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Bilateral economic diplomacy between South Korea and Iraq

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Abstract

The article discusses the evolution of Iraq-South Korea relations since the late 1970s. It relies on Iraq's and South Korea's governmental platforms, local media outlets, and databases such as the Korea Statistical Information Service and the Observatory of Economic Complexity. This article argues that while in the 1970s both countries had economic rapport, bilateral economic diplomacy between both countries began in the 1980s, faced challenges in the 1990s and was revived by 2003. In the 1970s, the relationship was focused on trade and infrastructure. By the 1980s, official diplomatic and bilateral relations took shape, resulting in increased trade and South Korea energy ventures in Iraq. By the 1990s relations were dormant due to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the UN sanctions. In 2003, the diplomatic relationship was revived and further enhanced. These include energy, trade, infrastructure, and South Korea's humanitarian, military, and industrial assistance to Iraq. The post-2003 phase shows the expansion of ties between both countries including the Kurdistan Regional Government. Bilateral economic diplomacy between South Korea and Iraq has not been without political and security challenges, particularly concerning Iraq's political stability.

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KEYWORDS
economic diplomacy, energy, Iraq, South Korea, trade

INTRODUCTION

This article examines the development of bilateral relations, focusing on bilateral economic diplomacy between Iraq and South Korea. What are the key elements of the bilateral ties between the two countries? The article examines how bilateral relations have developed since the end of the 1970s in areas such as energy (oil and gas), trade, infrastructure, and development projects, which have shaped bilateral relations. As data sources, the article utilized resources such as Iraq's and South Korea's governmental web sites and official statements, Iraqi and Korean news outlets, and databases, namely the Observatory of Economic Complexity and Korea Statistical Information Service.

The article finds that South Korea–Iraq relations underwent four stages, which witnessed the employment of bilateral economic diplomacy's positive instruments (such as expanding diplomatic ties and trade promotion) and negative dimensions (such as sanctions and downgrading diplomatic rapport). The first stage was in the 1970s when the official relationship and bilateral economic diplomacy did not materialize, and the rapport was merely around trade and some infrastructure projects. The second stage was in the 1980s, in which diplomatic relationships and the core elements of bilateral economic diplomacy and expansion of energy and trade ties emerged. In the third stage (1990s), the bilateral relationship faced challenges as Iraq invaded Kuwait, the UN sanctions against Iraq, and negative instruments such as an economic embargo were imposed. The fourth stage is the post-2003 period when bilateral relations have ameliorated, and numerous positive instruments have been utilized. Post-2003, there has been a surge in the engagement of South Korea in Iraq. This stage showed Seoul's engagement with the federal government of Iraq and Iraq's Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) in various areas, including diplomacy, infrastructure, energy, trade, and industry.

The article is divided into four sections: First, the concept of economic diplomacy will be discussed. Then, this article covers the inception of the official bilateral relations focusing on the period during the Iran–Iraq War and the UN sanctions against Iraq. The third section examines Iraq–South Korea's relations in the post-2003 period, including South Korea's involvement in the US-led invasion and its main contribution to humanitarian and infrastructure ventures, and the restoration of diplomatic relations and the role of energy (oil and gas). Finally, this article tackles South Korea's involvement with the KRG.

ECONOMIC DIPLOMACY

While international trade started thousands of years ago, the use of the concept of economic diplomacy is relatively new (Cavalcanti Muniz, 2018, p. 69). The concept appeared in academic papers in the mid-1950s and was used rarely in the 1960s and the 1970s. In 2010, the usage of the term peaked, and it has been used in a thousand scientific papers per year (Van Bergeijk & Moons, 2018, pp. 3–4). Various fields, including International Relations, International Political Economy, and International Economics, study economic diplomacy, and each has its own research methodologies regarding how and why economy and diplomacy complete each other. Within economics, large-N panel studies and mathematical analysis are used for economic

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diplomacy, whilst in IR, the focus on economic diplomacy is qualitative, but several scholars employ quantitative approaches too, and case studies are common (Cavalanti Muniz, 2018, p. 68).

What is economic diplomacy? While there is no common definition, there have been a few attempts to develop definitions and analytical frameworks (Okano-Heijmans, 2013, pp. 1–3; Sainsbury, 2016, p. 614). This article adopts Moons and Bergeijk's definition, which states that economic diplomacy is a set of activities in the processes and methods for decision-making internationally centers around economic activities across borders, including import, export, migration, lending, investment, and aid carried out by states and nonstate actors globally (Moons & van Bergeijk, 2017, p. 1).

Diamond and McDonald (1996, p. 26) argued that economic diplomacy aims to shape, structure, and manage a system of international relationships over time to secure and gain a nation's interests. Gilpin and Gilpin (1987, p. 6) stated that the principle of economic diplomacy is to interrupt, employ, and direct commercial and political intercourse. Bayne and Woolcock, (2017, p. 15) state that economic diplomacy is carried out mainly by states, and it also includes nonstate actors and is about international economic issues. Economic diplomacy concerns what states do, and its scope includes all agencies and actors associated with states. All government officials and agencies with international tasks are engaging in economic diplomacy. This includes heads of government, ministers, independent public agencies, diplomats, and subnational bodies. Economic diplomacy displays how governments integrate nonstate actors in their decision-making process (Bayne & Woolcock, 2017, pp. 15–20). Nonstate actors include business firms, interest groups, nongovernmental organizations, and civil societies, which try to shape governments' policies. Economic diplomacy has been viewed as either a tool of a country's foreign policy or a partial vision for bolstering a state's commercial and broader economic interests (Qobo, 2010; Sainsbury, 2016, pp. 613–624).

Economic diplomacy explains a state's interactions with other actors and is a tool of foreign policy toward a geographic area or issue. In this vein, studies on states' economic diplomacy include South Africa (Qobo, 2010), China (Chaziza, 2019; Sun & Zoubir, 2015), Australia (Sainsbury, 2016), France (Badel, 2014), Japan (Okano-Heijmans, 2012), Saudi Arabia (Li, 2019), India (Dabhade, 2022), and Croatia (Peternel & Grešš, 2021). Economic diplomacy has also been applied to interactions between two or more states and international organizations, or multilateral economic diplomacy (Lee, 2001). For example, the Atlantic Conference (Dobson, 1984), the European Community and Japan (Rothacher, 1983), the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) plus three and India (Hoa, 2007), India and the World Trade Organization (Tripathi, 2008), Bangladesh and Nepal (Ahmed & Islam, 2019), and the European Union (Stephen, 2016). A few relevant studies examine South Korea–Middle East economic and diplomatic ties, such as South Korea and the United Arab Emirates (Jeong, 2019), South Korea and the Middle East (Jeong, 2022; Niu, 2015), and South Korea and the Persian or Arab Gulf (Azad, 2015).

