

The Strategic Partnership between South Korea and the United Arab Emirates*

Güney Kore ve Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri
Arasındaki Stratejik Ortaklık

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Abstract

The United Arab Emirates (UAE) established a strategic partnership with South Korea in December 2009 with the import of nuclear power stations as an opportunity, that is, civilian nuclear energy cooperation as a precursor while taking into account other civil economic cooperation fields, such as oil and gas development; and then stretched to military exchange, import of weapons and fighting together against piracy. Its long-term goals also include cultural based healthy cooperation. The strategic partnership between South Korea and the UAE is an important part of South Korea's Middle East strategy and UAE's "looking eastward" policy. A more crucial task is to implement the bilateral agreements with quality and quantity in the next few years, to promote the relations not only between South Korea and the UAE, but also between East Asia and the Middle East.

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Öz

Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri (BAE) 2009 Aralık ayında nükleer santral teknolojisi ithalatına ilişkin Güney Kore ile stratejik bir ortaklık kurdu. Bu ortaklık sivil nükleer enerji alanındaki iş birliğinin ve petrol ve gaz geliştiriciliği gibi sivil alandaki diğer ekonomik ortaklıkların öncüsü konumunda olmuştur. Bu ortaklık daha sonra silah ithalatı ve deniz korsanlığına karşı ortak mücadele gibi askeri alanlara da genişlemiştir. Bu şekilde uzun vadeli hedeflerin olduğu ortaklıklar kültürel temelli sağlıklı iş birliğine dayanmaktadır. Güney Kore ve Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri arasındaki stratejik ortaklık Güney Kore'nin Orta Doğu stratejisinin önemli bir parçası olmakla birlikte, BAE'nin "doğuya yönelme" politikasının da önemli bir unsurudur. Önümüzdeki yıllarda sadece Güney Kore ve BAE arasında değil, aynı zamanda Doğu Asya ve Orta Doğu arasındaki ilişkileri geliştirmek için ikili anlaşmaların hem niteliksel hem de niceliksel açıdan sürdürülmesi en çok önem atfedilmesi gereken konuların başında gelmektedir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Akh Birimleri, Nükleer, Petrol ve Gaz, Somalili Korsanlar, Güney Kore, Stratejik Ortaklık, BAE.*

Introduction

South Korea's Middle East diplomacy started with the Korean War. After experiencing changes in its own international situation and foreign policy, South Korea has established diplomatic relations with all the Middle Eastern countries besides Syria and Palestine, and also established diplomatic ties with Palestine. The Middle East diplomatic channels of South Korea include economic diplomacy (including civil and military economy and trade exchanges) and international contribution diplomacy (including development assistance and international peacekeeping and other political and military activities).

The specific ways of the Middle Eastern diplomacy of South Korea include:

- International organization diplomacy that involves cooperation with Saudi Arabia and Turkey within the framework of the G20, and with Turkey and Israel within the framework of “Organization of Economic and Cultural Development” (OECD), with the United Arab Emirates within the framework of the “Global Green Growth Institute” (GGGI),

- Bilateral diplomacy that involves cooperation with Middle Eastern countries through “Middle East & Africa Society”, “Korea-Middle East Association”, “Korea-Arab Society” and other organizations in Korea under the framework of the “Middle East Cooperation Forum” (KMECF),

- Religious and cultural diplomacy that plays important role in the Arab-Islamic world and the South Korean Christians’ role in the Israeli diplomacy, and the Korean traditional culture as soft power in the Middle East diplomacy. South Korea focuses on following areas in its Middle East diplomacy: oil and gas resource development, as it is in the Gulf countries; food exports to Arab countries; cooperation in the high-tech area, e.g., with Israel,

- Nuclear power plant construction, e.g., with Turkey and the United Arab Emirates,

- Security and counter-terrorism, as in sending peacekeeping troops to Iraq and Afghanistan and a naval fleet to the Somali on waters.

Overall, the Middle East diplomatic strategy of South Korea is subordinate to the United States’ strategy. The relationships between South Korea and Turkey, Israel, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Libya, and other Middle Eastern powers have been under the pressure of the US. However, South Korea’s independent Middle East diplomacy has appeared in UAE, which has chosen the emerging international power-South Korea- to lift Saudi Arabia’s control in the region and taken precautions against the US in terms of security requirements. South Korea, for the first time built a strategic partnership with UAE without

the US supervision. This strategic partnership originated in economic areas such as nuclear power plant projects, cooperation, and development of oil and gas exploration, and oil reserve bases in East Asia. On this basis, the military field has been deepened constantly. South Korean Special Forces have been deployed in UAE, and they trained armed forces in combating against Somali pirates.

The Origin of Strategic Partnership between South Korea and the UAE

The strategic partnership between South Korea and the UAE has been different from the general partnership. It mostly focuses on security goals, but the first concrete part of this partnership is related to civilian matters.

South Korea and the UAE have established a strategic partnership on the nuclear power plant construction. From the point of the UAE, energy security and power shortage have top priority. Even during the traditional oil and gas energy exploitation, Abu Dhabi attached great importance to ecological and environmental protection building, which has experienced pre energy, old energy and new energy periods as three stages, and has made remarkable achievements.¹ In the present era, the most clean and stable power supply comes from nuclear power, and nuclear power plant construction is known as the UAE's own choice.

