

Revisiting South Korea's Peace Operations: Public Diplomatic Achievements of Korean PRT in Afghanistan

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Abstract

This study examined the outcomes of Korea's peace operations in terms of public diplomacy. It focuses on the analysis of peacebuilding among peace operations. Korean Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Parwan province, Afghanistan carried out local stabilization and humanitarian assistance activities in Afghanistan from July 2010 to June 2014. Korean PRT directly shared the development experience of Korea with Afghans and conducted civilian field activities to reach out to local residents. As a result, the Korean PRT earned a positive evaluation from the Afghan government and the appellation of "Friends of the Afghans" from local people. The peacebuilding activities of the Korean PRT involved the private-led participation of various actors, utilization of soft power, and interactive communication, which can be understood in terms of public diplomacy. This study expands the scope of peace operations research by examining the achievements of the Korean PRT in Afghanistan from a non-military point of view.

Key Words: *Korea's Peace Operations, Peacebuilding, Public Diplomacy, Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Afghanistan, Korean PRT*

Introduction

As international conflict resolution and management have increased in the post-Cold War era, South Korea, a member of the UN and a U.S. ally, has been active in peace operations.¹⁾ This is in distinct contrast to Korea's passive role in international security during the Cold War. However, in most cases, Korea's peace operations have received negative evaluations based on the domestic and international security situations, lack of public consensus, and challenges with related laws and institutions.²⁾ By and large, existing studies on peace operations of Korea have focused on the determinants of defense and security policies or suggestions for future development. Exploring non-military aspects, this study aims to analyze the positive outcomes of Korea's peace operations. Accordingly, it focuses on 'peacebuilding' operations, a significant part of the UN peace operations in the post-Cold War era, to assess the outcomes of Korea's international peace efforts.

This study examines the public diplomacy outcomes of peacebuilding operations, which have been emerging as a central part of foreign policies in the 21st century and have significant implications in public diplomacy as they aim at rebuilding and stabilizing conflict areas and providing humanitarian support to local people in need. In the post-Cold War era, mid- to long-term goals of the operations could be achieved through soft power that appeals to local communities in addition to hard power such as military and economic power. Peacebuilding operations are an effective means of public diplomacy in the 21st century to promote horizontal and interactive communication with local people through sharing experiences, transferring knowledge, and providing educational, cultural, and medical benefits.

This research explores the outcomes of public diplomacy in the Korean Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan.³⁾ The Korean PRT conducted peacebuilding operations from July 2010 to June 2014 for rebuilding

1) Since Korea sent the Military Medical Assistance Corps and the Air Force Transport Corps to the multinational forces in the Gulf War that broke out in January 1991, it has sent 54 units and 61,044 personnel overseas in 27 regions by the end of December 2022. As of June 2023, a total of 852 soldiers, professionals, and more, including 571 for UN peacekeeping operations and 281 for multinational forces peace operations, have been deployed for overseas military missions (The Ministry of National Defense).

2) Shin-wha Lee, "A Study on 'PKO Divide' in Korean International Peacekeeping Operations: UN-led PKO vs. Non-UN-led PKO," *The Journal of Asiatic Studies*, Vol. 56, No. 2 (2013), p. 195.

3) Apart from the performances of the Korean PRT in Afghanistan, there are also a number of negative assessments of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF)-led stabilization operations in Afghanistan, which include a lack of operational capacity and situation control, failure to negotiate with Taliban forces, inability to set law and order in the country, and lack of unity and solidarity among ethnic groups (Rietjens 2022, 1001-1012; Bayir 2022, 217-244).

Parwan Province, Afghanistan, in four areas: education and training, health, rural development, and consultation to the provincial government. Compared to military-led reconstruction efforts in other countries, it has focused on stabilizing the region and improving the quality of lives of Afghans by offering political, economic, and cultural support through civilian-led efforts. This allowed Korea to be favorably viewed as a trusted country and a friend of Afghans by the Afghan government and its people. Thus, this study aims to empirically analyze the community-friendly activities of the Korean PRT and the outcomes of public diplomacy in Afghanistan.

To do so, we will review the existing studies on the peace operations of Korea and discuss their limitations. Next, we will identify the public diplomatic aspects of peacebuilding operations as a paradigm shift in international peace efforts of the post-Cold War era. Then, we will examine the processes of Korea's participation in the Afghanistan PRT and then review the peacebuilding operations and its public diplomatic outcomes. In the last section of the study, based on the findings of this research, we will draw policy implications for Korean peacebuilding efforts as public diplomacy.

Literature Review

Two major streams of research on Korea's peace operations have emerged. One stream of scholarship adopts an approach that analyzes the determinants of peace operations of Korea. Some studies suggest that South Korea joins peace operations to maintain its relations with its allies.⁴⁾ They explain that South Korea, under the threat of North Korea, participates in U.S.-led multinational peace operations to resolve the asymmetric alliance with the United States and to strengthen military and security cooperation with the United States in the 21st century. Other studies identify the growing national power as a determinant for South Korea to engage in peace operations.⁵⁾ These analyses basically examine the key factors that Korea has

4) Balbina Hwang, "Peacekeeping." in Scott Snyder (ed.) *The US-South Korea Alliance: Meeting New Security Challenges*. (2012) Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, pp. 173-194.; Hannah Kim, "*Dong-maeng-gwa Pa-byung-oi-gyo-ui Sang-ho-yeon-gye-sung: Han-guk-ui Vietnam Mit Iraq Pa-gyung-ui Gong-tong-yo-in* (Interconnectedness of Alliance and Troop Deployment Diplomacy: Common Factors in Korea's Troop Dispatch to Vietnam and Iraq)," Master's thesis, Korea University, (2007), pp. 1-104. ; Seok-woo Lee, "Security Dilemma of ROK-US Alliance Troops Dispatches to Iraq and Afghanistan," Doctoral dissertation, Yonsei University, (2015), pp. 1-210.

