

South Korea's Strategic Relationships with Sub-Saharan Africa :

Energy Security and Beyond

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· **Keywords** : South Korea-Sub-Saharan Africa, China-Sub-Saharan Africa, Energy Security, Medium Power

[ABSTRACT]

Recently, countries seeking energy source diversification have been attracted to sub-Saharan Africa. South Korea, a medium power, is no exception. The experiences of major powers, especially neighboring China's successes and missteps in Africa, inform Seoul's diplomatic strategy toward sub-Saharan Africa. Seoul has learned that aiming only to win oil resources is counterproductive and that a sincere partnership approach will build stronger ties with African nations. South Korea must increase and focus ODA, enlarge its role in African UNPKO, and fully capitalize on both its cultural assets and the advantages in Africa conferred by its status as a medium power.

I . Introduction

As the price of oil fluctuates, oil-importing countries around the world strive to secure steady and reliable supplies of this vital form of energy. Many countries try to diversify the origin of their oil and natural gas imports, so as not to be too dependent on supply from the politically volatile region of the Middle East. Africa is one region that has recently attracted the attention of energy-hungry nations.¹⁾ Along with Central Asia, Africa is considered a critical region with enormous potential to provide much-needed energy for the rest of the world. Besides energy, Africa's slowly but steadily growing economy makes it an attractive new market.

The major powers have recently scrambled to gain more access to Africa and to preserve their interests on the continent. A number of Asian nations have substantially increased ties with Africa. Major Asian powers like China, India, and Japan have led the way and their activities have been well documented. The non-major powers of Asia, like South Korea, have ample reason to be concerned about better relationships with Africa, since these nations are as dependent on energy imports as any in the world. Yet, there has been a lack of analyses addressing non-major powers' interests in energy security and their specific concerns toward the African continent. To fill the gap, I analyze strategic relationships between Africa of South Korea, one of the non-major powers in East Asia, with a focus on energy security. First, I provide a theoretical background for a medium power's foreign policy, as South Korea is a "medium power." The section demonstrates the differences and similarities of foreign policy behaviors between medium powers and major powers and how being a medium power could enhance South Korea's position in relations with Africa. Then I explore recent trends regarding energy security, paying particular attention to China, a major power and neighbor of South Korea and one of the most important external actors in African affairs. I then explore the implications for South Korea's African policy, examining both the lessons

1) Hereafter, Africa means sub-Saharan Africa, unless specified otherwise.

South Korea can take from other major Asian powers and South Korea's history and emerging status as a medium power. In the African context, I argue, the historical, geographical, and cultural characteristics of medium power confer distinct opportunities for South Korea.

II . South Korea as a Medium Power

South Korea is not a major power. However, with a population of 49 million people, the fourteenth largest economy in the world, and a well-equipped military nearly seven hundred thousand strong, South Korea is not a small, weak state either. Scholars have attempted to define the position of such states in the international system. The most common term in use to identify a state like South Korea is 'middle' state. Middle power has been a useful but vague concept. In general, middle powers are defined as "states that commit their relative affluence, managerial skills and international prestige to the preservation of the international order and peace."² Such middle powers concentrate on niche issues (environmental or moral issues, for example) that major powers do not much emphasize, because those are areas in which these countries can excel even with their relatively limited material capability. This engagement offers middle powers a means to maintain or improve their status in the international community. Middle powers are also active in Official Development Assistance (ODA) and UN peacekeeping operations (UNPKO).³

The problem with the middle power concept, as Laura Neack points out, is that most discussions are of ideographic foreign policies by self-identified middle powers. To rectify this lack of precision, Davis Bobrow

2) Laura Neack, "Linking State Type with Foreign Policy Behavior," in Laura Neack, Jeanne Hey, and Patrick Haney (eds.), *Foreign Policy Analysis: Continuity and Change in Its Second Generation* (NJ: Prentice Hall, 1995), p. 224.

3) Andrew Cooper, Richard Higgott, and Kim Nossal (eds.), *Relocating Middle Powers: Australia and Canada in a Changing World* (Vancouver: University of British Columbia Press, 1993); Andrew Cooper (ed.), *Niche Diplomacy: Middle Powers After the Cold War* (NY: St Martin's Press, 1997).

and Steve Chan⁴⁾ and Neack⁵⁾ apply objective indicators (such as GNP per capita, military expenditure per capita, and population) to categorize world powers in a more rigorous fashion. South Korea, their analyses show, is a middle power (or 'achiever') that scores above the median in all examined categories.