Economic diplomacy functions at bilateral, regional, plurilateral, and multilateral levels and interests (Moons & van Bergeijk, 2018, p. 3). This article applies bilateral economic diplomacy, an analytical framework developed by Moons and van Bergeijk (2018). The latter classifies bilateral economic diplomacy into positive and negative interactions and instruments. Bilateral economic diplomacy's instruments include positive interactions such as state visits, trade missions, and the role of economic and diplomatic staff, export and trade promotion, development cooperation, bilateral investments, establishing and upgrading diplomatic representation, signing of treaties (including trade deals), and providing support through

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membership in international organizations as well as aid (Moons & van Bergeijk, 2018, p. 4). These positive instruments and interactions could strengthen relationships, economic ties, and contribute to a nation's welfare (Fernandes & Forte, 2022, p. 216; Van Bergeijk & Moons, 2018). Negative instruments include boycotts, embargos, financial and specific trade sanctions, temporary closing of embassies and consulates, and withdrawal of Ambassadors, nonadherence to rules, regulations, and/or obligations (Moons & van Bergeijk, 2018, p. 4). These negative instruments could be a combination of a state's punitive, conditional, or obstructionist behavior toward another state to achieve certain political, economic, or strategic objectives (Okano-Heijmans, 2010, p. 368). Economic diplomacy, including bilateral, can include coercive economic tools (negative) and noncoercive (positive) (Konoe, 2015, p. 181). Bilateral economic diplomacy's positive instruments can play a critical role in restoring ties when bilateral relations deteriorate at a later stage if governments put effort into restoring ties (Fuchs, 2018, p. 308).

Positive and negative interactions and instruments have been deployed in South Korean and Iraq relations before and after 2003. For instance, positive instruments have been witnessed in the reinstatement of official relations between Seoul and Baghdad post-2003 after the closure of diplomatic representations in both countries in the 1990s. Post-2003 Iraq's federal government and Seoul overcame their differences—Baghdad penalized some of South Korea's state-run companies for their oil deals with the KRG— through positive instruments of bilateral economic diplomacy, such as summits and signing trade agreements. The limited penalization could be considered as the utilization of negative instruments. Foreign missions and strong diplomatic representations through higher diplomatic representation levels are part of promoting bilateral economic diplomacy (Lapeyronie et al., 2018, p. 354). South Korea and Iraq have been expanding their diplomatic representations in both countries, including South Korea's presence in Baghdad and upgrading its presence in Erbil, the capital of the Kurdistan Region of Iraq (KR-I), and this underlines the employment of positive instruments.

Broadly, a turning point for the success of South Korea's economic diplomacy was in 2008 when it won a seat in the G20. Seoul has seen an expansion of its multilateral economic diplomacy, including its increasing role in South-South trade and economic cooperation (Mo, 2016, p. 590). The term economic diplomacy has been utilized by the governments of South Korea and Iraq. President Yoon Suk Yoel said in July 2022 that economic diplomacy is paramount and that he is prepared to go anywhere if it helps the economy (Shin, 2022). South Korea's government, including the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, clearly indicated the importance of economic diplomacy stating, "Korea's key diplomatic tasks include strengthening economic diplomacy and development cooperation to promote national interest." Its official interpretation of economic diplomacy and a set of goals include diplomatic tools, expanding economic cooperation and development, which fall within the aforementioned instruments, and interactions of positive bilateral economic diplomacy (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, 2022). Generally, the subsequent Iraqi governments post-2003, including Iraq's PM Haider al-Abadi in 2018 and Iraq's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in 2022, recognize economic diplomacy's importance, including its instruments (CNBC, 2018; Iraqi News Agency, 2022). Post-2003, Iraq's overall foreign policy priorities focus on diplomacy, economy, and security (Gulmohamad, 2021, p. 105) and these priorities are compatible with core elements of economic diplomacy. However, these priorities are reactionary to Iraq's needs, and Iraq does not have a specific, consistent economic diplomacy plan and a roadmap on how to achieve them (Abdel-Amir Al-Gharibawi, 2023; Ali Hassan, 2020; Gulmohamad, 2021, pp. 105–109).

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THE ONSET OF THE BILATERAL TIES

Iraq was a latecomer to South Korea's official Middle East diplomatic relations compared to other Middle Eastern countries. South Korea began diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Iran, and Israel at the beginning of the 1960s under President Park Chung-hee, and Korean chaebols commenced engaging in the Middle East. Before the start of South Korea and Iraq's bilateral ties in the 1980s, South Korea had been involved in Iraq, as its economy required foreign markets to sell its products and services (Levkowitz, 2010). Iraq's crude oil exports to South Korea and Korean infrastructure projects in Iraq were essential for both countries' economies. In 1978, Hyundai built water desalination facilities in Basra, and Iraq exported oil worth $23.6 million to Seoul (Yonhap News, 2019). These economic ties contributed to the surfacing of bilateral economic diplomacy between both countries in the following decade. See Table 1 on bilateral trade.

South Korea and Iraq during the Iran–Iraq war

During the 1980s, elements of bilateral economic diplomacy's positive instruments emerged, such as establishing and upgrading diplomatic representations, trade promotion, and signing agreements. These elements were gradually embedded in both countries' bilateral economic diplomacy, yet they faced some hurdles due to Iraq's volatility, including the Iran–Iraq War. Both countries tried to overcome the insecurity and uphold the positive instruments of bilateral economic diplomacy.

The diplomatic liaison between Iraq and South Korea began on June 26, 1981, and the Iraqi consulate started to operate in South Korea (Jeong, 2022, p. 135). The Iran–Iraq War between 1980 and 1988 created an era of instability, and the number of Korean citizens and companies gradually reduced, and at least seven Korean commercial ships came under attack, particularly in Musa Bay (Azad, 2015, p. 77). When the war broke out in September 1980, 739 Korean workers in Basra decided to leave and Hyundai logistical networks in the region facilitated their departure (Jeong, 2022, p. 138). Nevertheless, South Korea maintained its ties with Iran and Iraq and had a neutral policy. South Korea continued trade and some projects with both countries. In the mid-1980s, South Korea had 9000 construction workers in Baghdad and Basra, but by the end of this decade, the number of Koreans reduced to nearly 1000 (Levkowitz, 2013a).