5) Balbina Hwang, "Korea and PKO: Is Korea Contributing to Global Peace?," *Global Korea: South Korea's Contributions to International Security*. (2012), pp. 13-27.; Min Ye, Uk Heo, and Quan Li, "Economic Development and South Korea's UN PKO Participation," *Journal of Asian and African Studies*, Vol. 53, No. 5, (2018), pp. 666-684.; GAB-SEONG LEE, "An Analysis of the Policy Decision Making Process for the Participation in Multinational Force of ROK Troops focusing on the State Autonomy," Doctoral dissertation, Yonsei University, (2015).

participated in UN peace operations since the 1990s in the context of economic development and national autonomy. Another group of studies pays special attention to domestic politics.⁶⁾ This literature adopted an analytical approach that focuses on the political leadership factors of the Korean president and the model of bureaucratic politics as well as changes in domestic public opinion and institutions. Moreover, some scholars highlight the role of the idea in South Korea's decision to commit to peace operations.⁷⁾ These studies emphasize that Korea's normative motivation for solving human rights problems in the international community led to participation in peace operations. Lastly, some studies associate Korea's participation in UN PKO with the changes in the perception of security that favored humanitarianism in the post-Cold War era.

The other stream of scholarship subscribes to an approach that examines the challenges and development of Korea's peace operations. The studies focusing on the role of the middle power suggest peace operations as a strategic means for Korea to contribute to the international community.⁸⁾ Scholars studying soft power promotion emphasize that Korea's participation in peace operations could enhance its useful diplomatic asset, soft power.⁹⁾ Other studies examining the

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- 6) Eun-sook Chung, "Korea's Law on UNPKO and Its Role in International Peacekeeping Missions," *Korea Focus*, Vol. 18, No.2. (2010), pp. 98-102.; Sangtu Ko, "Korea's Middle Power Activism and Peacekeeping Operations," *Asia Europe Journal*, Vol. 10, No. 4 (2012), pp.287-299.; Heung-Soon Park, "UN PKOs and Domestic Politics of Korea," in Soo-Gil Park and Sung-Hack Kang (eds.), *UN, PKO and East Asian Security: Currents, Trends and Prospects* (Seoul: Korean Academic Council on the United Nations System, 2002), pp. 197-215.; KyudokHong, "Han-guk-ui Iraq Pa-byeong-ui Mok-jeok, Yeok-hal, Jeon-mang (Purpose, Role, and Prospect of Korea's Troop Dispatch to Iraq)," in Gang, Seong-Hak(eds.) *UN-gwa Guk-je-wi-gi-gwan-ri (The UN and International Crisis Management)*, Seoul: LeeBook, 183-208.
- 7) Sangtu Ko, "The Foreign Policy Goal of South Korea's UN Peacekeeping Operations," *International Peacekeeping*, Vol.22, No.1 (2015), pp. 65-80.; Key-young Son, "From a Garrison State to a Humanitarian Power?: Security Identities, Constitutive Norms and South Korea's Overseas Troop Dispatches," *The Korean Journal of Defense Analysis*, Vol.23, No.4 (December 2011), pp. 557-573.
- 8) Brendan M. Howe, "Korea's role for peacebuilding and development in Asia," *Asian Journal of Peacebuilding*, 5-2 (November 2017), pp. 243-266; Geumryul Kim, Kangkyong Lee, & Hyeonju Seol, "Strategies for the Development of International Peace Activities of the Korean Army in Conjunction with the UN's Action for Peacekeeping(A4P)." *STRATEGIC STUDIES*, Vol. 29, No. 3. (2013), pp. 43-83. ; Terence Roehrig, "South Korea, Foreign Aid, and UN Peacekeeping: Contributing to International Peace and Security as a Middle Power," *Korea Observer*, Vol.44, No.4 (Winter, 2013), pp. 623-645.; Dae-sun Son, "A Study on the UN PKO of Republic of Korea, as a Middle Power for Exercising Its Leadership: Focusing on the Producing Dignitaries," *The Quarterly Journal of Defense Policy Studies* Vol. 33, No. 1 (2017), pp. 59-95.
- 9) Young-Ho Kim, "Smart Power Strategy and the Korean Armed Forces' Peace Operations," *THE JOURNAL OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS*, Vo.12, No.2 (2009e), pp. 47-67.; Jaechun KIM & Hyun AHN, "Korea's National Strategy for Global Governance Participation: With

implementation of civil-military operations assess the outcomes and limitations of Korea's civil-military operations and suggest policy directions that could be applied in the future.¹⁰⁾ Lastly, the public diplomacy studies regard peace operations as a new paradigm of public diplomacy and emphasize the need of public diplomacy for the development of peace operations.¹¹⁾

As we have reviewed, there is no shortage of studies on South Korea's peace operations, which affirms the salience of the research on the peace operations of military intervention or overseas deployment even though the country is under constant threats from North Korea and is not as capable as the great powers in terms of military capability. However, the existing discussions focus heavily on exploring determinants of South Korea's participation in peace operations and presenting development plans. They have shown little interest in analyzing what Korean peace operations have achieved empirically. Rather, researchers seem to have stayed in epistemological skepticism that treats Korea's peace operations as foreign policies, which the country should engage in as little as possible as a means of military and security.