Although middle powers have been strongly linked with politically and economically advanced countries, countries in the developing world such as Brazil or Turkey have also been referred to as middle powers in specific contexts. Thus, the concept of middle power remains unsatisfactory because it lumps countries around the world solely based on material criteria. The countries in Western Europe, North America, and Oceania have qualitatively different security and other interests from most countries with similar material capacity in other parts of the world. As Amitav Acharya superbly demonstrates in elucidating the unique nature of Southeast Asian nations regarding regional multilateral security institutions, ideational and normative factors must be taken into account to grasp the foreign policy behaviors of these countries.⁶⁾

As a first step to developing a more useful categorization, I delineate a second group of mid-sized nations in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, which I term "medium powers" to differentiate them from the middle powers of Western Europe, North America, and Oceania. The historical, geographical, and cultural features of medium states make their behaviors distinct from those of traditionally recognized middle powers with a

4) Davis Bobrow and Steve Chan, "Simple Labels and Complex Realities: National Security for the Third World," in Edward Azar and Chung-in Moon (eds.), *National Security in the Third World: The Management of Internal and External Threats* (College Park, MD: University of Maryland, 1988).

5) Laura Neack, "The Empirical Observations on 'Middle Power State' Behavior at the Start of a New International System," *Pacific Focus* 7 (Spring 1992), pp. 5-21.

6) Amitav Acharya, "Regional Institutions and Asian Security Order: Norms, Power, and Prospects for Peaceful Change" in Muthia Alagappa (ed.), *Asian Security Order: Instrumental and Normative Features* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press, 2003). He argues that the major contribution to ASEAN security order has been normative identity formed through colonial experience that produced distinct characteristics of noninterference and nonalignment.

comparable level of material capacity.

Even medium powers are diverse, and their behaviors can be affected by internal and external security environments, historical relationships with their neighbors, and the dynamics of domestic politics. Despite their diversity, however, the medium powers have much in common. One of the common characteristics of these countries is that, as former colonies for parts of their histories, they espouse a strong sense of nationalism. Their emotional and practical distance from the West is shared by nations in Africa as well, which is an important consideration in relations between African countries and medium powers in other parts of the world, like South Korea. Furthermore, many medium powers have achieved remarkable success in their political and economic development, although they all struggled at first to overcome the dark legacy of colonialism. Thus, their success stories could also be inspirational for African nations.

South Korea, whose security still depends on the ROK-U.S. alliance, has found itself in a more favorable security environment since the end of the Cold War—with its economic and military power much increased and its political legitimacy newly enhanced by democratization—and its confidence and strengthened aggregate power have allowed South Korea to be more pro-active. Thus, South Korea has pursued diversification of its strategic relationships, including relations with African nations. South Korea can now adopt a strategic policy toward Africa as a medium power free from any imperial past. This policy must be broadly based, but energy will inevitably be a key consideration, as is the case for most medium powers.

III. Energy Security in the Twenty-First Century

One of the biggest challenges any nation faces in the twenty-first century is securing an uninterrupted energy supply, which is vital for a nation's economy and even survival.⁷⁾ Major powers around the world have

7) The critical importance of petroleum resources has sometimes led nations to go to war,

organized task forces, seminars, and congressional hearings to find the best possible solution to the urgent challenge of assessing and evaluating energy security, which is defined as “assurance of the ability to access the energy resources required for the continued development of national power.”⁸⁾ For example, the United States, the leading energy consumer in the world, has produced numerous governmental and nongovernmental reports recently.⁹⁾ The authors of these reports and analyses commonly argue that the U.S. dependence on oil will not diminish any time soon and the world oil consumption is more likely to increase from 80 million barrels of oil per day in 2003 to 118 million barrels per day in 2030. One of the best ways to cope with the challenge is to make arduous efforts to diversify energy supply sources, since both the U.S. and the world economy are precariously reliant on energy imports from the Middle East, one of the most volatile regions in the world.¹⁰⁾

as some even argue that the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003 “should be viewed as not the first—and certainly not the last—of a long series of wars and military interventions over the control of foreign oil.” Michael Klare, “Protecting Overseas Oil Supplies: The Globalization of the ‘Carter Doctrine’,” in Jan Kalicki and David Goldwyn (eds.), *Energy and Security: Toward a New Foreign Policy Strategy* (Washington, D.C.: Woodrow Wilson Center Press, 2005), p. 108. Also see Ian Rutledge, *Addicted to Oil: America’s Relentless Drive for Energy Security* (NY: I. B. Tauris, 2005), pp. 6-7, 178-201.

- 8) Jan Kalicki and David Goldwyn, “Introduction: The Need to Integrate Energy and Foreign Policy,” in Kalicki and Goldwyn (2005), p. 9.
- 9) Kalicki and Goldwyn (2005); John Deutch and James Schlesinger, “National Security Consequences of US Oil Dependency,” The Council for Foreign Relations Special Task Force Report, No. 58, 2006; The US Senate, “Energy Security and Oil Dependence: Recommendations on Policies and Funding to Reduce US Oil Dependence,” Hearing before a Subcommittee on Appropriations Committee. 110th Congress, First Session, Special Hearing, May 8, 2007; John Deutch, Ann Lauvergeon, and Widhyawan Prawiraatmadja, *Energy Security and Climate Change* (Washington, Paris, Tokyo: The Trilateral Commission, 2007).
- 10) In 1998, for the first time America’s dependence on imported oil crossed the psychologically important 50 percent threshold and it is estimated to grow further from 55 percent of U.S. oil consumption in 2001 to 66 percent in 2020. Michael Klare, *Blood and Oil: The Dangers and Consequences of America’s Growing Petroleum Dependency* (NY: Metropolitan Books, 2004), pp. 13, 18. “Even more disturbing, (in 2001) the proportion of total US oil supplies which was coming from the Persian Gulf—14.1%—was now the highest in the nation’s history.” Rutledge (2005), p. 9. Inevitably, “the growing reliance on the oil kingdoms of the Persian Gulf only makes

