

The relations between India and Chile when it comes to defence and military represents more of potential than actual depth in relations currently. There needs to be a more pro-active approach when it comes to engaging with Chile. The scale at which other parties like the Chinese are approaching South America shows that India should also be investing in relationships in this part of the world. - **Ashwath Komath***

The prospects for cooperation in [defence](#) and military spheres between India and Chile as it stands today seem to be quite limited in its reach. These prospects are not necessarily limited to the military and defence spheres but are a trend in general, with limited prospects of trade and other forms of exchange. Experts and foreign policy professionals lament this lack of engagement between India and [South America](#) in general, citing India's inability to cash in on strategic depth.

Currently, the military relations of the two countries is characterized more in terms of defence acquisitions. India has been trying to enter the South American markets for its military exports. There has been considerable interest in the HAL Advanced Light Helicopter. While Ecuador has made purchases of the ALH and there has been an interest in Chile for its acquisition, a solid deal has not worked out as yet. The same goes for a Chilean purchase of trucks manufactured by Mahindra Marksman vehicles for the Chilean National Police (Carabineros de Chile).



India's state-owned Hindustan Aeronautics Limited, or HAL, has floated a global request for information for the purchase of engines to power its homemade multi-role helicopter |
Image: Hindustan Aeronautics Limited

The decision for Chile to look to India for defence procurement by itself constituted a very exciting prospect for cooperation, given that they're geographically really far and the interest in Indian defence hardware showed that perhaps Indian manufacturing capabilities have improved.

The inability to conclude deals for additional procurement of defence equipment from India gets stymied by the quality issues in the production. The Chileans looked at the Ecuadorian

procurement of the ALH to understand the challenges with its acquisition, which in this case, were the poor serviceability and the purchase of spare parts. Some helicopters delivered to the Ecuadorians have crashed, and the Ecuadorians believe that is partly to do with the untimely delivery of spare parts and inability to service them on time. Besides, the Chileans also have first-hand experience with the acquisition of the Marksman trucks for the Carabineros de Chile, where they have complained of the questionable quality of the vehicles that have been delivered to them.

This doesn't necessarily mean the end of defence procurement from India for the Chileans, especially since the improvement of logistical chains as well as the servicing structures can bridge this gap and create confidence for a larger purchase of vehicles and other equipment.

Another small obstacle that comes in the way is also that of the geopolitical interventions that occur as a result of increased cooperation in defence machinery. Defence procurement has been currently restricted to non-lethal weaponry because India also has to consider the concerns of Chile's neighbours such as Argentina, which may not be amenable to increased arms sales to Chile.

The defence and military relationship between Chile and India represents more of potential than actual gains in the date today. There are several untapped areas which could work out well if a proper framework for cooperation can be laid out between the two countries.

One area is that of exchange of military personnel for training. India's High Altitude Warfare School can be a good place to start with an exchange of cadets to mutually improve their capabilities in mountain warfare, which both countries have a commonality in terms of terrain. This cooperation could also be extended to Jungle warfare, naval, and air force capabilities as well. The exchange of personnel need not be constrained by geographical distance as we can see in the case of the Chinese also establishing military links with countries in South America.

Another area which holds a lot of promise is cooperation on peacekeeping. India has been the third-largest contributor of troops and police to UN peacekeeping operations and has developed significant capabilities in terms of logistics, training and other parts of the peacekeeping processes. The Chilean role in peacekeeping has increased over the years, with Chile sending in personnel to participate in observer missions posted to places like

Haiti, East-Timor.



Image Representing Indian Peacekeepers in the United Nations Peacekeeping Force | Image: News Bharti

India has the Centre for United Nations Peacekeeping created to spread the lessons learned from years of experience. Chile too has a school for peacekeeping called CECOPAC. This shows that lessons can be learned mutually when it comes to peacekeeping. This becomes significant when you notice the expansion of Peacekeeping operations around the world with more complex mandates and service delivery. This also can translate to gains in cooperation when Troop Contributing Countries negotiate the various mandates and service at the Security Council when new missions are authorized, or existing mandates have been renewed or expanded. Both countries could potentially learn something in the realm of disaster management and relief as well, where both countries have been improving their logistical capabilities to respond to various kinds of disasters.



Image Representing Chilean Peacekeepers in the United Nations Peacekeeping Force | Image: Fiveprime

The exchange of personnel for the training of various kinds is a very workable idea and requires us to leverage existing resources and institutions and will permeate a lot faster in terms of cooperation.

If the stumbling block in defence acquisition and procurement is that of spare parts and serviceability, then it would be prudent for Indian firms to be creating and improving logistical chains for the servicing of the products they sell. Perhaps, the setting up of a logistics hub in Chile could be an incentive for Chile to place larger orders for defence equipment and needs to be incorporated into future contracts. While contracts are executed by individual firms, perhaps regulatory agencies at the governmental level can incentivize this provision in larger interests and relations between the two countries.

As stated earlier, the relations between India and Chile when it comes to defence and military represents more of potential than actual depth in relations currently. There needs to be a more pro-active approach when it comes to engaging with Chile. The scale at which

other parties like the Chinese are approaching South America shows that India should also be investing in relationships in this part of the world.



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