The Korea Institute of Economics and Technology estimated that construction tenders in Iraq in August 1988 were worth approximately $7 billion (Jeong, 2022, p. 138). In the 1980s, South Korea's Hyundai Corp built Iraq's largest power plant, which generated electricity in Iskandariyah, which operated on Iraq's oil and employed Iraqis, Germans, Russians, and Koreans during its service; the US-led coalition forces hit this plant in 1991 and 2003 (Brody, 2008). In 1983, Baghdad and Seoul signed an agreement for trade, economic, and technological cooperation. In 1984, the Iraqi-Korean Joint Committee was established and had meetings (Al-Mawrid, 2020). Despite the war, South Korea viewed Iraq as the most fertile country for the construction sector in the region after Saudi Arabia (Jeong, 2022, p. 138).

On July 9, 1989, South Korean-Iraqi official diplomatic relations were upgraded, and the Iraqi embassy in Seoul and South Korea's embassy in Baghdad opened (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, 2023). In July 1989, Ho-Joon Choi, the South Korean Foreign Minister, visited Iraq for 3 days, and the diplomatic mission's figure was elevated to an

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TABLE 1 Trade between Iraq and South Korea.

Year	Exports from Iraq to South Korea (oil)	Exports from South Korea to Iraq
2022	$8.52b	$111.78m
2021	$5.32b	$986.4m
2020	$3.78b	$935m
2019	$7.11b	$1.95b
2018	$8.48b	$1.91b
2017	$5.66b	$1.46b
2016	$4.57b	$1.44b
2015	$5.6b	$1.43b
2014	$6b	$2.18b
2013	$8.2b	$1.97b
2012	$8.94b	$1.87b
2011	$8.09b	$1.54b
2010	$3.94b	$2.1b
2009	$3.36b	$785m
2008	$3.78b	$368m
2007	$2.7b	210m
2006	$800m	$109m
2005	$597m	$68m
2004	$360m	$125m
2003	$50.3m	$35.6m
2002	$33.8m	$86.5m
2001	$24.6m	S73.2m
2000	$445m	$23m
1999	$151m	$9.6m
1998	$66.8m	$2.2m
1991	$365,000	$57,000
1990	$173m	$89.8m
1989	$63.9m	$67.1m
1988	$723.6m	$42.1m
1984	$208.4m	$1.4m
1983	$157.4m	$9.3m
1979	$63.8m	$12m
1978	$23.6m	$1.1m

Abbreviations: b, billion; m, million.

Sources: Al Naeem News (2022), alghadpress (2022), Economic Complexity Index (2023), Korean Statistical Information Service (2023), and Statista (2023).

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ambassadorial level. South Korea's government encouraged South Korean companies to be involved in Iraq after the Iran–Iraq War and post-war reconstruction projects were valued at around US$30 billion (Azad, 2015, p. 91). This year South Korea experienced economic prosperity and export expansion (Levkowitz, 2010). Meanwhile, Iraq faced financial challenges, particularly sovereign debt default, as Iraq's debt service was more than half of Iraqi oil revenues (Hinrichsen, 2019). Iraq's export capacity had been restricted as its oil exports faced OPEC (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries)-restricted quotas and an oil glut (Azad, 2015, p. 91; Jiyad, 2001, pp. 15–18).

South Korean companies' hope for post-Iraq–Iran war reconstruction contracts did not fully materialize as they managed only to obtain less than 1% of contracts worth $500 million (Jeong, 2022, p. 142). South Korea's minimal share in Iraqi development projects did not diminish the economic ties. Ultimately, the next phase was molded by Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and its implications on bilateral relations, which hindered the progress of both countries' positive interactions of bilateral economic diplomacy.

South Korea and Iraq from 1990–2003

In the 1990s, negative bilateral economic diplomacy instruments were used, namely, embargos, sanctions, and the temporary closure of embassies and the withdrawal of ambassadors. Iraq's financial setbacks and the invasion of Kuwait hindered the progress of bilateral relations. This resulted in Iraq missing the prospects of South Korean companies to invest and rebuild Iraq after 8 years of war. In the wake of Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990, South Korea managed to evacuate its citizens (around 1300 workers) from Iraq and Kuwait, via Iranian and Saudi borders (Azad, 2015, pp. 91–95). Initially, South Korea held back from taking any firm position and announced its objection to the use of force. Several Korean civil societies, such as the Church Women's Association, did not want South Korea sending troops to the Gulf War, and they organized an event attended by US Ambassador Donald Gregg, the Iraqi Deputy Ambassador, and South Korea's Defense Minister Lee Jong-gu. South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs spokesperson had a soft position regarding Iraq and issued a statement on August 2, 1990, hoping to resolve the conflict peacefully and urged Iraqi security forces to withdraw from Kuwait quickly (Jeong, 2022, pp. 138–141). After the United States's tacit pressure on South Korea to back the Gulf War, Seoul agreed to support sanctions against Iraq. Seoul demonstrated “symbolic support” by sending 150 medical teams and basic supplies such as medicines, uniforms, boots, and gas masks. South Korea contributed around $500 million to the Desert Storm Operations in 1991. South Korea reluctantly agreed to be involved in the war, and as its first military involvement in the Middle East, it posed a political dilemma for the country (Levkowitz, 2013b, p. 10). It was relevant for the South Korean government that the Gulf War was backed by the UN Security Council (UNSC) resolution 665, which was passed on August 25, 1990. The UNSC resolutions, including no. 678, passed on November 29, 1990, provided the legal umbrella for South Korea's participation. South Korea grudgingly agreed—due to fear of rising oil prices—to participate in the oil embargo against Iraq and the trade ban under the UNSC resolutions, particularly 660 and 661, which were passed in August 1990 (Bridges, 1992, p. 142). Focusing on these negative economic diplomacy instruments, such as the closure of embassies, embargoes, and sanctions, could be part of South Korea's punitive, conditional, and obstructionist behavior shaped by the United States and UN towards Iraq. The

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aims of these measures included forcing Iraq out of Kuwait, paying reparations, and destroying weapons of mass destruction.