Seeking energy-producing regions other than the Middle East, many nations have begun to eye the enormous oil—and natural gas—producing potential of the African continent.¹¹⁾ Africa is also strategically important for other reasons, including its political (in)stability, economic difficulties, and medical challenges (especially HIV/AIDS), which could spillover and have serious consequences beyond the continent, with the potential to bring extremist activities and increase social migration. Thus, recently competition has grown among world powers for access to energy and other strategic objectives in Africa. A number of countries in East Asia have been active in Africa as well, since Pacific Asia is currently the largest energy-consuming region in the world, with 34 percent of the world total in 2005, and their consumption is heavily dependent upon oil imports from abroad.¹²⁾ China's energetic activity on the continent has been particularly noteworthy, because of China's sheer capacity and its unique, sometimes controversial, approach to nations in Africa.

IV. China in Africa

Since the establishment of the PRC in 1949, and especially since assuming leadership of the Non-Aligned Movement in the mid-1950s, China has maintained close relationships with African nations. During the Cold War, Beijing provided military and financial assistance to armed liberation movements in Africa to build solidarity.¹³⁾ In the 1970s, the Chinese built several monumental and symbolic constructions as goodwill

the US more vulnerable." Klare (2004), p. 20.

11) Paul Hueper, "Sub-Saharan Africa," in Kalicki and Goldwyn (2005); Anthony Lake and Christine Whitman, "More Than Humanitarian: A Strategic Approach toward Africa," The Council for Foreign Relations Task Force Report, No. 56, 2006; Deutch et al, (2007), pp. 6-10.

12) Ibid., p. 82.

13) Bates Gill, *Rising Star: China's New Security Diplomacy* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institute, 2007), pp. 124-25; Chris Alden, *China in Africa: Partner, Competitor, or Hegemon?* (London: Zed Books, 2007), p. 10.

gestures and to win the diplomatic battle with Taiwan, who competed for decades with the PRC for recognition as the sole legitimate political entity in the whole of China.¹⁴ Due to the sheer number of countries in Africa and their tendency to vote as a bloc in various international organizations, especially in the United Nations General Assembly, Beijing has made substantial efforts to win their support.¹⁵ The Chinese appeal—as a fellow Third World nation that underwent national humiliation at the hands of western imperialism—has found many sympathetic audiences in Africa, where the memory of harsh western colonial rule is still fresh.¹⁶

Since the 1990s, unprecedented economic growth and the massive scale of China's economy and population have required the Chinese leadership to secure an uninterrupted supply of energy. China's status shifted from oil exporter to oil importer in 1993, and many Chinese policymakers admit that energy is one of the fundamental challenges for Chinese society.¹⁷ For the Chinese leadership, energy supply is a necessity for the survival of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), because its political legitimacy depends on continued economic growth.¹⁸ Like its competitors, Beijing has sought to diversify oil suppliers. China has aggressively pushed for better relationships with oil-producing countries around the world, including many in Africa.¹⁹

Beijing's substantial diplomatic efforts in the post-Tiananmen 1990s targeted a variety of issues in Africa from energy supply to African

14) Joshua Kurlantzick, *Charm Offensive: How China's Soft Power is Transforming the World* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2007), pp. 142-43.

15) Alden (2007), pp. 20-22.

16) Robert Sutter, *Chinese Foreign Relations: Power and Policy Since the Cold War* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2008), p. 368; Stephanie Rupp, "Africa and China: Engaging Postcolonial Interdependencies," in Robert Rotberg (ed.), *China into Africa: Trade, Aid, and Influence* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2008).

17) Zheng Bijian, *China's Peaceful Rise: Speeches of Zheng Bijian, 1997-2005* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution, 2003), p. 3; Alden (2007), p. 13.

18) David Zweig and Bi Jianhai, "China's Global Hunt for Energy," *Foreign Affairs* 84-5 (September/October 2005), pp. 18-30.