As the UAE is a country which has a close relationship with the United States, its nuclear power plans may overcome the distrust of the international community and may set it apart from the nuclear issue of Iran. In this case, the nuclear power companies of the West and their allies as the contractors of nuclear power plants have been preferred by the UAE. Based on its size and previous experiences of its national nuclear power plants, South Korea needed to consider nuclear power

¹ Che Xiaomei and Niu Ming, "Energy Development and Ecological Environmental Protection in Abu Dhabi", *Arab World Studies*, Vol. 28, No. 6, November 2009.

plant construction as its new economic growth point. On the other hand, international community still has some worries about the UAE. The first one is whether it can impose a stringent export control regime for dual-use technologies, and the second one is the difficulty of finding the capable workforce for the UAE. In December 2009, the South Korean consortium headed by the “Korea Electric Power Corporation” (KEPCO) won the \$20 billion contract. South Korean government has invested heavily in the bidding process and provided strong governmental support to KEPCO in anticipation of its first nuclear export.²

However, international society raises doubts as to the UAE’s. The first one is the attentions on the ability of strict export control over the dual-use technology, and the second one is whether to find the necessary labor. In short, the UAE has become the first Arabian country utilizing civilian nuclear power from South Korea. Clearly, the reactor is one of the critical steps during the construction of a nuclear power plant. The KEPCO signed a contract worth \$3.9 billion with Doosan Heavy Industries and authorized Doosan to build the UAE’s four main nuclear reactors, and the UAE Nuclear Energy Corporation awarded recognition. Not only that, the UAE has authorized the KEPCO to distribute related engineering branches to other partners such as Samsung and Hyundai Group. In April 2010, the UAE officially determined to build its first nuclear power plant in Braika. The first unit Braika-1 is slated to operate in 2017, with its three sister plants following at one-year intervals.³ To further consolidate and develop the strategic partnership between the two countries, the UAE-Korean Business Council was launched on May 27, 2010 and General Sheikh Mohammad Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, Abu Dhabi Crown Prince and Deputy Supreme Commander of the UAE Armed Forces, expressed his hope that “the council will achieve the goals of the two

² Danny Burkli, “UAE to be the First Arab State to Use Civilian Nuclear Power”, *Hürriyet Daily News*, March 7, 2011.

³ T. Ramavarman, “Doosan Wins UAE’s N-power Contract”, *Khaleej Times*, July 3, 2010.

countries and enhance the sustainable economic development in two countries”. The President of South Korea, Lee Myung-bak, also expressed his hope that the strategic cooperation between the UAE and Korea would cover a long lasting partnership in all business aspects including the nuclear power field. The aim of the UAE-Korean Business Council is to support executives in both countries with all the future business fields of cooperation.⁴

Sheikh Mohammad also visited Doosan Heavy Industries and the nuclear reactors. During the nuclear power plant construction, the South Korean government committed to train the UAE technical personnel. From July to August 2010, forty-eight UAE students from the Institute of Applied Technology (IAT) as well as Khalifa University of Science, Technology and Research finished a month-long training session on nuclear facilities. “Many of those students will become the main operators of the UAE nuclear reactors in the future. We plan to hold a training session like this every year,” KEPCO spokesperson Kim Hye-lim said. As of September 2011, KEPCO and IAT also decided to open a specialized three-year course in order to train skilled staff who will play a crucial role in operating the UAE nuclear reactors once they have finished the course.⁵

As the nuclear power plant construction is not an easy process, the closest economic cooperation of South Korea and the UAE is still in oil and gas fields. The UAE is ranked as the second largest oil exporter to South Korea, while oil is the major export product of the UAE. Therefore, there is an interaction between the UAE and South Korea regarding oil. These two countries began discussions on the construction of the UAE’s oil reserve base in 2009, and taking the established strategic partnership as the basis, the Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) and the Korean National Oil Corporation signed a Memorandum of Understanding on oil reserves and oil

⁴ “Mohammad Attends Launch of UAE-Korea Council”, *Gulf News*, March 28, 2010.

⁵ Kim Tae-gyu, “Korea-UAE Nuclear Tie-up Strengthened”, *Korea Times*, August 12, 2010.

development cooperation on August 2, 2010. The UAE aimed to export oil to Northeast Asia by a more economical and convenient way, while South Korea is expected to establish its oil port in Northeast Asia. The two sides negotiated that the current size of the reserve base is 200 million barrels and its capacity would expand with the improvement of the infrastructure. The memorandum opened the way for Korea's access to the oil reserves of the UAE. The Korean National Oil Corporation and ADNOC will form a joint evaluation group to investigate oil and gas fields in Abu Dhabi. South Korea will be mainly involved in deep-sea oil field development.⁶ Compared to the oil industry, the UAE's natural gas exploration industry is relatively slow. The UAE, in April 2009 granted a project measured \$1.5 billion from the total value of \$10 billion natural gas project to South Korea. In November 2010, South Korea's Samsung Engineering Company signed an agreement with the Abu Dhabi Gas Development Company on a project, which would be in the area 180 km. southwest from Abu Dhabi Shah Region, and the expected commissioning time of the project is August 2013.⁷

At the same time, South Korea and the UAE have continued to discuss their specific consultation on nuclear power plant construction, which is the priority of their bilateral strategic partnership. The Export-Import Bank of Korea (Korea Eximbank) will play a leading role in supporting the export of nuclear power technology by providing financial credits for local companies. Eximbank Chairman Kim Dong-soo said on February 9, 2010, "We are taking part in UAE nuclear power plant business. We will do our best to enable the UAE to become one of the top three powerhouses in the industry" and "we plan to complete the design of a financing structure and the creation of a

⁶ Choi Hyun-cheol, "UAE Chooses to Build Its Northeast Asian Oil Reserve Bases in South Korea", *Jungang Ilbo (Chinese edition)*, August 3, 2010.