The South Korean Embassy in Baghdad remained open during Iraq's invasion of Kuwait in 1990 with one staff member. In 1991, the South Korean embassy closed, and 3 years later, in 1994, the Iraqi embassy in Seoul closed (The Korea Times, 2010). Hyundai E&C remained in Iraq as they had projects valued at $1.3 billion. After the Gulf War, the UN compensation commission was created in 1991, and South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs offered Hyundai $5 million for losses and damages. The compensation came from the UN-controlled Iraqi oil exports (Al Bawaba, 2001).

During the Gulf War, South Korea's trade volume decreased in the Middle East— excluding in the Gulf States where trade increased—due to the risk associated with the war. Trade with Iraq declined to the point where Iraq was South Korea's smallest trading partner. Iraq opposed South Korea's participation in the Gulf War, but maintained a rapport. South Korea espoused a pragmatic approach toward Iraq by retaining some ties, coordinating with various Iraqi ministries, including Iraq's Ministry of Trade, and convening meetings with figures in the business sector (Azad, 2015, p. 106; Jeong, 2022, p. 144).

During the 1990s, South Korea and Iraq rapports continued through the UN Oil for Food programme established in 1995 and South Korea maintained some commercial links to Iraq. From 1990 to 1999, South Korea and Iraq's total trade was around $500 million. The state-funded Korea Trade Promotion Corporation (KOTRA) office reopened in Baghdad in October 1999 (Azad, 2015, p. 145; Jeong, 2022, p. 160) and promoted access to some Korean businesses. From 2000 to 2003 before the US-led invasion, trade continued at a lower volume. For example, in 2001, Korean trade with Iraq included Hyundai Motor shipping 400 buses to Iraq worth US $9 million to be operated by the Iraqi Education Ministry. Hyundai began marketing activities in 1996 and was leading the Iraqi vehicle market; in 2000, Hyundai shared 28% of the Iraqi market compared to Mercedes (17%) and Renault (13%) (bcusack, 2001). At the beginning of the 2000s, Korean automakers and electronics, such as LG Electronics, Kia Corporation, and Daewoo Group, were preparing to export various products to Iraq (Jeong, 2022, p. 145). South Korea, its chaebols, and other businesses' desire to capitalize on Iraq's potentially lucrative projects persisted and became more involved.

IRAQ–SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS POST-2003

The post-2003 era has witnessed the deployment of many positive instruments of bilateral economic diplomacy. For example, state visits between both countries, trade missions and the role of economic and diplomatic staff, export and trade promotion, development cooperation, reopening and upgrading diplomatic representations, signing various treaties, and South Korea providing aid and supporting Iraq directly and through international organizations. Both countries have used these positive instruments. These instruments became their foreign policy tools, particularly toward each other, as they sought to advance economic interests.

South Korea's second military involvement in the Middle East was Operation Iraqi Freedom. After the United States asked Seoul to participate in the war against Iraq in November 2002 and officially in March 2003 and send active military troops, Seoul delayed making a decision and first sent noncombat troops. South Korean critics were vocal, and public opinion was severely divided (Geunwook Lee, 2006, p. 481). In the wake of the Iraq War in 2003, South Korea pulled out its citizens from Iraq. It sent cabinet delegations to 15 Middle

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Eastern states to not alienate them and eradicate prospective anti-Korean sentiments (Azad, 2015, p. 116). A month into the Iraq War, South Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced its plan for Iraq's reconstruction, and the Ministry planned $10 million of immediate humanitarian assistance through the UNHCR, UNICEF, World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO). Seoul's plan included the swift restoration of diplomatic ties with Iraq (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, 2003a, 2003b). South Korea's embassy in Baghdad reopened on May 17, 2003 (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, 2003a, 2003b) and the Iraqi embassy in Seoul reopened in December 2006 (Yonhap News, 2019).

The United States demanded that South Korea send troops to a battle area such as Mosul, but Korea sent troops to noncombat zones. In April 2003, South Korea dispatched 1180 troops composed of Seohee and Jema units as part of the multinational forces-Iraq (MNF-I). They mainly included engineering and medical support in Southern Iraq, Nasiriya. These units stayed for 1 year, and their activities focused on humanitarian recovery and medical services to the MNF base operations and locals (MND Defense Policy Division, I. S. S. A., 2008). Following the US-led invasion and anti-US insurgency, particularly outside the KR-I, several Koreans faced abductions, shootings, and robbery by criminal networks and violent groups—that is, Nitham Kouri specifically targeted Koreans—which hindered the progress of some projects (Hong & Demick, 2004; Jeong, 2022, p. 150). South Koreans have a history of Christian missionaries in the Middle East, including Iraq (Onishi, 2004). Post-2003 some South Korean missionaries have been active. In coordination with Iraqi Christians, such as an Iraqi pastor, Estawri Haritounian, they planned to open a seminary in Baghdad at the National Protestant Evangelical Church. In Iraq, a young South Korean missionary (Kim, 2011) was kidnapped and killed by insurgents in 2004; the terrorists, then known as Jamat al-Tawhid Wal-Jihad, demanded the withdrawal of South Korean forces. Seoul refused the terrorists' demands. However, Seoul banned Korean Christian groups from working there (The Korea Herald, 2011).

Again, in September 2003, the United States asked South Korea to send military forces to Iraq. After the UNSC 1511 resolution passed on October 16, 2003, which demanded Iraqi leaders draw up a plan for a new constitution and elections, Seoul sent a small combat division. Despite objections from his backers and cabinet members, President Roh Moo-Hyun's administration (2003–2008) unenthusiastically sent troops (Geunwook Lee, 2006, p. 490; Hwang, 2017, p. 16). In July 2004, South Korea dispatched 3566 soldiers, the Zaytun "olive" division, to the noncombat areas of Kirkuk and Erbil. The total number of dispatched troops, including the returned personnel, is 19,000 (Jung, 2008). South Korea had the third largest number of foreign troops in Iraq, after the United States and the United Kingdom, and constituted 2% of the overall foreign troops and multinational force in Iraq (Park, 2017). The mission was called a "peacekeeping mission" in the Middle East, the division's military slogan was reconstruction, and it was based in Erbil (Azad, 2015, p. 116; South Korean troops deployed to Iraq (2004) (Korea Defence Blog, 2004). Zaytun division included a medical battalion for humanitarian support, an engineering battalion for reconstruction assistance and four multifunctional battalions for special operations. It had largely civilian tasks, reconstruction projects, and logistical equipment. Zaytun division's operation "Operation Green Angel" carried out 67 tasks, including the promotion of friendship, supporting the new Iraqi Security Forces, humanitarian assistance, and contributing to infrastructure development (Geunwook Lee, 2006, p. 482; MND Defense Policy Division, I. S. S. A., 2008; The Asan Institute for Policy Studies, 2014).