With a different analytical perspective from the existing approaches, this study aims to positively portray South Korea's role in contributing to international security in the post-Cold War era by tracking the achievements of South Korea's peace operations. This analytical attempt intends to challenge the realist paradigm that views Korea's foreign and security policy as a dependent variable, which is significantly influenced by power or structure. By confirming and accumulating the significant achievements of Korean peace operations, this study aims to explore the theoretical and policy balance of Korean security policy in the future. This research

Emphasis on Peace Operations(PO)," *NEW ASIA*, Vol. 20, No.3 (2013), pp. 109-129.; Hwang and Kim, "Analysis on the ROK Armed Forces' Peacekeeping Strategy in the 21st Century: Focusing on the Implementing Military Power Based on Soft Power," *Korean Journal of Military Art and Science*, 68-3 (November 2012), 99-127.

- 10) John Hemmings, "The ROK Provincial Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan," in Scott Bruce et al. (eds.), *Global Korea: South Korea's Contributions to International Security* (New York: Council on Foreign Relations Press, 2012), pp. 45-60.; Kyudok Hong, "South Korean Approaches to Peacekeeping and Peacebuilding: Lessons Learned and Challenges Ahead," *The Journal of East Asian Affairs*, Vol. 23, No.1 (Spring/Summer 2009), pp. 23-45.; Byung Ok Kil, "Development Direction of ROK's Civil Military Operations and Future Tasks," *Military Studies*, No.54 (Summer, 2008), pp. 88-110.
- 11) Sun-Tae Kim, "Case Studies of ROK Military Diplomacy: Focused on the Perspective of Public Diplomacy," *East and West Studies*, Vol. 22, No.2 (2010a), pp. 223-250.; Keumsoo Kim & Hyekeun Jee, "The Direction of International Peace Activities in Korea from the Perspective of Public Diplomacy," *Military Studies*, No.106 (2021), pp. 505-619.; Shin-wha Lee, "International PKO as 'Security Public Diplomacy'," *OUGHTOPIA*, Vol. 34, No. 1 (2019), pp. 7-42.; Yeong Mi Yun, "A Study of the New Paradigm of Public Diplomacy: Focusing on the Cooperative Activities with the Ashena Base and the Provincial Reconstruction Team(PRT) in Afghanistan," *The Korean Association of Area Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3 (2012), pp. 253-278.

revisits the peace operations of Korea in the post-Cold War era from a diplomatic point of view rather than that of the military, focusing on the process of policy implementation rather than policy-making.

Theoretical Discussion

Origin and Enhancement of Peacebuilding Capabilities since Post-Cold War Era

The UN was authorized to manage international conflicts during the post-Cold War era and has emphasized the ‘peacebuilding’ function in peace operations. Since the 1990s, the proliferation of high-intensity conflicts has led peace operations to gradually encompass the concept of peace enforcement,¹²⁾ but the UN has continued to appear to emphasize its peacebuilding mission.¹³⁾ In the post-Cold War era, the UN sought to expand more active and complex peace operations than before, which included rebuilding failed states, promoting political reconciliation among conflict groups, and enhancing the human rights through political, economic, and social support such as election support and monitoring, reorganization and enhancement of government institutions, cross-party controlling arms, refugee return, and humanitarian relief.¹⁴⁾

The conceptual definition of peace reconstruction can be found in the report 「Agenda for Peace」 released in 1992 by Boutros Boutros-Ghali, the 6th Secretary-General of the UN. Peacebuilding was defined as “action to identify and support structures which will strengthen and solidify peace in order to avoid a relapse into conflict.”¹⁵⁾ In other words, peacebuilding can be interpreted as an active peace activity mission to prevent a return to conflict by supporting structures that strengthen and clarify the state of peace.

Since then, the concept of peacebuilding has often been mentioned as a key function of peace operations. The UK Ministry of Defense summarized peacebuilding as “peace support operations employing complementary diplomatic, civil and, when necessary, military means to address the underlying causes of

12) Peace enforcement involves “the application of a range of coercive measures, including the use of military force with the authorization of the Security Council”. These measures empower the Security Council to restore international peace and security in threats to peace or aggression (UNDPKO and UNDFS 2008, 17).

13) Paul F. Diehl, *Peace Operations*. Malden (MA: Polity, 2008), p.8.; Yeoul Soo Kim, *National Security: The Dilemma of Threats and Vulnerabilities*(Paju: Bobmunsa, 2010b), p.103.

14) In-Hwan Song, “An Analysis of Decision Factors of ROK's Troops Dispatch to Iraq,” Master's thesis, Honam University (2006a), p. 97.; Dong-soon Park & Hyung-hwoi Gu, *International Conflict and Peace Activities*(Seoul: Sunin, 2019), pp. 2-19, 251.