⁷ "Samsung Engineering Signs UAE Shah Gas Project" http://www.samsungengineering.co.kr/eng/company/PressReleasesView.jsp?onPage=1&tb2_seq=303&category=14 (Access date: 23 March 2012).

lenders' group in the first quarter in cooperation with UAE's Nuclear Energy Corporation."⁸ It is said that in October 2010 South Korea was expected to lend about \$10 billion for the UAEs' first nuclear plants, more than doubling pledges it has already made that year to finance construction projects in the Middle East.⁹

The South Korean opposition parties also disagreed with Korea Eximbank, which pledged to loan half of the \$18.6 billion that the UAE would repay over almost three decades. These issues prompted critics to argue that South Korea signed a secret deal with the UAE, promising overly favorable terms.¹⁰ This reflects the importance that South Korea attached to the UAE project. The Chairman of the UAE Energy Company visited South Korea on March 10, 2011 and held further discussions with Korea Eximbank on fund procurement. In order to consolidate the agreement, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak visited the UAE on March 3, 2011, uttered a speech as follows: "Nuclear power is an important source of energy that will play a critical role in the post-fossil fuel era. The true value of nuclear power consists in its peaceful utilization", "I expect that the horizon of bilateral co-operation will continue to expand into other areas, including new and renewable energy, information and communications technology, and finance."¹¹ Lee Myung-bak also had an inspection of the site of the UAE's first nuclear reactor. In the first 11 months of 2010, the trade volume between South Korea and the UAE reached \$15.7 billion. The UAE is South Korea's largest export market in the region.¹² In the face of Japan 3/11 Fukushima nuclear power plant explosion and serious nuclear leakage incident in 2011, President Lee

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⁸ Kim Jae-won, "Eximbank to Aid Export of Nuclear Power Plant", *Korea Times*, February 9, 2010.

⁹ Ayesha Daya, "South Korea Plans to Lend \$ 10 Billion for U.A.E. Nuclear Plants", *Bloomberg*, October 7, 2010.

¹⁰ "Nuclear Power Plant Exports Boost Korea Inc.", *Korea Times*, February 21, 2011.

¹¹ Gerry Doyle, "S. Korea Leader Upbeat on Ties", *The National*, March 13, 2011.

¹² *Ibid.*

on March 14, 2011 clarified the need to eliminate the panic of the UAE government and people. He said; “the construction of nuclear power plants reflects the growing economic ties between the UAE and Korea. We would take all possible measures to ensure their safety.”¹³ On March 15, 2011, the KEPCO decided to offer two nuclear power plant simulators to UAE by 2015. The supply of the training simulators valued at \$23 million, which are designed to train plant operators, constitutes a part of the deal to build nuclear power plants in the UAE.¹⁴

In addition to further implementing the nuclear power plant projects, the two heads of governments of South Korea and the UAE signed a memorandum of understanding on March 13, 2011 on the South Korean involvement in the oil exploration. The Korea National Oil Corporation and the United Arab Emirates National Oil Company signed an agreement on three oil fields which have at least 10 billion barrels of oil reserves; not only that, the two sides also decided to have 6 million barrels of crude oil storage in Abu Dhabi for South Korea and to allow South Korea to purchase the first 300 thousand barrels every day in the future.¹⁵ In fact, South Korea and the UAE have nuclear power plant construction, and oil and gas production projects together to form a relationship based on mutual cooperation.

The Development of Strategic Partnership between South Korea and the UAE

Compared with nuclear power plant construction, the resources exploitation, and other economic development projects, the strategic partnership of South Korea and UAE has gradually moved beyond the original agenda and extended to the military field. UAE requested

¹³ Na Jeong-ju, “Lee Pledges to Ensure Safety of UAE Nuclear Plants”, *Korea Times*, March 14, 2011.

¹⁴ Nam Kwang-sik. “KEPCO to Offer 2 Nuclear Power Simulators to UAE”, *Yonhap News*, March 15, 2011.

¹⁵ “Korea Signs Major Oil Deal with UAE”, *Chosun Ilbo*, March 14, 2011.

South Korea to send troops to the UAE as a historical opportunity after South Korean led consortium was awarded to build nuclear power plants.

Since the UAE has insufficient defense force, so when facing the pressure from the regional powers, especially Iran and internal opposition, the UAE needed to obtain new weapons to face unexpected events. The UAE in August 2009 intercepted the North Korean's illegal transport to Iran of weapons prohibited by international ships. The weapons include rocket-propelled grenades, while North Korea has UN sanctions imposed upon it because of its nuclear test in June 2009.¹⁶

Because Iran was also suspected of developing nuclear weapons, the exchange of weapons between North Korea and Iran caused international panic. Facing the threat of Iran, Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries except Bahrain all have cooperated with Israel in varying degrees.¹⁷ Although South Korea had to participate in sanctions against Iran because of Iran's nuclear issue with the international community, South Korea actually has had good relations with Iran. North Korea is the largest security threat for South Korea, by threat of mass destruction as well as the proliferation of nuclear weapons. It is critical for South Korea that the UAE would intercept North Korean ships transporting weapons. Since South Korean weapons have the most direct relevance to North Korea and there had been weapon cooperation between North Korea and Iran, thus the weapons procurement from South Korea has become a logical investment for the UAE. The UAE has agreed to procure weapons from South Korean companies as much as \$560,000 (Dh2m) worth of specialized assault rifles. According to the developers, the K11 rifle consists of a semi-automatic 20 mm grenade launcher, an underslung

¹⁶ "UAE Seizes N Korea Arms Cargo", *BBC News*, August 28, 2009.