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When Zaytun division arrived in Erbil, it installed some public waterworks and invited locals to various cultural activities such as football matches, festivals, offering food and art activities for children, and operating Taekwondo classes. Zaytun's poster stated, "We are here for reconstruction and peace" (Korea Defence Blog, 2004). The division offered local doctors' and nurses' internship programs and provided medicines. The program supported local police and established vocational training centers to enhance employability skills, for example, auto maintenance programs, computing, and operating heavy machinery, and 2300 Iraqis graduated (Voice of America, 2009). The division built 10 schools and established a hospital that treated 88,800 patients on-site and could treat hundreds of outpatients daily (Sung-ki, 2008). Zaytun supplied local security forces with communication, investigation, and protection equipment, and some vehicles (Geunwook Lee, 2006, p. 150). South Korea's mission was completed in December 2008, and the Korean Ministry of National Defence announced that Zaytun's activities strengthened bilateral relations, including future economic cooperation between Iraq and South Korea (Sung-ki, 2008).

South Korea banned its citizens from traveling to Iraq since 2004 and more strictly in 2007 due to poor security. In September 2022, the ban was extended for 6 months (Korea JoongAng Daily, 2006). However, South Korea gradually has been allowing Korean citizens to travel to parts of Iraq for specific ventures (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, 2018). An estimated 1600 Koreans in Iraq in 2020 are involved in projects and businesses (Yonhap News, 2020). Iraqi foreign ministers, such as Hoshyar Zebari in 2012 and Ibrahim al-Jaafari in 2017, have repeatedly asked Seoul to lift the ban on Koreans visiting Iraq, ultimately allowing for more business and increasing trade volume and investments (Al Journal News, 2017). In June 2023, the Iraqi-Korean Friendship Committee and a South Korean parliamentary delegation discussed ways to increase visits and the delegation's plan to recommend Seoul's government lift the travel ban.

Post-2003, Seoul and Baghdad relations have not been affected by Pyongyang. North Korea has not directly challenged Iraq–South Korean relations, as post-2003 Iraq did not restore diplomatic ties with Pyongyang. While Saddam's regime had ties with Pyongyang, Iraq post-Saddam has been more cautious.

Ascendance of bilateral relations

Economic diplomacy's function is to bring and incentivize commercial and financial benefits. Economic diplomacy also becomes the main interest of foreign policy and bilateral ties (Hussain, 2006, p. 37) and this is observed in the bilateral relationship between Baghdad and Seoul. In April 2007, the first summit between Iraqi PM Nouri al-Maliki, accompanied by several cabinet members, and President Roh Moo-Hyun was held in Seoul. The summit was on energy (oil and gas) and reconstruction, and al-Maliki had meetings with Korean business leaders. Al-Maliki also met PM Han Duck-soo and discussed how to accelerate Korean firms' contribution to Iraq's reconstruction projects and cooperation in energy (UPI, 2007a).

In February 2009, Iraqi President Jalal Talabani, with 20 Iraqi and Kurdish officials, visited Seoul. He was the first Iraqi president to visit since establishing diplomatic ties. Discussions focused on expanding cooperation and fostering bilateral relations, and Talabani applauded Zaytun's contributions to reconstruction and peacekeeping. The summit resulted in a $3.55 billion deal, and both governments signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) detailing South Korea's participation in Iraq such as constructing power plants and developing oil fields

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in Basra (The Korea Times, 2009a). Both countries signed an MOU to expedite the entry of Korean construction companies to Iraq (Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, Republic of Korea, 2009). In 2011, PM al-Maliki visited Seoul for the second time, met President Lee Myung-bak for bilateral talks, and signed the Korea–Iraq Economic and Energy Cooperation Agreement, a framework to increase two-way trade and investment (Kim, 2011).[1]

The Iraqi-Korean Joint Committee resumed in 2007 and held eight meetings. The eighth meeting in March 2017 was attended by Hoin Kang, the Korean Minister of Construction, and Nafea' al-Awsi, the Iraqi Minister of Land and Infrastructure. They discussed cooperation in services, housing, construction, transport, communications, energy and natural resources, health, environmental care, agriculture, food, and education (Iraqi News Agency, 2020; Korean Embassy in Iraq, 2023). Since then, the joint committee meetings were suspended due to instability including Iraq's 2017 anticorruption protests. In 2019, a preparatory meeting for a joint committee was conducted at the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and the ninth joint meeting in 2020 was postponed due to COVID-19 (Al-Mawrid, 2020; Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022). In June 2023, the nine joint meetings were held and discussions covered the completion of Bismaya City, projects including a metro across Baghdad and signing memorandums (Yoo, 2023). These joint meetings were about collaboration in various sectors and paved the way for Iraqi and Korean officials to review current projects and consider proposals for future ventures.

In January 2013, Iraq's National Investment Commission signed a strategic memorandum of cooperation with the KOTRA to raise the size of investment and economic exchange. The signing ceremony was attended by both countries' officials and representatives of companies (Iraq Business News, 2013). Post-2003 and after lifting the UN sanctions on Iraq, Iraq has been flooded with South Korean products, including vehicles and electronic devices. South Korean firms have been winning major contracts, valued at $71 billion in 2010. The number of South Korean contracts in Iraq has declined over the last few years (Kurdistan 24, 2019). In 2011, South Korean firms won a contract to develop 25 diesel power plants for Iraq's national electricity grid to produce 2500 MW, which cost around $3 billion. The deal with the Iraqi Ministry of Electricity included Hyundai Heavy Industries, South Korea's STX Heavy Industries and Doosan Heavy Industries, and LG Corp (Hafidh, 2011).