15) Boutros Boutros-Ghali, *An Agenda for Peace: Preventive Diplomacy, Peacemaking and Peace-keeping*(New York: UN, 1992), p. 11.

conflicts and the longer-term needs of the people.”¹⁶⁾ Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver P. Richmond defined peacebuilding in a broad sense as a comprehensive operation encompassing political reconciliation, security, economic reconstruction, development and humanitarian assistance, social integration, and human rights protection.¹⁷⁾

The UN has also gradually evolved the concept of peacebuilding in the 21st century. The 「Brahimi Report」 published in 2000 characterized peacebuilding as an activity that builds a foundation beyond the 'absence of war' and called for a combination of political and developmental roles to mitigate the cause of armed conflict.¹⁸⁾ The UN pledged to establish a Peacebuilding Commission at the 60th UN General Assembly Millennium Summit in September 2005 and was created in June 2006 based on Resolution 1645 adopted by UN Security Council in December 2005 and General Assembly Resolution 60/180. Since then, it has contributed to building and restoring peace in 23 countries and regions by 2021 with integrated efforts.¹⁹⁾ It has also raised international awareness for post-conflict peacebuilding as a coordinator that orchestrate peace activities of various UN agencies, international financial institutions, and donor countries and raised and distributed funds for stability in target countries with the Peacebuilding Fund.²⁰⁾

Public Diplomatic Aspects of Peacebuilding Operations

In the 21st century, peacebuilding is considered a core function of peace operations that the UN has actively promoted with policy priorities.²¹⁾ It also has

16) The Ministry of Defense, U. K. *The Military Contribution to Peace Support Operations*, Joint Warfare Publication 3-50 (JWP 3-50), 2nd edition (London: The Ministry of Defense, 1998), p. Glossary-8.

17) Edward Newman, Roland Paris, and Oliver P. Richmond, *New Perspectives on Liberal Peacebuilding* (New York: United Nations University Press, 2009), pp.8-9.

18) United Nations. “Report of the Panel on United Nations Peace Operations (Brahimi Report).” *General Assembly and Security Council (A55/305-S/2000/809)*, Aug. 21, 2000.

19) United Nations Peacebuilding Commission. “INFORMATIVE BROCHURE.” available at https://www.un.org/peacebuilding/sites/www.un.org.peacebuilding/files/documents/psc_brochure_eng_corr.pdf (accessed on April 27, 2023).

20) Department of International Organizations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. *2022 UN Gae-hwang (2022 United Nations Overview)*(2022), pp. 102-103. ; The Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) is a special United Nations fund created in 2006 to provide rapid and flexible financial resources for peacebuilding. The fund is used to assist the implementation of peace agreements and political dialogue, promote the peaceful resolution of conflicts, provide essential administrative services, and promote reconstruction through capacity building, and stimulate the economy (Department of International Organizations, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2022, 104).

21) Public diplomacy began in earnest in the 1960s as the Cold War intensified with nongovernmental diplomacy targeting communist areas. It became much less emphasized

important implications for public diplomacy as an influential tool in foreign policy in the 21st century. Public diplomacy is a form of direct communication to the people in another country, usually aiming to win the hearts of the people of other countries, which elevates a country's image and brand and build trust by spreading consensus on the values, cultures, policies, and visions of the country in the other countries.

This study seeks to claim that peacebuilding operations aimed at rebuilding post-conflict areas and providing assistance to affected populations are inherently a form of new public diplomacy in the 21st century. Actors in peacebuilding operations have been diversified over the years. Today, peacekeeping and reconstruction missions in conflict zones and disaster-affected areas are staffed by international organizations, including the United Nations and nongovernmental organizations (NGOs). In countries that have been called upon for peacekeeping and reconstruction activities, reconstruction teams comprised of not only military personnel but also civilians such as police, medical personnel, and election and vocational training experts have been organized to actively participate in peacekeeping and reconstruction support activities on the ground.²²⁾ As such, the establishment of good governance at the international level and the coordination of various actors at the domestic level, including civil, public, and military personnel, are crucial to the success of peacebuilding efforts.

In addition, soft power has become important as a means of peacebuilding operations. Because peace operations are tasked with preventing armed conflicts and protecting security, hard power centered on military and economic power is inevitably emphasized. Today, however, in addition to their military and financial roles in dispatched regions, peace operations can only be effective when they secure the favor and trust of the locals. At the mid- to long-term level, security and stability can never be achieved without the support and help of locals. The 21st-century peacebuilding efforts focus on outreach to the local community through various civil affairs operations²³⁾ and attempt to engage with them to make connections and win their hearts. In peacebuilding, soft power can be

with the end of the Cold War in the 1990s but began to be revived in the wake of the 9 • 11 terrorist attack as the limits of hard power were exposed. In the 21st century, most countries have recognized the importance of public diplomacy by using intangible assets like art, knowledge, information, culture, and sports for the private sector (Public Diplomacy and Cultural Affairs Bureau, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2010), p.14.

22) Shin-wha Lee, "International PKO as 'Security Public Diplomacy'," p. 8.

23) Civil affairs operations refer to all activities that involve the interaction between military forces, government agencies, and civilians in areas where military forces are stationed or operate. The main objectives of civil affairs include (1) supporting the civilian sector to facilitate military operations, (2) preventing civilians from undertaking disruptive activities, (3) acquiring and controlling local resources, (4) assisting government administrative agencies, (5) public outreach activities, and (6) aiding civil defense tasks (Choi 2006, 192).

significant in that it can help establish favorable relations with the host country and also enhance a positive reputation and goodwill in the international community. In addition, communication with the public in other countries targeted by peacebuilding efforts is becoming more horizontal and interactive.

The achievements of peacebuilding operations as a form of public diplomacy can be assessed in the political, economic, and social domains. First, the political domain involves capacity building in administrative governance to establish a system of governance at the institutional level that ensures democratic principles are in effect. This type of activity could include providing political consultation or advice to government officials or officials, or capacity-building support and training programs for local governments. The economic domain includes activities to repair or rehabilitate social overhead capital such as roads, railroads, schools, and hospitals that have been destroyed or rendered inoperable by conflict, disaster, or catastrophe, as well as food and medical assistance activities directly related to survival. Lastly, the social domain encompasses activities such as enlightenment education, goodwill events, and public outreach to foster a sense of unity with residents. Rural development education, farming practices, running vocational training centers, building schools, and organizing cultural events would be good examples of such activities.