19) Henry Lee and Dan Shalmon, "Searching for Oil: China's Oil Strategies in Africa," in Robert Rotberg (2008).

nations' recognition of China's international status as a growing major power. Unlike western nations, China attaches no conditions regarding domestic policy, based on Beijing's foreign affairs dictum, the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which includes a stipulation of non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations. This approach has raised eyebrows among western policymakers but has been welcomed by many in Africa,²⁰⁾ especially leaders with questionable political credentials. Nonetheless, Chinese diplomatic efforts and investments in Africa have been comprehensive. China surpassed Japan and South Korea as the most important market for Africa's exports in the mid-1990s.²¹⁾ Two-way trade between Africa and China increased fivefold from \$10 billion in 2000 to \$50 billion in 2006.²²⁾ Besides constructing buildings, Beijing has also invested heavily in education, medical care, and job training. Top Chinese officials, including Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao vigorously promote friendship through constant visits. Such summit diplomacy based on personal relationships has been particularly successful. Beijing has also hosted the Forum on China-Africa Cooperation (FOCAC) since 2000 and pledged to increase economic assistance and forgive some outstanding debt.²³⁾

Although it has not received the attention from western media it deserves, China's participation in UNPKO in various parts of Africa has encompassed a few thousand personnel and significant financial assistance.²⁴⁾ Beijing's efforts in Africa have been particularly appealing because the Chinese leadership has been careful about the emotional sensibilities of Africa: "The sine qua non of all international politics in Africa remains the anti-colonial discourse drawn from the past."²⁵⁾ Thus, it is claimed that, at least in Africa, a "Beijing Consensus" of non-interference has replaced the

20) Alden (2007), pp. 19-20.

21) Harry Broadman, *Africa's Silk Road: China and India's New Economic Frontier* (Washington, D.C.: World Bank, 2007), p. 79.

22) Alden (2007), p. 8.

23) Broadman (2007), p. 275.

24) David Shinn, "Military and Security Relations: China, Africa, and the Rest of the World," in Robert Rotberg (2008), pp. 176-78.

25) Alden (2007), p. 31.

“Washington Consensus,” a dominant model of economic development and cooperation for decades.²⁶⁾ Beijing also has paid great attention to exerting soft power by promoting cultural exchanges with countries in Africa.²⁷⁾ Thanks to these efforts and strengthened partnerships with many African nations, Chinese companies in Africa (especially state-owned oil companies) have been very successful in bidding against western competitors for access to oil and natural gas resources.²⁸⁾ The Chinese model of economic success has also been considered a solution to many African nations’ long history of underdevelopment and poverty.²⁹⁾

Recently, however, a tremendous level of challenge to China’s policies has emerged, and numerous negative consequences of the Chinese approach have appeared. China has brought its own poor labor and environmental standards to Africa. Obscure and unaccountable corporate governance has caused social and political frictions with the Chinese in a number of African countries.³⁰⁾ The Chinese practice of bringing workers and construction materials from China, while neglecting to hire local laborers or use locally made products, has caused sharp criticism by local authorities as well.³¹⁾ Beijing’s aggressive bilateral trade ties with many African nations have increased complaints among workers and civil society organizations because African goods have little chance to compete with the influx of cheap Chinese goods.³²⁾ Some even charge that the Chinese are “exploiters” or “colonizers,” terms previously reserved for the West.³³⁾ Furthermore, as the economic gap between China and Africa grows, Beijing will find it harder to win sympathy and support from

26) Ibid., p. 105.

27) Kurlantzick (2007); Broadman (2007), p. 172; Yong Deng, *China’s Struggle for Status: The Realignment of International Relations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008), pp. 231-32.

28) Kurlantzick (2007), p. 211.

29) Alden (2007), pp. 129-31; Kurlantzick (2007), p. 135.

30) Bates Gill and James Reilly, “The Tenuous Hold of China Inc. in Africa,” *The Washington Quarterly* 30-3 (2007), pp. 37-52; Alden (2007), pp. 74-76.

31) Broadman (2007), p. 281; Sutter (2008), pp. 375-76.

32) Alden (2007), pp. 79-89.

33) Kurlantzick (2007), p. 163; Alden (2007), p. 6.

countries in Africa.³⁴⁾

Chinese activities in Africa have drawn international as well as local criticism. The history of western oppression and exploitation in the region somewhat undercuts condemnations of China by former colonial powers,³⁵⁾ but the Chinese cannot avoid global and regional criticism for their questionable activities. The biggest criticism is that for pariah states or illiberal regimes in Africa, China has become a reliable source of stability through partnership and assistance based on its principle of non-interference in others' internal affairs.³⁶⁾ This practice has angered many western policymakers. China has used its veto power as a permanent member of the UN Security Council to play "the role of spoiler" by blocking attempts to sanction these troublesome countries,³⁷⁾ as the criticism goes.³⁸⁾ This Chinese behavior has raised doubts over their professed intentions of "peaceful development" and hurt western efforts to promote better governance, accountability, and transparency among governments in Africa.³⁹⁾ Although the Chinese arms sales to Africa comprise just 6-7 percent of total sales to the continent, they too are controversial because they mainly benefit rogue regimes.⁴⁰⁾

South Korea has carefully observed and studied the confrontations, competition, and cooperation among major powers with regard to Africa and its resources. The experiences of its Asian neighbors, especially China's, are particularly useful examples as South Korea crafts its policy toward Africa.⁴¹⁾

34) Sutter (2008), p. 372.