¹⁷ Niu Song, "Influence of Iranian factor on Relationship between Israeli and Countries in Gulf Cooperation Council", *Forum of World Economics & Politics*, Vol. 30, No. 2, April 2010.

assault carbine firing 5.56 mm NATO-standard rounds, and a top-mounted, computer-assisted sighting system with integrated laser rangefinder and thermal infrared night-vision capabilities. With this order, the UAE became the first foreign customer of South Korea for the weapon. South Korea also planned to sell the T-50 Golden Eagle supersonic trainer jet and the K2 Black Panther main battle tank to the UAE.¹⁸

In addition to importing of advanced weapons, the introduction of foreign armed forces stationed in the UAE has become an important choice. The UAE first had military cooperation with the US, Vladimir Ahmed Ali Air Base and Jebel Ali provided a strong support for the US military operations in the Gulf region.¹⁹

Moreover, the UAE has also been actively promoting the diversification of foreign troops to eliminate its excessive pro-American image. Before asking South Korea to send troops, ten countries have already stationed troops in the UAE. For South Korea, the troops deployed to the UAE have huge strategic interests, as *Cheong Wa Dae* said: “there are more than 3,000 soldiers from 10 countries’ armies stationed in there,” “so it is not special for South Korean troops,” “like the UAE with less defense capacity, the most promising one is the military cooperation”; “they must favor the country which provides military support”, “because they are protecting the Arab countries, so it is conducive to change the views of the UAE’s neighbors on South Korea”.²⁰

Even more critical is that this had been precedent for South Korean troops to go to areas not at war. South Korea had previously sent troops to war-torn countries in the Middle East, such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Since the numbers of Korean hostages increased, the

¹⁸ Ivan Gale, “UAE Buys Rifles from South Korea”, *The National*, May 27, 2010.

¹⁹ Sun Degang and Deng Haipeng, “Analysis of the Adjustment of the US Military Bases in Gulf Region”, *Contemporary International Relations* Vol. 31, No. 5, May 2010.

²⁰ Nam Gung-uk, “Cheong Wa Dae Explains Actively with Its Aims to Send Troops to UAE”, *Jungang Ilbo (Chinese edition)*, August 6, 2010.

South Korean government gradually withdrew its troops. As the South Korean participation in a large number of Afghan reconstruction projects, South Korea has set up “provincial reconstruction teams” consisting of military, police, and professional and technical staff to protect their interests in Afghanistan and the safety of their staff, which provided experience already for stationing troops in the UAE. The South Korean Defense Ministry on December 12, 2010 said that they would send military training cooperation group to UAE. Its task was described as to assist educational training of the UAE Special Operations, joint training and practice, as well as to protect civilians in war.²¹ The South Korean army held a farewell ceremony on January 10, 2011 for troops heading to the UAE at a military training camp in Gwangju, Gyeonggi Province. The *Akh* Unit consisted of 130 combat soldiers with K11 rifles and other advanced weapons. The *Akh* Unit was to be stationed in a special warfare school in the al-Ain region in the UAE. As President Lee Myung-bak pointed out, the troop deployment would also prove greatly helpful to South Korean efforts to solidify its energy security and expand its trade base in the Middle East.²² The *Akh* Unit would be in the UAE at the end of December 2012, shouldering the task of being a “global strategic cooperation partner.” Besides that, Seo Jeong-min, a professor of Middle East politics at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul, said while the South Korean troops had valuable skills to pass on, they would also benefit from being in the UAE, gaining experience unavailable in their home country.²³

Somali pirates hijacked South Korean *Samho Jewelry* cargo ship and 21 crewmembers on January 15, 2011. This emergency promoted the strategic partnership between South Korea and the UAE. The

²¹ Jeong Yong-su, “South Korea Army Special Warfare Command Will Dispatch 130 Soldiers to UAE”, *Jungang Ilbo (Chinese edition)*, December 13, 2010.

²² “Deployment of South Korea Akh Unit to UAE”, *KBS*, January 12, 2011.

²³ Daniel Bardsley, “South Korea Elite Forces Arrive in UAE”, *The National*, January 12, 2011.

Samho Jewelry is a Norwegian cargo ship whose actual owner is from South Korea. It was hijacked during the way from Sri Lanka to the UAE. The kidnapped crew included eight South Koreans, eleven Burmese and two Indonesians. On January 21, 2011, a South Korean escort ship launched attacks on the Somali pirates, and after hours of fighting, there were eight pirates killed and five were captured. Although South Korea began to send convoy fleets to the waters off Somalia in 2009, it had avoided fierce fighting with Somali pirates, such as *Samho Dream* which had been hijacked for 217 days was released after the payment of a \$9.5 million ransom, while South Korean ships suffered from violent attacks for a variety of reasons: first of them is the ending of the passiveness of Yeonpyeong Island. On November 23, 2010, North Korea fired against Yeonpyeong Island and injured soldiers and civilians in South Korea, which intensified the debate over domestic policy toward North Korea and doubt on South Korea's military capabilities. In this context, the use of force against the Somali pirates became South Korea's first military choice. "Somali pirates clearly are not as dangerous as the Korean People's Army (KPA)," says Andrew Salmon, a Korean War historian and Seoul-based journalist. "Many South Koreans would like to see a muscular response, but the risks are far greater against the KPA."²⁴