Case Study

The Timeline of South Korea's Participation in the Afghanistan PRT

In late December 2001, the U.S. shifted to stabilization operations to achieve early successes in the War on Terrorism, including the collapse of the Taliban regime, and to stabilize and rebuild Afghanistan. With the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1386 on December 20, 2001, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF), a military organization under the aegis of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, was created. On March 28, 2002, the UN subsequently adopted Security Council Resolution 1401 to create the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), which began to engage in stabilization operations in a robust manner.²⁴⁾ The triangular cooperation of the U.S., NATO, and the UN in stabilizing Afghanistan, however, was not effective in terms of strategy and efficiency, and the war in Afghanistan entered a protracted phase as a result. In the midst of these circumstances, the Obama administration, which took office in January 2009, sought an exit strategy that would withdraw U.S. troops with

24) Institute for Military History, the Ministry of Defense, Guk-gun-ui Afghanistan Pyeong-hwa-hwal-dong 9 The ROK Armed Forces' Peace Operations in Afghanistan), (Seoul: Institute for Military History, 2016), pp. 38-41.

substantial support for Afghanistan's stabilization and national reconstruction.

On April 16, 2009, Richard Holbrooke, the U.S. State Department's special envoy for Afghanistan and Pakistan, visited Korea to express the U.S. opinion on the appropriate role of Korea in supporting Afghanistan. On Oct. 21, U.S. Defense Secretary Robert Gates indirectly addressed the need for Korea to send troops back to Afghanistan, noting that Korea's military contribution to the international community would benefit Korea's security and core national interests.²⁵⁾ On May 6, 2009, the ROK government decided to support Afghanistan with a Cabinet resolution, amidst increasing requests for reconstruction assistance from the Afghan government and the international community. On Oct. 30, the government officially announced its deployment of a PRT to stabilize and reconstruct Afghanistan.

Moon Tae-young, a spokesperson for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade, said, "Apart from the medical-vocational training team currently operating at the U.S. Air Force Base in Bagram, the PRT was designed to provide comprehensive support for local reconstruction projects, including enhanced state administrative capacity building, economic reconstruction, infrastructure construction, and humanitarian assistance." The government also announced that it would dispatch military security forces to protect Korean personnel and its own security, in accordance with the National Assembly's agreement.²⁶⁾ On December 8, the government confirmed the final deployment plan at a Cabinet meeting and on December 11, submitted 「Motion to Send Armed Forces to Afghanistan」 to the National Assembly. The motion was passed with 148 votes in favor, 5 against, and 10 abstentions on February 25 (National Assembly Secretariat, 2010).

The government explained the reason for the deployment to Afghanistan, saying, "In accordance with the resolution of the UN Security Council and the request of the Afghan government, the Korean PRT and the ROK military to protect them will be sent to Afghanistan to fulfill the role as a responsible member of the international community and enhance the international status of Korea."²⁷⁾ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Trade (currently, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs) noted that the decision to establish the Afghan PRT was made as "to fulfill its role as an honorable and responsible member of the international community in accordance with UN Security Council Resolutions 1833 and 1890 urging UN member states to provide

25) Secretary Robert Gates said, "In the past, Korea's (overseas) deployments have been perceived as benefiting the U.S., but in the future, Korea's international military contributions should be recognized as benefiting Korea's security and vital national interests.;" Won-je Son, "Gates" *Guk Gun-sa-gi-yeo, Guk-ik-e Do-um*(Gates, "Contributing to Korea's military helps national interest"), *Hankyoreh*. Oct. 21, 2009.

26) Public Communications Office, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, "Jeong-bu, Afghan Ji-bang-jae-geon-team Hwak-dae-ki-ro(Government Expands Afghan Provincial Reconstruction Team to Include)," *Korea Policy Briefing*, Oct. 30, 2009.

27) National Assembly Secretariat. *Minutes of the 287th National Assembly Plenary Session No. 10* (Feb. 25, 2010).

manpower, equipment, and other resources to the International Security Assistance Forces and the UN Security Council Resolution 1868, which requests international supports for the Afghan government's capacity building and human resource development.”²⁸⁾

Peacebuilding Operations of the Korean PRT

The Korean PRT in Afghanistan officially initiated its mission in July 2010 with the goal of reconstructing Parwan province of more than 642,000 people lacking basic infrastructure and in desperate need of development assistance.²⁹⁾ In January 2011, the Korean PRT moved into its own base, Charikar, where it operated a hospital, a school, and a police training center. After transferring the base from Charikar to Parwan in December 2012, Korea continued to assist with reconstruction work for Afghan residents at the U.S. base, Bagram Airfield, and ended its four-year mission of the PRT in June 2014.³⁰⁾ Unlike other countries focusing on the military activity, the Korean PRT was characterized by an integrated civil-public-military structure that included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Ministry of National Defense, Oshino Unit,³¹⁾ the police, the Korea International Cooperation Agency(KOICA), and hospital and vocational training personnel.³²⁾

The Korean government’s contribution to Afghanistan in the Bagram base continued even after the end of PRT operations. Since the completion of the PRT activities from 2011 to 2014, the South Korean forces have still been working with U.S. counterparts.³³⁾ Even though the PRT mission ended, they had planned to turn the hospital and the training centers into the official development aid (ODA),³⁴⁾ and

28) Public Communications Office, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, “Government Expands Afghan Provincial Reconstruction Team to Include,” *Korea Policy Briefing*, Oct. 30, 2009.