South Korea's colossal construction projects in Iraq are unprecedented, and they are shaping Iraq's infrastructure and development. One of South Korea's main construction projects is Bismaya City, Iraq's largest residential construction project located southeast of Baghdad. The Iraqi government awarded a $10 billion contract to Hanwha in 2012, which aimed to build 100,000 housing units (Hanwha Group, 2014). Bismaya's construction temporarily stalled in 2020 after building 30,000 units due to late payments. Both governments' delegations and members of parliaments have been checking the progress (Lee, 2018; Zawya Staff, 2023). Another sizable Korean construction project is Grand Al-Faw Port in the south of Basra, and upon completion, it will be one of the largest ports in the world. In 2010, the Iraqi government publicized the construction of the port, which was delayed due to financial and political instability. Baghdad, with international reconstruction companies including Archirodon and Korea's Daewoo E&C, worked on dredging and constructing the $1 billion breakwater, which is the longest in the world, 14.523 km (Aguinaldo, 2019; Geosense, 2023). In 2020, Iraq signed a $2.625 billion contract with Daewoo to build the first phase of the Grand Al-Faw Port's terminals, which are expected to be partly finished in 2028 and fully completed in 2038. The South Korean Port of Busan and SM Line Gyeong-in's governing body provide operational support for the container terminal (Maritime Gateway, 2022; Mohammed,

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2020). Daewoo's other project in Iraq is the Middle East's largest underwater tunnel, 2.5 km valued at $86 million, connecting Al-Faw Port to Iraqi transport networks. The tunnel is part of the al-Harir Silk Tunnel, associated with China's Belt and Road Initiative projects in Iraq (Zawya Staff, 2021). While China is a prominent stakeholder in the Iraqi oil sector (China purchases 40% of Iraq's oil) and increasingly in trade and infrastructure, offering these projects and investment opportunities such as Grand Al-Faw Port to South Korean firms has disappointed Chinese firms (Gul, 2023, p. 357).

Over the last decade, Iraqis and South Koreans have discussed the establishment of a South Korean vehicle plant assembly in Iraq. KIA has been leading these talks with the Iraqi State Company for Automotive to install an assembly plant in the Babylon governorate. This venture underlines Seoul's plan to contribute to Iraq's postwar development in the industrial sector (Thomson Reuters Projects News, 2019). A bilateral achievement was when both governments signed a double taxation exemption agreement in 2019, which was negotiated in 2016 (Embassy of the Republic of Iraq, 2019). This reduces South Korean firms' costs, namely, taxes, and encourages bilateral trade and Korean investments in Iraq. This stresses the positive instruments of bilateral economic diplomacy between Baghdad and Seoul that seek to solidify the economic nexus.

Bilateral economic diplomacy can enhance states' policies on national security through financial resources (including investments in military capabilities) and agreements to increase security levels (Papadimitriou & Pistikou, 2014, pp. 42–44). Regarding military and security cooperation, in 2008, Korean Minister of National Defence Lee Sang-Hee visited Iraq and met Iraqi Defense Minister Abdul Qadir Jassim. They underscored military collaboration after the Korean troops' withdrawal (The Korea Times, 2008a). In February 2012, Iraqi Foreign Minister Hoshyar Zebari visited Seoul to negotiate an arms deal to purchase T-50 light (Fighting Eagle) combat aircraft. In 2013, Iraq signed a deal with Korea Aerospace Industries and bought 24 T-50 and to train Iraqi pilots for two decades costing $2 billion (Reuters, 2013). Iraq purchased South Korean armored vehicles (Promoter DAPC-2 4 × 4), artilleries, and missiles (Al Jazeera, 2013). During the war on Daesh in 2014, Iraqi Defence Minister Khalid al-Obeildi visited Seoul and met Korean counterpart Han Min-goo and foreign minister Yun Byung-Se, and they signed an MOU for military cooperation that included training and supporting Iraqi air force personnel (Al-Sumaria, 2014).

Humanitarian, technical, and development aid and grants are positive instruments of bilateral economic diplomacy, and aid can elevate diplomatic relations (De Haan & Warmerdam, 2018, p. 373; Li, 2019, p. 110). Since 2003, South Korea has consistently provided aid to Iraq directly and through international organizations. Choi Sungsoo, the South Korean Ambassador to Iraq, said, "The Korean government and the Korean people have always been making the best efforts to share their development experience with Iraq." Sungsoo said South Korea provided aid via the United Nations Development Program's Funding Facility for Stabilization in the post-Daesh rehabilitation stage for Iraq's stability (OCHA, 2022). This $26.9 million donation supported the stabilization and return of Iraqi International Displaced Persons (IDPs) to their areas. South Korea's various governmental agencies have been involved in Iraq, such as Korea's Official Development Assistant, which increased its reconstruction and relief aid volume to Iraq (Hwang, 2017, p. 55). Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), which was established by and coordinates with Korea's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and its embassies and consulates, set up two branches in Baghdad and Erbil and contributed to various socioeconomic projects, including building several schools and hospitals (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea, 2019). KOICA and international organizations such as the International Organization for Migration helped Iraq during

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the war against Daesh and COVID-19. The assistance contributed to local economic recovery and helped local businesses and small-sized enterprises through grants, and building partnerships with local actors (International Organization for Migration, 2021; UN-Habitat Iraq, 2022). KOICA ventures involve funding the Iraqi-Korean Heart Centre for Children, setting up conferences on economic development, and environmental and energy issues, providing the government with assistance to combat gender-based violence and poverty, and supporting vulnerable communities (The Global Coalition Against Daesh, 2021). South Korea, through the WFP, supported Iraqi farmers by distributing grants for sustainable agriculture and aiding the obtainment of solar-powered water pumps in areas affected by climate change and increasing salinity in southern Iraq (WFP, 2022). In 2019, Baghdad and Seoul discussed opportunities for renewable energy in Iraq.