Second one is that the South Korea needed to provide forceful security for the good relationship established after the realization of the UAE nuclear project and the station plan. The critical issue was how to escort the five captured Somali pirates back to Korea. The UAE royal family played a key role during this process. Since the *Samho Dream* was not able to get the Oman's permission to enter the port, so they could not send the pirates to South Korea by sea and there were some difficulties in terms of money for sending them by air as well as some practical problems. A South Korean Foreign Ministry official pointed out: "The government originally planned to use civil or military

²⁴ Danald Kirk, "South Korea Delivers Setback to Somalia Pirates, and a Warning to North Korea", *Christian Science Monitor*, January 21, 2011.

aircraft to escort the pirates, but it is difficult that the civil aircraft costs heavily and military one had to get permission by nine countries around.” South Korean President Lee Myung-bak turned to the UAE royal family, “the Ambassador Kwon Tae-gyun visited senior members of the royal family on January 26, and less than an hour, after South Korea made the request, the UAE royal family borrowed the private plane in response.”²⁵ It both improved the efficiency of escort, and did not cause a contradiction with other Islamic countries.

Finally, the *Akh* Unit, South Korea’s special operation forces, provided security protection, so it was fair enough to select them to escort pirates in the UAE royal plane. The *Akh* Unit escorted five Somali pirates back to Korea on January 30, 2010, which prompted closer military cooperation between the two countries. Although the UAE and Somali both belong to the Arab countries, several UAE ships also had been hijacked by Somali pirates. Besides, the hijacked ships also involved vessels, which had trade with the UAE, such as the *Samho Jewelry*. It actually affected the interests of the UAE. South Korean Foreign Minister Kim Sung-hwan visited the UAE in early February 2011 and met with his UAE counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahayan. Their topics were the “strategic partnership”, such as in the areas of trade, politics, military, culture, health, and education. Kim said that, “They agreed to further strengthen bilateral cooperation on the global stage, especially in fighting against pirates.” “Kim also asked for the UAE government’s support for South Korean firms operating there, stressing their efforts to contribute to the UAE’s economic growth and enhanced bilateral relations.”²⁶

In January 2011, when Southern Sudan had successfully held its referendum and finally chose to be independent, which might reshape the geographical map of the Arab world, a Tunisian vendors’ uprising

²⁵ Kim Su-jin, “It is President Lee’s Idea to Escort Pirates with UAE Royal Plane”, *Jungang Ilbo (Chinese edition)*, January 31, 2011.

²⁶ “S. Korea, UAE Agree to Bust Anti-piracy Efforts”, *Yonhap News*, February 7, 2011.

triggered self-immolation, which had a more significant impact on the political map of the Arab world. Tunisia and Egypt changed governments and their presidents resigned already. Besides, there had been large-scale protests in Yemen, Libya and other Arab countries, as the Middle East strongman rule in the era of globalization encountered great challenges. The “Arab Spring” turmoil inevitably spread to the Gulf Arab states; Bahrain, Oman and Saudi Arabia suffered anti-government demonstrations. As the UAE government took a high-welfare policy, and there was almost no serious sectarian conflict in UAE, so now people there had no sign to oppose the government. However, the UAE government has also been aware of unequal income distribution, especially the importance of regional income distributions for stability of the country. The UAE government announced in early March 2011 that they would spend \$1.6 billion to improve the infrastructure in the less developed regions of the country.²⁷

The role of the *Ahk* Unit in UAE is important for upgrading the sense of security of the South Korean nationals in the UAE, and the UAE also needed the assistance of foreign armed forces including South Korea in response to the security situation in the long term. On March 12, 2011, South Korean President Lee Myung-bak visited the *Akh* Unit, which protects 5.500 Korean nationals, and he pointed out that: “The UAE is a special country (for South Korea). South Korea and the UAE can be viewed as having friendly relations”, “each of you should play a role as ambassador”.²⁸ Moreover, the sudden change in Libya and the common attitude of South Korea and the UAE for Gaddafi promoted the development of a bilateral strategic partnership. The South Korean *Cheonghae* Unit had been sent to Libya for evacuation of South Korean nationals on February 24, 2011. Since the Spy event had caused a chasm between the Gaddafi regime and South

²⁷ “UAE Stable Despite Regional Turmoil”, *Reuters*, March 8, 2011.

²⁸ Lee Chi-dong, “Lee Says S. Korean Troops in UAE Crucial for Bilateral Ties”, *Yonhap News*, March 13, 2011.

Korea, a port in the UAE capital of Abu Dhabi provided a temporary stop for the unit's change of staff. Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman General Han Min-koo met with and encouraged soldiers of the *Cheonghae* Unit in the UAE on April 27, 2011.²⁹

The Reasons for the Strategic Cooperation-Partnership

Since the establishment of diplomatic relations between South Korea and the UAE in June 1980, their bilateral relations have developed in a stable and long-standing trend. In the 21st century, besides trades in the oil field, South Korea also has contracted to build a large number of desalination facilities constructions, and major projects such as Burj Dubai, and has exported a large number of home appliances to the UAE. The South Koreans even showed their interests on an Islamic finance introduction after the financial crisis in Dubai. It was because of long-term economic cooperation and mutual understanding between South Korea and the UAE that the two countries have taken nuclear power plants as an opportunity to establish a formally "strategic partnership." Deepening and developing the relationship between South Korea and the UAE has been closely related with the international strategy on both sides.