29) U.S. Army, “Afghan, US Leaders Thank Korea for Medical, Educational Support to Parwan Province,” (Mar. 18, 2015). available at https://www.army.mil/article/144761/afghan_us_leaders_thank_korea_for_medical_educational_support_to_parwan_province (assessed on Sep. 5, 2023).

30) In December 2014, Korea withdrew its PRT as part of the overall withdrawal of nations as the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) mission came to an end (The Ministry of Foreign Affairs 2014).; Soo-yeon Kim, “S.Korea's Reconstruction Team in Afghanistan Ends 4-year Mission,” *Yonhap News Agency*, Jun. 24, 2014. available at <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20140624002900315> (assessed on Sep. 5, 2023).

31) The Oshino Unit was an Army Headquarters whose mission was to protect the garrison and the activities of the PRT from July 2010 to June 23, 2014, so that it could safely carry out its reconstruction mission (The Ministry of National Defense).

32) Soonhyang Park, “A study on the Civil-Military Cooperation in the Peace Operations: Focusing on the PRT(Provincial Reconstruction Team) in Afghanistan,” Doctoral dissertation, Chonnam National University (2012), pp.93-94.

33) U.S. Air Forces, CENTAF Releases Airpower Summary (Jul. 25. 2006).

34) Byoung-chul Kang, “*Afghan Ji-bang-jae-geon-team' Im-mu-jong-ryo...Oshino-bu-dae-do*

the hospital remained open to serve those in need.³⁵⁾

The reconstruction project of the PRT focused on the following four areas.³⁶⁾ First, in the field of education and training, the Korean government established a vocational training center in the Bagram Base in March 2010 to offer five courses on automobile, welding, architecture, electricity, and computers. As a result, a total of 439 people graduated by 2013, contributing to job creation. The PRT operated the Charika Police Training Center from September 2010 to December 2012 for a stable security environment, which as the basis for national reconstruction, trained 355 local police officers. From August 2011 to December 2012, the Charika Education and Culture Center provided literacy training, children's education, sewing, and barbering skills to a total of 322 people, which helped establish a foundation for self-reliance. In addition, 140 to 160 people were invited to Korea every year to learn about Korea's post-war development experience such as the Saemaul Undong (New Village Movement) and the know-how for building law and order.³⁷⁾

Second, in the field of health, the Korean government provided medical assistance to Afghans since opening Bagram Hospital in May 2009, treating 150,000 patients as of March 2014. The civilian-staffed Bagram Hospital provided access to specialized health facilities for Afghans who had been deprived of basic medical services. In addition, Charika Hospital opened in January 2012 and treated 16,500 people for a year, providing medical care by Korean medical staff. Overall, the Korean PRT supported local people with “tireless medical treatment” and the Bagram Korean Hospital cared for 300,000 patients.³⁸⁾ It provided \$2 million worth of support, including ambulances and medical equipment, and built three health centers providing direct medical support to the Afghans.³⁹⁾

Cheol-su. (‘Afghan Provincial Reconstruction Team’ Mission Ends...Oshino Troops also Withdraw),” *Yonhap News Agency*, Jun. 24, 2014, available at <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/AKR20140624053800043> (accessed on Oct. 6, 2023).

35) Sung-hee Hwang, “Korea Completes Reconstruction Mission in Afghanistan,” *Arirang News*, Jun. 24, 2014, available at https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nJplhsN_k98 (assessed on Sep. 5, 2023).

36) The Government of the Republic of Korea. *Lee-myung-bak-jeong-bu Guk-jeong-baek-seo: Je-4-kwon global-leadership-gwa Guk-geok Je-go (The White Book on State Affairs of The Lee Myung-bak Administration: Global Leadership and National Status Enhancement, Volume 4)*(2013), p. 179.

37) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “*Afghan-in-deul-e-ge Mi-rae-ui Hui-mang-eul Sim-go, Global Partnership Gi-yeo-han Dae-han-min-guk Afghan Ji-bang-jae-geon-team(PRT)-ui Gong-sik Im-mu Jong-ryo (Jun. 23)*(Official Mission of the Korean Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan Ends (Jun. 23), Giving Afghans Hope for the Future and Contributing to Global Partnerships),” Jun. 24, 2014, available at https://www.mofa.go.kr/www/brd/m_4080/view.do?seq=350848 (accessed on May 19, 2023).

38) U.S. Army, “Afghan, US Leaders Thank Korea for Medical, Educational Support to Parwan Province,” Mar. 18, 2015.

39) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Official Mission of the Korean Provincial Reconstruction

Third, in the area of rural development, in December 2013, the Korean government started an agricultural school project to improve the productivity of agriculture which accounts for 80% of Afghanistan's industry. In addition, while operating a \$3-million model farm and agricultural products processing plant, the South Korean government invited Afghan agricultural experts to collaborate with the agricultural sector and contributed to the dissemination of agricultural technology.

