Beyond K9 Vajra: Can the K30 Biho Become the Next Milestone in India-South Korea Defense Cooperation?

July 7, 2026

Setting up the Political Momentum

Between April and June 2026, India and South Korea held back-to-back high-level meetings and exchanges. The most important and urgent ones were on cooperation in strategic sectors such as defense, AI, shipbuilding, and semiconductors. In April, South Korean President Lee Jae Myung made a landmark state visit to India. His visit produced 25 outcomes for cooperation in strategic sectors.

Following this, India's Defense Minister Rajnath Singh visited South Korea in May to strengthen defense ties. Singh held talks with the South Korean Defense Minister Ahn Gyu-back and met with the Minister of the Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA), Lee Yong-cheol, leading to collaboration on the roadmap for the Korea-India Defense

Innovation Accelerator Ecosystem (KIND-X).

Singh's visit also produced two MoUs on self-propelled air defense systems and directed energy weapons systems (laser weapons). Complementing these, L&T and Hanwha signed two corporate agreements for the co-development and production of these systems.

Recently, on 24 June, EAM S. Jaishankar met his South Korean counterpart Cho Hyun in Seoul. Their meeting also focused on follow-up measures on the outcomes agreed during President Lee's visit to New Delhi.

These high-level diplomatic engagements signal renewed momentum in India-South Korea defense ties, particularly in cooperation on the K30 Biho.

Upgrading the Indian Air Defense Systems

Especially post Singh's visit, discussions on reviving the stalled K-30 Biho procurement have begun to float in policy circles. The renewed interest comes against the backdrop of Operation Sindoor, which underscored the growing urgency of updating air defenses to counter drones, loitering munitions, and low-flying aerial threats.

While in Seoul, Singh touched on Operation Sindoor, implicitly arguing that New Delhi is reforming its military system into a multi-domain, highly integrated, and technologically advanced combat structure.

There were key lessons for India after Op Sindoor, as highlighted in CSDR's report. India's traditional air defense systems (expensive and centralized) were challenged by low-cost Pakistani drones. Pakistan deployed around 300-400 Turkish-origin drones, including *Bayraktar TB2* and *Bayraktar YIHA-III* kamikaze drones, micro-drones such as *Songatri* and *eYatri*, and Chinese-origin UAVs. The intent of such drone onslaught was to saturate and overwhelm India's air

defenses (ADs), deplete stockpiles, and test India's sensors and interceptors. There was a cost imbalance because ADs relied on million-dollar interceptors to destroy disposable USD 2,000 FPV drones.

While India's legacy gun systems (L-70 and Zu-23) were effective in successfully destroying most of the drones, they came under heavy strain against the massive drone swarms. These guns have also been awaiting replacement, as they remained in service only due to procurement delays.

Since the 1990s, India has been trying to procure a Self-Propelled Air Defense Gun Missile System (SPAD-GMS) to replace the Bofors L70 and Soviet-era ZU-23. Following this, various countries, including Russia and South Korea, have offered their systems to India. In 2018, Hanwha Aerospace won India's technical evaluation. The K30 Biho beat an upgraded Russian Tunguska-M1 model and the Pantsir missile system and was considered the most capable in dual-purpose use as an anti-missile and anti-aircraft defense system. However, the final contract was never signed due to India's push towards indigenization and external pressures from Russia.

K-Air Defense for the Indian Military

South Korea is advancing its layered air defense architecture and drawing significant global attention, especially since the Russia-Ukraine war. Hanwha has emerged as a reliable defense partner for Poland, Estonia, Finland, Norway, and, more recently, the UAE.

The *Cheongung-II* (M-SAM) reported a 96% hit rate during its combat debut against Iranian strikes in the UAE, strengthening its credentials as an air defense supplier. Also, West Asian countries requested support for the Biho Combined System against Iran's kamikaze drone campaign during the US-Iran War.

The K30 Biho, an integrated short-range air defense (SHORAD)

platform, aligns with the Indian military's priorities by neutralizing close-range threats such as drones, helicopters, and missiles. It is a hybrid system that uses rapid-firing twin 30mm guns to counter fast-moving aerial targets and KP-SAM Chiron missiles to engage targets beyond gun range. Its mobility enables it to accompany tanks, infantry fighting vehicles, and self-propelled artillery units.

Several reports indicate that the Indian Army is resuming discussions to procure the K30 Biho following the 2025 conflict. The army is considering around 104 systems, valued at USD 2.5-2.6 billion.

The urgent need to upgrade and develop SPAD-GMS can serve as a catalyst for finalizing the K30 Biho deal. Also, South Korea has proven its credibility through the K9 Vajra-T self-propelled howitzer arrangement with India. The Indian Army signed its first order of 100 units in May 2017 and an additional 100 guns in 2024. Under the *Make-in-India* initiative, it is manufactured by Larsen & Toubro (L&T) in a technology transfer partnership with South Korea's Hanwha Aerospace, featuring over 50% indigenous content.

The *Vajras* also performed exceptionally well at the trials when they were relocated to Ladakh (a cold, mountainous region) in May 2020, amid border tensions with China.

K30 Biho is expected to pursue localization, possibly achieving 80% indigenous content by the 50th unit manufactured. Since L&T has experience and facilities ready in Gujarat for K9, it will also reduce cost and time for K30. Some reports indicate that stakeholders are proposing *Hybrid Biho*, integrating Korean chassis with Indian radars and missile systems to boost localization and reduce costs.

Path Ahead

The K30 is still in the early stages of the acquisition

process, and the procurement cycle remains lengthy. Even if the MoD issues a fresh Acceptance of Necessity (AoN) and releases a new Request for Proposal (RFP), K30 biho will still have to pass through technical evaluations, financial negotiations, trials, and production planning.

Notably, the biggest challenge may be the “Make in India” model, as it will require South Koreans to extensively localize through a local partner, involving negotiations over technology transfer, indigenous content, intellectual property rights, and many more. Historically, India-South Korea defense projects have failed to fructify due to such reasons. Projects like the Mine Countermeasure Vessels with South Korea’s Kangnam Corporation and joint venture on Project 75(I) were shelved before finalization.

Thus, while India’s strategic environment spurred urgency and renewed political momentum between the two countries created a stronger case for the K30 Biho than in previous years, the success of the deal will depend on whether both New Delhi and Seoul can overcome the structural obstacles that have previously hindered their cooperation.