First, the UAE's strategic choice is an important part of the Arab world's "Looking Eastward" policy. During the Cold War, the Arab world countries' foreign policy had been towards the United States and Western Europe, or Russia; since the end of the Cold War, the "Look West" policy became the mainstream of the Arab world; entering into the 21st century, its "Looking Eastward" policy is increasingly clear. "In recent years, the 'Looking Eastward' tendencies of Arab countries became increasingly clear. The East includes not only the Asia-Pacific countries such as China, Japan, Korea, and Australia, but also India and other Asian developing countries, as well as Brazil and other emerging Non-Asian economies."³⁰ In fact, the Arab countries,

²⁹ Song Sang-ho, "JCS Chairman Visits Overseas S. Korea Troops", *Korea Herald*, April 28, 2011.

³⁰ An Huihou, "Analysis of Arab States' "Looking Eastward Policy", *Arab World*

especially the Gulf monarchies have had a more complex attitude toward the US. There has been cooperation as well as contradictions with the US. They have hoped that the US would provide security while developing the relationships involving military development and all areas with the non-Western emerging countries including South Korea.

Although Saudi Arabia is the core of the GCC, but the UAE's status should not be overlooked: "In the past 10 years, the UAE has become the pioneer and innovation center of GCC"; "Dubai has quickly become the economic center of the region, but the subsequent development is more exciting: it will shine on the global stage"; the UAE has three major advantages: economic restructure, open for the business and healthy competition.³¹ It is because of the UAE's vitality in free competition and their openness to the world that South Korea with its strong economic strength and high-tech industries has become a key UAE consideration during the process of "Looking Eastward."

Although South Korea is an ally of the United States, after the 1973 oil crisis, it has taken a balanced attitude towards Palestinians and Israelis, which in fact is a part of its pro-Arab Middle East policy. It is the solid foundation that South Korea successfully established diplomatic relations with the UAE. After reaching an understanding on the use of civilian nuclear energy with the US, the UAE has taken construction of nuclear power plants as a long-run national developing strategy after the depletion of other energy resources. It is obvious to the UAE that South Korea has high-quality engineering projects and solid financial backing as well as great support of the South Korean government. Thirty year-long friendly exchanges and the important role of the nuclear power plant have established a close linkage between their strategic partnership and nuclear power plant project,

Studies, Vol. 30, No. 1, January 2011.

³¹ A. Rehman, *Dubai & Co.: Global Strategies for Doing Business in the Gulf States*, Translated by Hu Weishan, Oriental Publisher, Beijing, 2009, pp. 68-76.

while South Korea's companies have beaten the Western nuclear power potential by its own excellent technology, favorable prices, and high-speed deliveries and have successfully exported the nuclear power plants.

Second is the successful implementation of South Korea's Middle East strategy. Since the independence of South Korea, especially in the 1970s, it has positively developed good relations with Middle East countries. From the perspective of Middle East diplomacy, South Korea has actually implemented a three-ring diplomacy in the Middle East: the first ring for the entire Middle East, on which South Korea has established "Korea Middle East Association" (KOMEA) and "Korea Middle East Cooperation Forum" and held several meetings; The second ring is for the dominant Arab countries, on which South Korea has established the "Korean-Arab Friendship Society" (KOAFS) and the "Korean-Arab Society" (KAS); the third ring is for the oil-rich Gulf Arab states, especially for the members of the GCC. South Korea and the GCC have been negotiating to establish a Free Trade Agreement (FTA). Therefore, the UAE has become the top priority for South Korean Middle East diplomacy.

Moreover, South Korea had been proper understandings of international relations in the Middle East and had taken appropriate responses. There have been three different but related international systems in the international relations of Middle East: the Westphalia international system (the modern international system), Islamic international system, and Tribal system. The 1648 Westphalia international system mainly works on the relations with the countries outside the Middle East; the Islamic international system works for the relations with Islamic countries; and the Tribal system is mainly for the relationship between the tribal areas and other countries. South Korean Middle East diplomacy has dealt better with the relationships among all levels of government, religious leader, tribal elders, and greatly developed its local diplomacy as well as religious and cultural diplomacy. Early in 1999, South Korea had already established the "Governors Association of Korea" (GAOK), whose tasks included: assisting local governments to promote the decentralization of local

governments, supporting policy research and the internationalization of local governments, which includes promoting Korea overseas training of local civil servants and foreign civil servants trained in South Korea.³²

Islam has also played an active role in the South Korean Middle East diplomacy. It has achieved results that are more significant such that Islamic groups in South Korea are actively involved in economic and international contribution diplomacy, as well as the rescue diplomacy.³³ South Korea's local diplomacy as well as religious and cultural diplomacy composited the background and framework of its diplomatic relations with the UAE. As part of the cultural exchange program between the two countries, the Gyeonggi Provincial Dance Company of Korea's cultural performance, titled "Movements and Rhythms of Korea" was held in Dubai's Zayed University Convention Centre in June 2010. The performance marked the 30th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the UAE and South Korea. The UAE also sends delegations to perform during cultural events in Korea, as part of the cultural exchange programs between the two countries. The most recent one was held on May 5, 2010 in Sinjeju, where a UAE delegation held a cultural performance during the third annual Arab Cultural Festival hosted by the Korean-Arab Society.³⁴ This is the integration model of local and religious/ cultural diplomacy.