Fourth, in the field of advisory to the state government, from June 2010 to May 2011, the first advisory group worked in areas such as health care, education, rural development, crop cultivation, administrative system, economic development, and gender. For example, the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA) invited around 100 senior Afghan provincial officials to Korea every year for capacity-building training and site visits that were needed for national reconstruction.⁴⁰⁾

In summary, the Korean PRT focused on empowering government officials in Parwan for the Rule of Law, building infrastructure, and transferring professional skills to local Afghan people as it opened a new medical center, police training center, and the Korean Educational and Cultural Center.⁴¹⁾ The PRT consisted of three domains: ① police, army, and civilian personnel in public healthcare; ② education and vocational training and agricultural and rural development; and ③ police training. The Korean PRT genuinely sought to improve the lives of Afghanistan.⁴²⁾

Public Diplomatic Achievements of the Korean PRT

From 2010 to June 2014, the Korean government deployed 2,500 military and civilian personnel to stabilize Afghanistan and carry out provincial reconstruction operations. Such deployments have substantially improved the quality of life and contributed to the economic and social development of Afghans. The prioritized

Team (PRT) in Afghanistan Ends (Jun. 23), Giving Afghans Hope for the Future and Contributing to Global Partnerships),” Jun. 24, 2014.

40) Hyun-min Yu, “*Afghan PRT, Parwan-ju Jae-geon-ji-won 'Bon-gyeok-hwa'* (Afghan PRT 'Full-scale' Support for Reconstruction in Parwan Province).” *Yonhap News Agency*. Feb. 16, 2012, available at <https://www.yna.co.kr/view/MYH20120216004800038> (assessed on Oct. 8, 2023).

41) Chris Fahey, “Republic of Korea PRT Invests in Afghan Capabilities, Plans for Afghan Sustainability,” *Defense Visual Information Distribution Service*, Jan. 27, 2012, available at <https://www.dvidshub.net/news/83109/republic-korea-prt-invests-afghan-capabilities-plans-afghan-sustainability> (assessed on Sep. 5, 2023).

42) Office for Government Policy Coordination, “ROK's PRT Base in Afghanistan to be Transferred to the Host Country,” Nov. 7, 2012, available at http://www.odakorea.go.kr/bbs/selectArticleDetail?bbsId=eng_101&ntfId=13228&menuNo=12031000&searchWrd=&insTypeCd=&pageIndex=261&searchCnd=4 (assessed on Sep. 5, 2023).

need of the Afghan government was in education and economic development to rebuild the state, the areas in which Korea could play even more active roles.⁴³⁾ Through this, Korea substantially contributed to improving the life quality of Parwan by driving economic and social development within a short amount of time; the income increased, student enrollment rate increased, access to health facilities improved, infrastructure facilities expanded, women's participation in social activities increased, and security conditions improved.

The Korean PRT can be understood in terms of public diplomacy as they focused on sharing Korea's development experiences directly with Afghans and conducting local-friendly activities. It offered interactive activities led by the private sector to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people through soft power, including education and cultural projects, medical and health activities, and transmission of rural development experience and job training.⁴⁴⁾ Through this, Korea has been recognized by the Afghans as a trusted country that always keeps promises and Koreans have also been regarded as true friends of Afghans.⁴⁵⁾

Koreans thought that the troop deployment in 2010 became an opportunity for long-term and systematic expansion of human exchange and active cooperation between Korea and Afghanistan.⁴⁶⁾ "Ashena," the name of the Korean unit means a "friend" or "colleague" in the local language. The U.S. Army's report quoted the comments of Afghan government officers and U.S. officers about on the Korean PRT operations:⁴⁷⁾ "I thank the Korean friends for their compassion and selfless support," Parwan Provincial Governor Adul Basir Salagi said. "For the past five years, the Republic of Korea Provincial Reconstruction Team and its successor, the Korea Bagram Office, achieved remarkable progress towards peace and reconstruction in Parwan by providing medical care and educational opportunities for the people of Afghanistan." "Although they will be gone, the memory of the good they have done here in Afghanistan will live on," the Commander of the U.S. Army of Bagram Airfield Maj. Gen. John Murray said. "You have made a profound

43) Hyun-kyung Kang, "Koreans Sow Seeds of Hope in Afghanistan," *The Korea Times*, Sep. 5, 2023, available at https://www.koreatimes.co.kr/www/nation/2023/09/113_176527.html (assessed on Sep. 5, 2023).

44) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs. "Official Mission of the Korean Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan Ends (Jun. 23), Giving Afghans Hope for the Future and Contributing to Global Partnerships," Jun. 24, 2014.

45) Yoon-gyung Son, "*Afghan, Neo-e-ge U-rin, U-ri-e-gen Neon* (Afghans, We to You, You to us)." *The Kyunghyang Shinmun*. Aug. 28, 2021, available at <https://m.khan.co.kr/politics/politics-general/article/202108281417001#c2b> (assessed on Oct. 8th, 2023).

46) Nam-sik In, "Recommendations for Korea's Future Policy Regarding Afghanistan," *IFANS Brief*, 2014-18, May. 29, 2014.

47) U.S. Army, "Afghan, US Leaders Thank Korea for Medical, Educational Support to Parwan Province," Mar. 18, 2015.

difference in the lives of people who had no other alternative to the medical care you brought to Afghanistan.” “The Korean staff have done an amazing job,” Ambassador Donald Yamamoto, principal officer to the U.S. Forces-Afghanistan, said. “and the Afghan people are grateful for their services.” In a recent interview with the Afghan Ambassador to Korea, Mohammad Saleem Sayeb said, “With strong work ethic, the Koreans won the hearts of the Afghan people.”⁴⁸⁾

