

BACKGROUND NOTE



Canada–Republic of Korea Defence and Security



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In recent years, Canada and South Korea have elevated a formerly trade-centric partnership into a multifaceted strategic partnership, rapidly expanding their defence and security co-operation, most notably through the 2015 Canada-ROK Free Trade Agreement.

The Canada–South Korea security partnership is now one of Canada’s most dynamic relationships in the Indo-Pacific. While the two countries are not formal treaty allies, over the past few years, Ottawa and Seoul have begun treating each other as [like-minded strategic partners](#), with a relationship anchored in shared democratic values and a rules-based international order, spelled out in such documents as Canada’s [Indo-Pacific Strategy \(2022\)](#) and [Korea’s Global Pivotal State Strategy \(2022\)](#).

Recent Milestones in Bilateral Defence Co-operation

This shift reflects converging interests: managing great-power competition and securing supply chains and emerging technologies that underpin national security. The 60th anniversary of bilateral relations in 2022 marked a pivotal moment as both governments deliberately upgraded their co-operation across policy, military, and industrial domains.

[The 2022 Comprehensive Strategic Partnership \(CSP\)](#) established pillars on security and defence, economic resilience, critical minerals, climate and energy security, and broader societal co-operation. This comprehensive scope signals that the relationship spans the full security spectrum. For defence, the CSP produced immediate steps: the renewal of the [Defence Materiel Co-operation](#)

[Memorandum of Understanding \(MoU\)](#) (first signed in 2009; renewed in December 2022), the launch of a high-level economic security dialogue, and commitments to deepen information-sharing and critical minerals collaboration.

[The 2024 CSP Action Plan](#) operationalized these ambitions by aligning the partnership with both countries’ Indo-Pacific strategies. It prioritized defence co-operation on classified information-sharing, defence R&D, and emerging security issues such as maritime and cyber security. The Action Plan also laid the groundwork for the inaugural [Foreign and Defence \(2+2\) Ministerial Meeting](#), held for the first time in November 2024. The ‘2+2’ mechanism — previously reserved by Seoul for mainly treaty allies — signalled a new level of trust and established a standing mechanism to guide bilateral security co-operation.

Defence industrial integration also expanded. In June 2024, the Canadian Commercial Corporation and the ROK’s Defense Acquisition Program Administration signed an [MoU on Defence Industry and Procurement Co-operation](#). The agreement promotes defence-industry partnerships, familiarizes both sides with government-to-government procurement processes, and facilitates joint bids and co-production opportunities. This begins to shift the defence relationship beyond transactional procurement toward long-term industrial co-operation.

In October 2025, the two governments elevated the partnership further by launching the Canada-ROK Security and Defence Co-operation Partnership (SDCP) — Canada's first dedicated bilateral defence roadmap with an Indo-Pacific partner. The SDCP institutionalizes annual '2+2' ministerial meetings, director-general-level policy talks, Joint Materiel and Joint Defence R&D Committees, and expanded navy, army, air force, and space staff talks. It sets out practical areas of collaboration: more joint exercises and personnel exchanges, interoperability and logistics frameworks, expanded intelligence-sharing, closer NATO co-ordination, and enhanced defence-industry linkages. It also prioritizes emerging domains such as cyber, space, artificial intelligence (AI), and hybrid threats. Taken together, these developments create an increasingly dense architecture of predictable engagement across ministries, militaries, and industry.

Key Areas for Further Security Co-operation

MODERNIZING THE CANADIAN DEFENCE SYSTEM

The potential for Canada-ROK defence industrial co-operation is driven by the alignment between Canada's modernization needs and South Korea's industrial capacity.

Canada is undertaking one of the largest recapitalization efforts in its history under [Our North, Strong and Free](#), with a commitment to reach two per cent of GDP in defence spending. Priorities include replacing the Victoria-class submarine fleet and advancing [NORAD modernization](#), including next-generation surveillance systems for continental and polar defence. In parallel, the Department of National Defence (DND) launched its [AI and Digital Strategy](#) (2024) to modernize its command, logistics, and intelligence system. Canada has also established a Defence Procurement Secretariat and is developing a Defence Industrial Strategy to strengthen domestic capability.

Given these requirements, Ottawa is exploring acquisition models that emphasize delivery speed, interoperability, and long-term industrial benefits. The emphasis extends beyond purchasing platforms to building resilient partnerships that sustain [Canadian Armed Forces readiness](#) in the Arctic and Pacific.