Conclusion

Although South Korea and the UAE have not clearly defined their "strategic partnership" that they had established from the covered areas and motivation, the core of the partnership is obviously to develop civil economic cooperation, taking civilian nuclear energy

³² GAOK, "Supporting Foreign Affairs of Local Governments". Retrieved November 7, 2011, from http://www.gaok.or.kr/eng/e02_act/act040.jsp (Access date: 25 March 2012).

³³ Niu Song, "Islam and South Korea's Middle East Diplomacy", *Arab World Studies*, Vol. 29, No. 3, May 2010.

³⁴ Mohammad Al Jashi, "Cultural Ties Help to Bind Links between UAE and South Korea", *Gulf News*, October 16, 2010.

cooperation as the leading aspect, and taking into account the oil and gas area, and extended to military areas through military exchanges, equipment introduction and jointly fighting measures on piracy. Its long-term goals also include cultural and health care fields. The strategic partnership between South Korea and the UAE is an important part of the South Korean Middle East strategy and the United Arab Emirates “Looking Eastward” policy. Since its establishment in December 2009, the strategic partnership has experienced only three years, but the two countries have had more than a 30-year relationship. South Korea released the situation of nuclear power plant exporting and sending troops to the non-war-torn areas in the UAE.

The UAE started transition to the post fossil power-era and security sources diversification by South Korea. The most critical duty of the two countries is to implement relevant signed agreements to promote further development between the regions. The establishment of the strategic partnership reflects the motivation of South Korea, which strives to be a leader in cooperation between East Asia and the Middle East. During the international financial crisis and the “Arab Spring”, South Korea, with high-speed economic development and Western-style democracy has the comprehensive advantage; since there is Middle Eastern fear towards China, Japan, and other major countries within East Asia, South Korea also plays a unique role in the coordination of international relations as an emerging small country. To put it simply, the relationship between South Korea and the UAE is a strong competitor towards China’s Middle East diplomacy, especially for the Gulf region. Besides developing the relationship with the Middle East oil-producing countries like the UAE, China needs to strengthen the coordination with major forces in East Asia such as South Korea, Japan and ASEAN to avoid fierce competition in order to maintain and preserve lasting peace and common development.

ÖZET

Kore Savaşı'nın ardından uluslararası konumundaki ve dış politikasındaki değişimler Güney Kore için Orta Doğu ülkeleri ile diplomatik ilişki kapısını araladı. Güney Kore'nin bölge ülkeleri ile kurduğu ilişkiler sadece diplomatik boyutta kalmayarak zaman içerisinde askerî, iktisadi ve sivil unsurları da kapsayacak şekilde genişledi. Güney Kore'nin Orta Doğu coğrafyasına yaklaşımında G20, OECD, Küresel Yeşil Büyüme Enstitüsü (GGGI) ve Orta Doğu İş Birliği Forumu (KMECF) gibi çatı kuruluşların yanı sıra bölgenin dinî ve kültürel yapısıyla kurduğu bağlar etkili oldu. Güney Kore, petrol ve gaz geliştiriciliği ile nükleer santral inşası gibi ekonomik alanlarda da rol almaya başladı. Son olarak Somalili korsanlara karşı yürütülen mücadelede aktif rol oynaması ilişkilerin güvenlik ve terörle mücadele boyutunda da önemli bir unsur olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Güney Kore'nin bölge ile ilişkilerini geliştirme çabaları ABD'nin bölge üzerindeki baskısı ve hâkim rolü düşünüldüğünde gölgede kalmış olsa da Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri (BAE), Suudi Arabistan'ın bölgedeki kontrolünü sonlandırmak ve güvenlik gereksinimleri açısından ABD'ye olan bağımlılığı azaltmak için Güney Kore ile iş birliğine yönelmiştir. Güney Kore de ABD'nin gözetimi olmaksızın ilk kez bir iş birliği içerisine girmiştir. Bu iş birliği nükleer santral projeleri, petrol ve gaz geliştiriciliği ve Doğu Asya'daki petrol rezervlerini kapsamaktadır. Daha sonra askerî alanlar da iş birliğine dâhil edilmiş ve Güney Kore BAE'ye Somalili korsanlarla mücadele ve eğitim amaçlı olarak asker göndermiştir.

BAE'nin ABD ile olan yakın ilişkileri sayesinde nükleer santral planları uluslararası kamuoyunun tepkisinin önlenmesini ve İran'ın nükleer faaliyetlerinden ayrı tutulmasını sağlayabilir. Ancak yine de BAE'nin çift kullanımlı teknolojiler için sıkı bir ihracat kontrol rejimi uygulayıp uygulamayacağı ve bu kapsamda nitelikli iş gücüne sahip olup olmadığı uluslararası kamuoyunun endişe ettiği konular arasında yer almaktadır. Bu süreç içerisinde Güney Koreli şirketlerden oluşan bir konsorsiyum BAE'de nükleer santral yapım ihalesini kazanarak nükleer santral için en önemli unsur olan reaktör yapım işine başlamıştır. Bunun üzerine iki ülke yöneticileri de bu anlaşmanın

ülkeler arası ilişkileri geliştirmede başlangıç olduğuna yönelik düşüncelerini açıklamış ve bu iş birliğinin uzun süreli ortaklığa dönüşeceğine ilişkin beklentilerini paylaşmışlardır. Güney Kore ayrıca BAE'den gelen öğrencilere ve teknik personele nükleer enerji konusunda eğitim verme rolünü de üstlenmiştir.

