expected to evolve into close cooperative partnerships not only at the bilateral level, but also at the regional and multilateral levels.