[The Canadian Submarine Procurement Project \(CPSP\)](#) illustrates how defence, industrial and strategic interests converge. Canada plans to acquire up to 12 advanced conventional submarines to replace the *Victoria*-class fleet. South Korea's [Hanwha Ocean](#) has been shortlisted, alongside Germany's ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS), offering a variant of the KSS-III submarine. Regardless of the final selection, [Canadian content](#) will be embedded throughout the program — Canadian firms will participate in the supply chain, Canadians will be employed, and Canadian authorities will retain intellectual-property control. This signals far more than a traditional vendor-buyer relationship; it requires a fundamentally deeper, long-term partnership that will extend across multiple decades.

For Korea, a Canadian contract would represent its largest defence export to date and would cement its reputation as a supplier of NATO-compatible high-end platforms. Korea's defence industry has scaled rapidly under its [K-Defense Strategy](#), aiming to become a top-four global exporter by 2027. Since Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine, Seoul has positioned itself as a key supplier to NATO members — most notably [Poland](#), which accounts for nearly half (46%) of Korea's arms transfers between 2020–24, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. Korea's record [US\\$17.3 billion](#) in defence contracts in 2022 demonstrated its ability to deliver advanced systems at speed.

This proven capacity may be instructive for Canada as it undertakes major recapitalization across maritime sustainment, shipbuilding, and digital defence technologies. While Korea is not part of NATO, its systems are increasingly interoperable with alliance standards, which supports Canada's broader commitments.

Regardless of the final decision, the bid has already deepened industrial integration. [Hanwha has signed MOUs](#) with multiple Canadian firms (such as CAE in Montreal, Gastops in Ottawa, and Curtiss-Wright INDAL in Mississauga) for design, systems integration, and through-life support. These partnerships generate Canadian jobs and technology transfer and create business relationships that can outlast a single project. On top of this, the CPSP will serve as both a potential flagship project and a catalyst for broader naval and defence-industrial co-operation.

CRITICAL MINERALS AND DEFENCE SUPPLY CHAINS

Critical minerals have become a central pillar of Canada–ROK economic and security co-operation. [The 2023 MOU on Critical Mineral Supply Chains, Clean Energy Transition, and Energy Security](#) recognizes that minerals such as lithium, nickel, cobalt, and rare earths are essential for both clean technology and defence systems.

Canada provides upstream resource endowment, while Korea brings midstream processing and downstream manufacturing capacity. Joint work includes reserve mapping, Korean investment in Canadian projects, and co-operation on refining. The SDCP extends this logic to defence supply chains, with a shared commitment to secure the inputs required for next-generation platforms, munitions, and energy systems — reducing reliance on non-like-minded suppliers.

EMERGING DUAL-USE TECHNOLOGIES (AI, QUANTUM, SENSORS)

Both countries are leaders in dual-use technologies. Canada has global strengths in AI, quantum science, and advanced research; South Korea leads in semiconductors, advanced electronics, and 5G/6G infrastructure. Under the CSP and Action Plan, both governments have prioritized collaboration in AI governance, cyber resilience, and emerging technologies.

The SDCP commits Canada and Korea to explore the responsible military use of AI and autonomy and to co-ordinate on cyber threats and critical infrastructure protection. Quantum technologies and sensor

innovation are logical next areas — supporting secure communications, undersea detection, and space-based surveillance. Canada’s NORAD modernization effort creates potential openings for Korean firms in next-generation radar, sensor fusion, and associated digital systems, especially as Canada diversifies suppliers.

Conclusion: Episodic Engagement to Strategic Alignment

As Canada and South Korea deepen their co-operation across defence policy, industry, and emerging technologies, the bilateral relationship is shifting from episodic engagement to sustained strategic alignment. Both countries recognize that safeguarding national security today requires reliable partners who can deliver resilient supply chains, interoperable capabilities, and trusted technological collaboration. The architecture built over the past three years — from the CSP to the SDCP — now provides a durable platform for co-ordinated action in an increasingly complex Indo-Pacific environment.

Looking ahead, the trajectory of Canada–ROK defence co-operation suggests growing opportunities to shape regional security outcomes, rather than simply adapt to them. Joint work on advanced platforms, critical minerals, AI, cyber resilience, and Arctic and maritime security will continue to expand the partnership’s strategic depth.

If nurtured, this co-operation can evolve into a comprehensive middle-power security framework — one that strengthens each country’s defence posture while contributing to stability in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.



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