Nükleer santral yapımının yanı sıra BAE, ikinci en büyük petrol ithalatçısı konumunda olan Güney Kore ile petrol geliştiriciliği ve sevkiyatına ilişkin anlaşmalara da imza atmıştır. Güney Kore İhracat-İthalat Bankası'nın BAE'ye nükleer inşaat için verdiği otuz yıl geri ödemeli kredi Güney Kore'de muhaliflerin tepkisine neden olsa da bu durum Güney Kore'nin BAE'deki projelerine ne kadar önem atfettiğini de göstermektedir. BAE'nin 2009 yılında Kuzey Kore'den İran'a gönderilen yasa dışı silah yüklü gemilere müdahalede bulunmasıyla başlayan süreç İran ve Kuzey Kore'nin uluslararası kamuoyunun tepkisini çeken nükleer faaliyetleri de düşünüldüğünde uluslararası kamuoyunun endişesinin bir kat daha artmasına neden olmuştur. Güney Kore ile İran arasında bir husumet bulunmamasına karşın Kuzey Kore ile Güney Kore arasındaki anlaşmazlık düşünüldüğünde, BAE için Güney Kore'den silah tedariki en mantıklı yol olarak ortaya çıkmıştır. Bunun sonucunda iki ülke arasında 560.000 ABD doları tutarında silah anlaşması imzalanmıştır bu anlaşma ile BAE, Güney Kore'nin ilk yabancı silah ithalatçısı olmuştur.

Silah anlaşmasının yanı sıra Güney Kore tarafından BAE'ye stratejik ortaklık kapsamında barış ortamında eğitim faaliyetleri için asker gönderilmesi için iki ülke arasında mutabakata varılmıştır. Somalili korsanların Güney Kore gemisine saldırması ve aralarında Güney Korelilerin de olduğu gemi personelini rehin alması sürecinde Güney Kore ile BAE arasında rehine kurtarma operasyonu ve korsanların Güney Kore'ye gönderilmesi sürecinde gerçekleşen iki ülkenin ortak harekâtı ikili ilişkileri daha da perçinlemiştir.

BAE, Tunus ve Mısır'da hükümet değişikliklerine neden olan ve diğer bölge ülkelerine de yayılan ve hükümet karşıtı gösterilerin yoğun olarak görüldüğü, kamuoyunda "Arap Baharı" olarak adlandırılan süreçten uygulamaya koyduğu refah politikaları ve gelir dağılımındaki eşitsizliği gidermeye yönelik çalışmaları sayesinde ciddi oranda

etkilenmemiştir. Bu süreçte BAE’de ciddi bir çatışma ya da hükümet karşıtı gösteriler yaşanmamıştır. Libya’daki iç savaşta BAE ve Güney Kore’nin ortak tutumu ikili ilişkilere olumlu etki etmiştir. Öyle ki Libya’daki sivillerin boşaltılmasında Abu Dabi limanı Güney Kore tarafından gönderilen askerî birimlerin geçici durağı ve ikmal noktası olarak kullanılmıştır.

Güney Kore ve BAE arasında diplomatik ilişkilerin kurulduğu 1980 yılından itibaren iki ülke arasındaki ilişkiler ivme kazanarak devam etmiştir. Nükleer santral yapım işiyle birlikte de ikili ilişkiler “stratejik ortaklık” boyutuna dönüşmüştür. Bu ortaklık Arap dünyasının “Doğuya Bakış” politikasıyla da paralellik göstermektedir. Her ne kadar Körfez Arap Ülkeleri İşbirliği Konseyi içerisinde Suudi Arabistan’ın başat bir rolü olsa da Birleşik Arap Emirlikleri de konsey içerisinde inovasyon merkezi ve öncü ülke olması bakımından yadsınamaz bir role sahiptir. Bölgesel ölçekte ekonominin merkezi olmasının yanı sıra küresel ölçekte de ekonomik yeniden yapılanma sayesinde uluslararası piyasanın rekabetçi yapısına uygun konumda bulunan BAE’nin ekonomik gücü ve ileri teknolojisi de düşünüldüğünde “Doğuya Bakış” politikası kapsamında Güney Kore en mantıklı ortak olarak öne çıkmaktadır. Güney Kore ise sivil nükleer enerji kullanımına ilişkin ABD ile mutabakata varmasının ardından kullanmış olduğu ileri teknoloji ve sağlam mali yapısı sayesinde nükleer santral yapımında pek çok Batılı ülkeyi geride bırakmıştır. Güney Kore’nin Orta Doğu’ya yönelik başarılı girişimleri ve ilişkilerin farklı açılardan geliştirilmesine yönelik çabaları nedeniyle de BAE bölge içerisindeki tüm bu özelliklerinden dolayı çok önemli bir yer tutmaktadır.

Sonuç olarak, iki ülke arasındaki ortaklık Güney Kore’nin Orta Doğu politikasının ve BAE’nin “Doğuya Bakış” politikasının önemli bir parçasıdır. İki ülke arasındaki stratejik ortaklık çok yakın geçmişe dayansa da kısa süre içerisinde çok fazla yol alınmıştır. Uluslararası finans krizi ve Arap Baharı süresince hızlı ekonomik büyümesi ve Batı tarzı demokratik yapısıyla öne çıkan Güney Kore, Orta Doğulu ülkelerin Doğu Asya’daki Çin, Japonya ve diğer büyük ülkelere yönelik çekinceleri de düşünüldüğünde nispeten küçük bir ülke olması

dolayısıyla da öne çıkmaktadır. Daha açık bir ifadeyle Güney Kore ve BAE arasındaki ilişki Çin'in Orta Doğu politikalarına ciddi bir rakip olarak gözükmemektedir.

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