35) Barry Sautman and Yan Hairong, "The Forest for the Trees: Trade, Interest, and the China-in-Africa Discourse," *Pacific Affairs* 81-1 (2008), pp. 9-29.

36) Gill (2007), p. 166; Kurlantzick (2007), pp. 219-24.

37) James Fraub, "The World According to China," *New York Times*, 3 September 2006.

38) David Sanger, "China's Oil Needs Are High on US Agenda," *New York Times*, 19 April 2006.

39) Hueper (2005); Kurlantzick (2007), pp. 171-4.

40) Alden (2007), p. 25.

41) Although overshadowed by Beijing's recent vigorous efforts, Japan has for many decades been a major supplier of economic assistance in Africa. However, a recent challenge Japan confronts in Africa is also strongly related to energy, as the annual

V. South Korea in Africa

South Korea's relationships with Africa started in 1962, when South Korea was bitterly poor, with establishment of diplomatic relations with Gabon. As in the PRC-Taiwan case, Seoul's efforts in Africa throughout the Cold War were mainly centered on its diplomatic competition with Pyongyang, which provided economic and military assistance to friendly forces on the African continent.⁴²⁾ Due to the limited state capacity of South Korea and the great geographic distance, Africa did not play an important role for Seoul during the Cold War period. The only state visit happened in 1982 when then-President Chun Doo-hwan visited four African nations, Kenya, Nigeria, Gabon, and Senegal. After the Cold War ended in the 1990s, Africa became even more marginalized from South Korea's diplomatic concerns, since Seoul's attention shifted strongly to the newly independent and liberalized countries of the former Soviet bloc.⁴³⁾

Yet in the 21st century, Africa has become more attractive than ever to South Korea, thanks to its deep concern about energy security and diversification of energy sources.⁴⁴⁾ Seoul's new approach toward Africa,

ODA white paper clearly admitted. "Japan ODA Focusing on Environment, Africa: White Paper," *Jiji Press*, December 20, 2007. Japan's shortage of energy resources and "increased competition for energy resources with its neighbors, notably China" has made Tokyo keener to strengthen relationships with Africa. Keiichi Yokobori, "Japan," in Kalicki and Goldwyn (2005), p. 312. In its efforts for energy security, the Japanese government proposed the Basic Energy Plan in 2003, of which a top priority is supply diversification. Reflecting recent concerns, Tokyo pledged at the 2008 Tokyo International Conference on African Development (TICAD) to double ODA to Africa by 2012. "LEAD: Japan Sets Record High ODA Targets for Asia, Africa in FY 2009," *Kyodo News*, April 23, 2009.

42) "Korea and Africa (editorial)," *Korea Herald*, March 14, 2006.

43) Sun-Joo Kang, "Africa's Opportunities and Challenges: A Study on Strengthening South Korea's Diplomacy Toward Africa," in the Institute of Foreign Affairs and National Security (IFANS) (ed.), *East Asia's Changing Security Environment and Diplomacy Task for South Korea* (Seoul, Korea: IFANS, 2008), p. 543.

44) Jae-Doo Kim, Kyungwook Shim, and Kwansik Cho, *Energy Security* (Seoul, Korea: Korea Institute of Defense Analysis [KIDA] Press, 2007), pp. 186-88; Kang (2008), pp. 542-43.

part of an effort to broaden its diplomatic horizons, was highlighted by the state visit of former President Roh Moo-hyun to Algeria, Egypt, and Nigeria in March 2006. President Roh announced the "Korea's Initiative for Africa's Development," which promised an increase in ODA, sharing of economic development experience, provision of medical care and job training, technology transfer in information technology and agriculture, etc.⁴⁵⁾ In November 2006, Seoul hosted the first Korea-Africa Forum, inviting delegates from thirty-one African nations and pledging to expand cooperation in many areas. Seoul also co-organized the Inter-Sessional Conference for the Korea-Africa Forum in Johannesburg in November 2007. At that meeting, the South Korean delegates promised to transfer economic development experience, especially for rural areas, to other participants.⁴⁶⁾ In October 2008, another Korea-Africa Forum was held in Rabat, Morocco. There, Seoul promised to consider Africa not just as a trade destination for Korean goods but also as a partner in an omni-directional diplomatic strategy based on pragmatic interests, regardless of ideology, culture, or region.⁴⁷⁾ At the bi-annual Korea-Africa Economic Cooperation Conference (KOAPEC) in late October 2008 in Seoul, the minister-level participants agreed to strengthen cooperation in infrastructure and energy development, information technology, human resources development, and so on, and Seoul pledged to promote \$760 million worth of economic cooperation projects by 2010.⁴⁸⁾ In November 2009, at the Second Korea-Africa Forum, the participants agreed to expand cooperation and promote the green growth of the continent. As the Korean organizer admits, there certainly are strategic goals for Seoul, given the

45) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (MOFAT) of Republic of Korea (ROK), *Diplomacy White Paper* (Seoul, Korea: MOFAT, 2007), pp. 145-46. One of the main objectives of Roh's visit was to promote "energy diplomacy."