SOUTH KOREAN AND IRAQI OIL AND GAS COOPERATION

Securing efficient energy and energy deals can be obtained through the employment of economic diplomacy's positive instruments such as export and trade promotion, official meetings, bilateral investments, and agreements (Aguinaldo, 2019; Moons & van Bergeijk, 2018, p. 4; Dusciac & Robu, 2019, p. 43). Post-2003, Iraq sent 100 Iraqi Oil Ministry officials to attend five training courses regarding the oil industry in Iraq (Song, 2015, p. 68). In 2013, Iraqi Oil Minister Abdul Kareem Al-Luaibi said that "relations between Seoul and Iraq are strong and developing fast"(The Korea Herald, 2013). During a summit with Iraqi officials, Jae-do Moon, the Vice Minister of Trade, Industry, and Energy, claimed that Iraqi oil helps South Korea during unstable periods in the petroleum markets and raises its energy efficiency (Kim, 2011). Post-2003, South Korea was one of the first foreign countries to secure the development and exploration of an oil deal in Iraq, namely the Bazian oilfield in the KR-I in 2007. The deal was sealed by a consortium of South Korean energy companies led by state-run Korea National Oil Corporation (KNOC) (38%), SK Energy (19%), Samchully (9.3%), and Daesung (9.3%) (Ryu, 2007). Additionally, in 2008 KNOC secured four exploration blocks in the KR-I, including Qusha Tappa and Sangaw South, and partnered with Sangaw North and Hawler blocs. At the time of signing the contracts, the aforementioned fields were estimated to have around 7.2 billion barrels, and the firms were expected to extract 1.9 billion barrels. A key element of KNOC's oil deal worth $2.1 billion was that KNOC, with reconstruction companies, would develop the KR-I's infrastructure, including water services, power facilities, and sewage systems. Nonetheless, South Korea was caught up in disputes between Iraq's federal government and the KRG over the power of oil and gas policy, oil management, and control. Baghdad disapproved oil deals with the KR-I and the Iraqi Oil Ministry sent warning letters to SK Energy and KNOC threatening penalties, including cutting them off from oil supplies or excluding them from future oil projects if they did not terminate their contracts with the KRG (Davis, 2008; Iraq Business News, 2010; Reuters, 2007; UPI, 2007b).[2]

The summit between the Iraqi and Korean Presidents in Seoul in 2009 attempted to forge closer energy relations, and an MOU was signed to ease South Korean firms' investments in the Iraqi oil and gas sector (Moon, 2009). This event also led to the signing of a nonbinding agreement to develop oil fields valued at $3.55 billion, such as fields in Basra, and the deal highlighted Seoul's commitment in helping to build Iraq's infrastructure (Arabian Business, 2009). The state-run Korean Gas Corporation (KOGAS) played a key role in Iraq's oil and gas sector. In 2009, KOGAS (22.5% share) and three other Russian, Turkish, and Malaysian energy

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firms sealed a deal to develop Iraq's Badra oilfield, estimated to contain three billion barrels and located 160 km southeast of Baghdad (Trade Arabia, 2014). The companies invested $3.52 billion to pump 170,000 barrels daily, and KOGAS secured 1 million barrels a year (The Korea Times, 2009b). In the same year, KOGAS, with Italian and US firms, won a contract to develop Iraq's Zubair oilfield, predicted to contain around 3.7 billion barrels (Reuters, 2009). In 2010 KOGAS, a Chinese and Turkish energy company, won a contract to develop the Mansuriyah gas field. After a few years, the contract was canceled as the energy firms faced difficulties producing gas and electricity as originally intended (DMS Projects, 2023; Reuters, 2011). In 2011, KOGAS and Kazakhstan's KasMunaiGas were awarded Anbar's Akkas gas field, which temporarily stalled due to Daesh's capture of the governorate, and work resumed in 2017; in 2022, KOGAS pulled out as KasMuniaGas withdrew (MEED, 2018).

Other prominent Korean energy companies have secured major contracts in Iraq. These include the Korean STX industries to build a gas (550 km long) pipeline in Iraq's Anbar Province at a $400 million cost in 2014 (Lee, 2014). In 2014, a South Korean consortium led by Hyundai E&C secured a contract of $6 billion to develop an oil refinery in Karbala. This refinery produces oil with a capacity of 140,000 barrels/day and supplies 60 MW of electricity to the Iraqi national grid (Lee, 2023). In Seoul in September 2014, Iraqi Oil Minister Abdul Karim al-Luaibi and his South Korean counterpart Yoon Sang-Jick signed an MOU on joint storage of Iraqi crude at an oil terminal in Seoul (Lee & Wells, 2014).

Iraq was ranked the 10th largest oil supplier to South Korea in 2005, and in 2011 and 2021, Iraq climbed to fourth (Trading Economics, 2023). Recently, Iraq dropped to the fifth due to South Korea's resource diversification, including purchasing oil from Russia and the United States (Reuters., 2014). GS Caltex Corp, a South Korean refinery firm, is one of the top buyers of Basra's crude oil (Mehdi, 2020; Tan & Cho, 2014). Over just more than two decades, Iraq's oil exports to South Korea have increased at an annualized rate of around 21%, from $63.9 million in 1998 to $5.32 billion in 2021. Meanwhile, South Korean exports, mainly vehicles, trucks, and electronic devices and machines to Iraq, have augmented too, from $42.1 million in 1995 to $986.4 million in 2021 (see Table 1 for more details). Iraq's exports to South Korea are higher than South Korea's exports to Iraq, primarily because of Seoul's oil imports from Iraq. Seoul is on the course of the energy transition to renewable energy and carbon neutrality by 2050. Hong et al (2019) expect South Korea's oil imports and fossil fuel reliance to notably and gradually decrease (Hong et al., 2019, p. 430). Long-term, South Korea would not be dependent on Iraq's oil.

A key similarity between South Korea's relationship with Iraq and other oil-rich Middle Eastern countries such as Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates is the fossil fuel energy ties. South Korea has a trade deficit with the aforementioned countries due to Seoul's energy imports (Workman, 2023). Beyond energy, a key difference is that Iraq stands out from the aforementioned countries as Seoul doesn't encourage the travel of Korean citizens to Iraq for tourism because of the insecurity.

POST-2003 SOUTH KOREA AND THE KURDISTAN REGIONAL GOVERNMENT RELATIONS

Economic diplomacy applies not only to state-to-state interactions it also includes nonstate actors and subnational or nonsovereign entities (Saner & Yiu, 2001), such as the KRG. Iraq–South Korea relations are not solely with the federal government of Iraq, as the extent of the rapport embraces Seoul and the KRG's ties. Economic diplomacy's positive instruments,

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such as state visits, diplomatic staff, trade promotion, development cooperation, and establishing and upgrading diplomatic representation and aid, have been employed by Seoul toward the KR-I. President Lee Myung-bak considered the KR-I a long-term investment rather than a temporary transactional economic benefit (Azad, 2013, p. 558). South Korea's engagement in the KR-I post-2003 progressed by Zaytun division's success in developing ties with local communities, and this opened the way for investment and Seoul's expansion of ties with the KRG (Choi, 2020; EKurd Daily, 2008). South Korea tapped into the KR-I's energy resources as part of Myung-bak's economic and energy diplomacy toward the KR-I. South Korean firms secured dozens of lucrative investment deals, and Korea's first oil deal—not approved by the federal government of Iraq—was in the KR-I in 2007. The economic rapport between Seoul and Erbil has been accompanied by diplomatic engagement. Korean forces' presence until 2008 allowed South Korean officials and representatives to visit the KR-I and engage with it early on (Azad, 2013, p. 557). In February 2008, South Korea's President Lee Myng-bak met the KRG's PM Nechervan Barzani, and the KRG signed an energy project with a consortium led by KNOC to develop four oil blocs in Bazian (EKurd Daily, 2008). This deal encompassed Korean construction firms to develop the KR-I's infrastructure, such as water supply, power plants, and sewage projects worth $2.1 billion (Rigzone & the KRG, 2008; The Korea Times, 2008b).

In contrast to oil deals, the KR-I's infrastructure projects are not controversial, do not face challenges from Baghdad, and are lucrative for South Korea (Azad, 2013, p. 557). From February 2009 to March 2011, Korea's Incheon International Airport Corp (IIAC) gained a consulting service agreement valued at $31.5 million for Erbil International Airport. In 2012, the IIAC obtained another construction deal valued at $9 million for a new airport in Dohuk (Lee, 2012). In cooperation with the KRG, the Korean POSCO company assisted the KRG's Ministry of Electricity in constructing a $700 million Thermal Power Plant, in Erbil Khabat, which produces 300 MW and increases 10% electricity capacity in the KR-I (Global Data, 2017). In 2012, Ssangyong won a contract to construct a water treatment plant and transmission storage facilities in Sulaimani and Halabja valued at $200 million (Middle East Construction News, 2012). These projects in the KR-I and Iraq underscore South Korea's economic diplomacy through infrastructure investment and development projects (Nicolas, 2021).

Embassies, consulates, and foreign offices are some of the relevant tools of economic diplomacy and a theater where essential diplomatic activities are accomplished in a country, and these tools encourage economic growth and reduce barriers (Fernandes & Forte, 2022, p. 216). In 2016, South Korea upgraded its diplomatic mission in the KR-I in Erbil from "an embassy office" to a consulate. Its activities have engaged in various sectors, including diplomatic, cultural, education, sport, business, and economic development in the region's four governorates, Erbil, Sulaimani, Duhok, and Halabja (Rudaw, 2023). The Korean consulate in Erbil proactively promotes cooperation and partnership between Korean (not limited to Chaebols) and Iraqi Kurdish firms and businesses.

KOICA, in liaison with South Korea's embassy and consulate in the KR-I, provides various economic and social development support to the KR-I. These include offering training to 1500 officers affiliated with the KRG, building 59 schools, 15 health centers and the Zaytun hospital and Zaytun public library, developing the Kurdistan Institute of Public Administration (supports building capacities of public officials), working on an e-procurement system (the development of public digital procurement to convert paper-based sectors to digital), and some support to refugees and IDPs (Basnews, 2021; Lee, 2012). During COVID-19, Seoul provided testing kits worth $400,000, emergency relief packages, and a few ambulances to the KRG's

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Ministry of Health. The KRG underlined South Korea's contribution to many areas in the KR-I, including health (The KRG, 2020). These ties uncover interests in developing ties beyond oil.

CONCLUSION

South Korea and Iraq's relations have gone through several phases, from economic relations in the 1970s to the materialization and employment of official bilateral economic diplomacy in the 1980s. The 1980s saw joint committees, the establishment and upgrade of diplomatic relations, expanded energy rapports, and South Korean infrastructure projects in Iraq and elements of positive economic diplomacy emerged. In the 1990s, the ties faced difficulties and negative bilateral economic diplomacy instruments were utilized and were abeyant due to Iraq's invasion of Kuwait and the UN sanctions. While embassies were closed in the 1990s, both countries maintained some elements of bilateral ties, namely, humanitarian and, through the UN, a minuscule level of trade at the beginning of the 2000s. Post-2003, the bilateral relations present a new period as most of the positive instruments of economic diplomacy have been utilized. From reopening embassies and opening a new consulate to increasing energy and trade rapports to unprecedented levels (see Table 1) and participating in Iraq's largest infrastructure projects, such as Bismaya City and Grand Al-Faw Port.

The key components of bilateral relations are energy cooperation, infrastructure projects, and trade. Post-2003, South Korea's postwar development approach has featured humanitarian, developing employment skills and industry development as well as military cooperation, particularly in arms purchases. This era witnesses South Korea's vigorous engagement with the KR-I in energy and infrastructure and development projects as well as humanitarian support. While Baghdad rebuked South Korea's energy (oil) rapport with the KRG, Seoul's humanitarian and development projects in the KR-I have not been opposed. Seoul's coordination with Baghdad and Erbil underlines Seoul's interests in Iraq and the common interests between Iraq's various actors and South Korea. Iraq's phases of insecurity, instability, and lack of transparency in several projects hindered the progress of ties.

The implications of adaptation of positive instruments of economic diplomacy by both countries demonstrate the sustainability of ties in areas such as energy, investment, trade, and South Korea's engagement in Iraq's infrastructure. The insecurity in Iraq and the targeting of Korean individuals by terrorists and criminals have hindered the progress of elements of bilateral economic diplomacy; for instance, tourism and expanding small enterprises between both countries. Nevertheless, both states have been persistent in overcoming the challenges by employing positive instruments of bilateral economic diplomacy such as official visits (on various formal levels, including executive and legislative), trade missions, bilateral investments, and signing deals and opening up for businesses. An implication of bilateral economic diplomacy suggests that ties between the two countries survive despite the geopolitical challenges.

Areas that could be further developed include tourism, renewable energy, and sustainable eco-friendly industry development. Iraq and the KR-I could benefit from Seoul's thriving eco-friendly industries, including the renewable energy industry, creating sustainable relationships beyond transactional relations and oil dependency.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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ENDNOTES

[1] Lee Myung-bak is a former chair of Hyundai Engineering and Construction who during his position visited Iraq for sealing project deals.

[2] Later, several media outlets circulated that SK Energy and KNOC energy ties and projects with Iraq outside the KR-I were halted.

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