46) MOFAT of ROK, *Diplomacy White Paper* (Seoul, Korea: MOFAT, 2008), pp. 99-100.

47) The North-West Africa Division of the Africa and Middle East Affairs Bureau at MOFAT, "The Outcome of the 2008 Korea-Africa Forum," Press Release, October 17, 2008.

48) Ik Chang Jang, "To Promote \$760 million Worth Economic Cooperation with 16 African Nations", *e-today*, October 31, 2008.

massive oil and natural resources in Africa, but “Korea’s approach is different in that we are trying to share our development experience with Africa.”⁴⁹⁾

Seoul recognizes the African continent’s potential importance as an energy supply source that would meet South Korea’s needs for diversification of energy supplies.⁵⁰⁾ Currently, South Korea is the tenth largest energy consumer, fourth largest oil importer, and second largest LNG importer and is almost entirely dependent on overseas energy sources, particularly on the 97 percent of its oil requirements that it imports from abroad, mostly from the Middle East.⁵¹⁾ Since the Oil Shocks in the 1970s, oil diplomacy has been vital for South Korea, and high oil prices during recent years have strengthened that imperative. Joint cooperation meetings or committees have been set up with several oil-producing countries in Africa; yet Seoul has found it difficult to compete with major powers, including China and Japan, that have ample money and influence. Furthermore, despite being a major importer of energy resources, South Korea has not been a major actor in international energy politics.⁵²⁾ What South Korea must do is to concentrate on what it is good at and develop those areas. Since South Korea “has strength in infrastructure construction and its experience in economic development ... a package deal of energy project accompanied by the construction of power plants”⁵³⁾ or other energy infrastructure construction would be greatly appealing. The merit of this approach was proven in South Korea’s successful consortium in Nigerian offshore oilfields in 2006.⁵⁴⁾

49) “Korea Pledges Aid, Training at Second Africa Forum in Seoul,” *Korea.net news*, December 2, 2009.

50) Joo-Hee Lee, “Korea Rolls Out Energy Diplomacy,” *Korea Herald*, March 22, 2006; Kim, Shim, and Cho (2007); Jae-Seung Lee, “Building Strategies for Korea’s Energy Diplomacy,” *IFANS Review* 16-1 (2008), pp. 89-111; Kang (2008). Enhancing Seoul’s energy diplomacy was one of the most important goals of the 1st Korea-Africa Forum. “First Korea-Africa Forum Expected to Focus on Energy Development,” *Yonhap* (Seoul), November 7, 2006.

51) Lee (2008), p. 95.

52) *Ibid.*, pp. 98-100.

53) Ja-Young Yoon, “Stingy Korea Image May Backfire Overseas,” *Korea Times*, June 23, 2008; Lee (2008) p. 102; Kim, Shim, and Cho (2007), pp. 206-9.

As can be learned from the experiences of major powers, in building strategic partnerships with nations in Africa, Seoul needs to focus on “promoting international cooperation and enhancing the national image”⁵⁵⁾ rather than just on approaching Africa as a way to diversify energy sources. In order to achieve this broad friendship, Seoul needs to pay great attention to ODA and UNPKO. Both are important for any nation trying to fulfill its duty of contributing to world peace and economic development. Commitment to these areas is the morally right thing for South Korea to do, especially as a nation *sans* an imperialistic past and that is now a medium power successful in international politics. Such commitment will help to improve the nation’s image around the world. Although it should not be an end in itself, such contributions will also help to gain favorable conditions for further cooperation in economy and energy.

As to ODA,⁵⁶⁾ Seoul’s overall ODA to developing nations has been minimal. For the last ten years, South Korea’s contribution has been only about 0.05-0.1 percent of annual GNI, well below the recommendation of the Development Assistance Committee (DAC), 0.7 percent of GNI.⁵⁷⁾ This is shamefully small compared with the level of ODA, more than 0.3 percent of GNI, of other DAC nations with GDP per capita similar to that of South Korea. Furthermore, more than 90 percent of South Korea’s ODA has been tied aid, which the recipients must use to purchase goods and services imported from the donors. Therefore, a serious change of

54) However, the new Nigerian government canceled the agreement in early 2009, which is a huge blow to Seoul’s energy security efforts, and awarded the rights to an Indian oil company. The controversy went to court in March 2009. Charles Eboh, “S. Korean Company in Court over Nigeria Oil Blocks,” *Reuters*, March 26, 2009. Yet this unfortunate setback does not necessarily negate Seoul’s package deal approach. Certainly, more cautious and thorough preparation would be needed in future efforts.

55) MOFAT (2008), p. 26.

56) Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), *KOICA Annual Report* (Seoul, Korea: KOICA, 2006); Sun-Joo Kang, “The New Administration’s Donation Diplomacy: Task and Prospect of ODA,” *Analysis of Main International Problems by IFANS*, 2008; Yong-Kyun Cho, “A Right ODA Policy Direction of South Korea,” *Policy Study Series by IFANS*, 2006; Sang-Sik Oh, “ODA Policies of Advanced Nations and Related Tasks for Korea,” *Policy Brief 2005-7 by IFANS*.

57) South Korea was admitted as a new DAC member in November 2009.

approach and direction is needed in Seoul's ODA policy.

Africa has not received much of South Korea's ODA, since the bulk has gone to Iraq, Afghanistan, and other countries in Asia. Yet since President Roh's visit to Africa in 2006, there has been an increase of ODA for Africa. In 2006, the total amount of Seoul's ODA for Africa was \$23.4 million, about 12 percent of the total budget and a 49 percent increase from the previous year. Roh also pledged to triple Seoul's ODA for Africa by 2008 "in order to assist with international efforts to alleviate poverty and achieve the Millennium Development Goals in Africa."⁵⁸⁾ In 2007, the ODA for Africa contributed by the KOICA reached \$49 million, about 18 percent of the total ODA amount required to fulfill Korea's Initiative.⁵⁹⁾ Yet as many experts strongly urge, Seoul needs to dramatically increase the overall size of ODA "to the level commensurate to its economic standing"⁶⁰⁾ and to raise the proportion of grant and untied aid. The target countries need to be identified with clearer goals and standards based on the "selection and focus" principle, since South Korea's ODA has been sent to too many countries with too little for each. The current Lee Myung-bak administration has also pledged to triple Seoul's aid to 0.25 percent of GNI by 2015. South Korea, whose economic success was helped by the foreign aid Seoul received until the late 1990s, has an obligation to share its experiences with the developing world, including Africa.⁶¹⁾

Seoul also needs to make better diplomatic efforts with regard to participation in UNPKO, especially in Africa. As former Minister of MOFAT Song Min-soon argues, South Korea has an ideal position to actively participate in UNPKO and ultimately contribute to peace and stability around the world because of its geographic distance from most of the conflicts, its tolerance of different cultures and religions as a multi-religious country, its status as an economically and politically successful

58) KOICA (2006), pp. 27-28.

59) MOFAT (2008), p. 136.

60) *Ibid.*, p. 132.

61) Jeong-Ju Na, "Korea to Triple Development Aid by 2015," *Korea Times*, November 26, 2009.

medium power, and its possession of a well-trained and well-equipped military.⁶²⁾ Furthermore, Korea's experience of colonialism, a brutal war fed by Cold War superpower tensions, and successful reconstruction efforts from scratch would win sympathy and support in Africa. Yet so far, Seoul's commitment to this area has been meager, especially in Africa, with only ten observers in Sudan, Liberia, Ivory Coast, and Western Sahara.⁶³⁾ South Korea needs to contribute more to the UNPKO activities by increasing its budget shares and personnel to correspond to its economic size. The Lee administration has pledged to increase the size of South Korea's PKO forces (which ranks 36th, although Seoul is the 10th largest donor to the UN) to 2,000 by 2012, whereupon it would rank 10th worldwide. Seoul also has been trying to revise South Korean law to make PKO deployment easier and faster.⁶⁴⁾

Vigorously implementing cultural diplomacy as a means of promoting the soft power of Korea will also be essential for success. The Korean wave ('Hallyu') of Korean movies, music, television dramas, etc. has been tremendously influential throughout much of Asia in building a positive image of Korea and diffusing information about Korea and the Koreans. Despite some technical challenges due to the status of communications and other infrastructure in Africa, there is no reason 'Hallyu' cannot extend to the African continent.⁶⁵⁾

South Korea is in an excellent position to appeal psychologically to many African nations as it is a medium state and a former colony of a major power, and a nation that was never a dominant power in its history.⁶⁶⁾ South

62) Min-Soon Song, "UNPKO: Upgrading National Status," *Seoul sinmun*, November 30, 2007.

63) The Ministry of National Defense (MND) of ROK (2009) "Individual Unit PKO," at http://mnd.go.kr/mndPolicy/globalArmy/privatePeace/privatePeace_1/index.jsp?topMenuNo=2&leftNum=18 (Retrieved on March 4, 2010).

64) Sung-Ki Jung, "South Korea Seeks Rapid PKO Development," *Korea Times*, January 13, 2008.

65) MOFAT (2008), p. 150; Jeong Sang Kwon, "Increasing Boom of Korean TV Dramas in Africa," *Yonhap*, October 31, 2008.

66) In this regard, India's approach to Africa could be instructive for Seoul. An Indian expert on Africa argues, "we do not have the money of the Chinese or the military

Korea, which harbors no hegemonic ambitions, is unlikely to be seen as a bully or colonizer.⁶⁷⁾ Yet certainly, true diplomatic success will be dependent upon Seoul's sincerity, dedication, and commitment.

VI. Conclusion

In the last few years, there has been a new "scramble for Africa" motivated primarily by the continent's energy reserve potential. Other strategic concerns such as "failed" states, ongoing conflicts, and poor governance also contribute to the growing strategic interests in Africa among major powers. Beijing's commitment in Africa has been particularly closely watched because of its unique approach, its unprecedented success, and the problems and challenges it has caused. South Korea, another energy-dependent nation in resource-poor East Asia, has been trying to benefit by learning from the successes and mistakes of other countries, especially China.⁶⁸⁾

might of the Americans. Therefore, we are able to rely on cooperating with African nations in IT, agriculture, engineering, areas where we have something to give." Employing this approach, India has been well received by leaders in Africa as "a trading partner who does not relate to it through dependence, charity, or a colonial mindset." Randeep Ramesh, "India Joins Queue for Africa's Resources," *The Guardian*, April 9, 2008. Indian companies also create jobs in Africa by hiring more locals. Aasha Khosa, "India Avoids Comparison with China on Eve of African Summit," *Business Standard*, April 8, 2008. Surely, India's unique connection to Africa, thanks to the extensive Indian diaspora that has established cultural and trade links throughout Africa, especially on the Eastern coast, should be acknowledged.

67) In this light, the recent controversy surrounding the South Korean industrial powerhouse Daewoo is regrettable. Daewoo attempted to lease farmland on a massive scale in Madagascar for food security reasons. Whether the criticism from the western media—which claimed the move amounted to "neo-colonialism"—is justifiable or not, Daewoo's approach was not taken well by the local population and subsequently damaged the national image of Korea. Javier Blas, "Africa 'Giving Away' Land as Rich Countries Push for Food Security," *Financial Times*, May 25, 2009; Jung-A Song and Christian Oliver, "Daewoo to Cultivate Madagascar Land for Free," *Financial Times*, November 19, 2008. A lesson that could be drawn from this incident is: be always humble and sincere when approaching the locals regardless of one's ultimate objective.

China has been instrumental for Seoul to devise proper diplomatic tactics toward Africa. For example, Seoul has seen that the Chinese approach of “the use of foreign assistance to cement ties with governments as a means of securing resources and winning new diplomatic allies”⁶⁹⁾ has been successful. However, Seoul has also learned that appearing to be rapacious by aiming only at winning oil resources is counterproductive. The experiences of China and of other major powers demonstrate that African nations welcome investment but are wary of dependence. Developing strong ties is not simply a function of economics: emotion and perception play a huge role in building meaningful relationships. Recent African resentment of both China’s investment style and China’s growing dominance in world trade is creating a new image of China as an exploiter rather than a partner. Furthermore, since Seoul is not able to wield as much influence in global affairs as some of the major powers due to its limited material capability, it is less likely to be seen as a potential bully. The historical and emotional affinities of medium states like South Korea provide an advantage that major powers lack when it comes to building a constructive relationship with African nations. Similar past experiences and recent success stories of medium powers are likely to gain them currency with the countries of Africa.

Thus, as a medium state, Seoul should promote policies that are balanced between international norms and ethics and the economic self-interest of acquiring access to energy supply and export markets. Seoul must sincerely try to win hearts and minds in Africa by providing more ODA, participating more vigorously in UNPKO activities, and transferring its unique know-how and experience of economic success. These efforts certainly should include boosting local economies, not only by investing in them but also by hiring local workers and transmitting technology and skills. As shown

68) Sun-Joo Kang, “China’s Foreign Aid to Africa: Opportunities, Risks and Policy Implications for Korea,” IFANS Policy Brief 2007-4; Kyu-Deuk Hwang, “The Energy Security Strategy of China and the US and Its Perspective,” *Analysis of Main International Problems* by IFANS, 2008.

69) Alden (2007), p. 22.

in the case of Madagascar, greater care and concern must be shown regarding the emotional feeling of the locals when promoting any type of economic projects. Seoul must realize that it can be more successful in achieving energy security by cooperating with other nations than by competing with them or relying on confrontation to win. South Korea must also cooperate with global efforts to improve governance and transparency in oil revenue management among African oil-producing countries. Furthermore, as Michael Ross argues, one of the best ways to reduce revenue-related conflicts in the oil-producing regions is to employ an “oil-for-development” approach.⁷⁰ In Africa, South Korea needs to further develop its version of this approach, relying on barter rather than cash payment, which will be beneficial in the long term for both Seoul and Africa.

Seoul’s diplomatic efforts toward Africa in the last decade or so demonstrate the general tendency of medium powers’ foreign policy behaviors. Both former President Roh and current President Lee demonstrate strikingly similar tendencies in their approaches to energy security, ODA, and UNPKO, despite starkly opposed ideological origins. As a medium power, South Korea must package its technological capabilities and its historical identity in developing strong, multidimensional relations with the nations of Africa. Although South Korea, like most countries, is currently suffering from the financial crisis, Africa has become strategically so important that South Korea can hardly afford to delay the launch of substantial diplomatic efforts there. It is also important to note that a true friend helps whether he is economically well or not: troubled times are the right times in which to demonstrate a sincere commitment to long-term cooperation that will benefit both partners.

70) Michael Ross, “Blood Barrels: Why Oil Wealth Fuels Conflict,” *Foreign Affairs* 87-3 (May/ June 2008), p. 7.

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