During the provincial reconstruction operations, the Korea Foundation provided a development- cooperation program to encourage the willingness of trainees to support themselves and communicate with local people. In order to meet the expectations and demands of the Afghan people to learn about the economic development, democratization, and culture of Korea, the foundation operated customized projects for the people that linked the Korean Wave, Hallyu, and taekwondo.⁴⁹⁾ Afghans came to have trust in the local reconstruction projects by the Korea International Cooperation Agency and greeted in Korean style. The Korean Police Training Center, which trained Afghan police officers and taught arrest techniques and Taekwondo, has helped maintain Afghan security and has been officially approved by the Afghan government as a “local police training center.”⁵⁰⁾ The Oshino unit actively carried out a local support project called ‘Operation Hanultari’ and received positive reviews from local residents.⁵¹⁾

The public diplomacy achievements of the Korean PRT are affirmed by key figures in Afghanistan. “Afghans consider Koreans to be true friends,” Governor Abdul Basir Salangi, who visited Korea at the invitation of the KOICA in November 2010, said. “They came to us in times of need and genuinely help us, but it's not just about the material help. We appreciate the perseverance, hard work, and creative efforts of the Korean people who have built a highly prosperous country symbolized by the Miracle of the Han River standing up from the ruins of war.”⁵²⁾

48) Hyun-kyung Kang, “Koreans Sow Seeds of Hope in Afghanistan,” *The Korea Times*, Sep. 5, 2023.

49) Yeong Mi Yun, “A Study of the New Paradigm of Public Diplomacy: Focusing on the Cooperative Activities with the Ashena Base and the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan,” *The Korean Association of Area Studies*, Vol. 30, No. 3, 2012, p. 265.

50) Public Communications Office, the Ministry of Culture, Sports and Tourism, “*Afghan-e Ggum-eul Sim-eoh-ju-neun ‘Han-guk Dream-team’* (‘Korean Dream Team’ Instills Dreams in Afghanistan),” *Korea Policy Briefing*. Mar. 30, 2012.

51) The Oshino unit focused on strengthening ties with local residents by repairing mosques and school facilities, providing humanitarian supplies, and hosting events by inviting residents. The Ministry of the Interior and Safety.; National Archives of Korea. 2015. “Oshino Unit Activities,” available at <https://www.archives.go.kr/next/search/listSubjectDescription.do?id=009712&sitePage=> (accessed on May 21, 2023)

52) In another interview, the governor of Parwan positively evaluated the activities of the Korean PRT, saying, “Thank you for your efforts to improve the quality of life and it has greatly helped the people to build the foundation for themselves.” (Kookbangilbo, July 17, 2013).; Hyun-min Yu, “<Interview> Salanggi Afghan Parwan Ju-ji-sa(“<Interview> Salangi, Afghan

In a local radio interview, the head of agriculture in Parwan said, “The Korean PRT has been carrying out operations for the pure purpose of reconstruction. Local residents should join in protecting them,” expressing support and confidence in the Korean PRT.⁵³⁾ The emotional and political link between people in two countries meant Korea could take the connection to Central Asia and expand its scope of global reach beyond Northeast Asia.⁵⁴⁾

In the case of Afghanistan, the Korean reconstruction team has won the hearts of the locals. “The Korean reconstruction team has been of great help to me and has completely turned my life around,” Faisal Safi, a graduate of Bagram Vocational Training Center, said. “I have learned electrical technology for four years and now have the ability to support my family as an expert,” sharing his appreciation of the Korean PRT.⁵⁵⁾ “The Vocational Training Center is a top-notch facility that cannot be found in Afghanistan,” Mohammad Zarif who learned mechanic skills at the Bagram Vocational Training Center said. “I want to become a great mechanic and serve the Afghan people.”⁵⁶⁾ Rahmat Bibi, who underwent heart surgery at Bagram Hospital on the verge of death, said, “I’m happy to be able to go home and meet my son I miss,” and appreciated the medical support of the Korean PRT.⁵⁷⁾

Since its deployment in July 2010, the Korean PRT in Afghanistan has successfully carried out its mission, receiving positive reviews from the Afghan government and local residents as ‘Korean brothers’.⁵⁸⁾ The Korean PRT carried out community-friendly activities that reached out to the hearts and minds of the Afghan people with the causes of “mission, service, and constructive contribution.”⁵⁹⁾ By

Parwan Governor).” *Yonhap News Agency*, Nov. 5, 2010, available at <https://n.news.naver.com/mnews/article/001/0004746716?sid=100> (assessed on Oct. 8, 2023).

- 53) After watching a video on economic development, 25 politicians and economic officials from Parwan who were invited by the Korean PRT advisors said, “We also want to be like Korea. Please help me to be like this.” (The SeoulShinmun, May 16, 2011).; Jin-wook Gang, “*Afghan Dang-guk, Ja-guk-min Han-guk PRT Bo-ho Chok-gu* (Afghan Authorities Urge Nationals to Protect South Korea's PRT).” *Yonhap News Agency*, Aug. 18, 2011.
- 54) Jae H. Ku, Drew Thompson, & Daniel Wertz. *Northeast Asia in Afghanistan: Whose Silk Road?* (US-Korea Institute at SAIS, 2011). available at <https://www.jstor.org/stable/resrep11156> (assessed on Sep. 5, 2023).
- 55) Hye-gyung Hwang, “*Afghan PRT Sa-nyeon Im-mu-jong-ryo... ” Ju-min Ma-eum Eot-eot-eo-yo* (“Afghan PRT ends four-year mission... “We won the hearts of the residents”),” *YTN*, Jun. 28, 2014.
- 56) Byoung-chul Kang, “‘Afghan Provincial Reconstruction Team’ Mission Ends... Oshino Troops also Withdraw,” *Yonhap News Agency*, Jun. 24, 2014.
- 57) Gi-jong Lee, “‘*Afghan Mae-um Eot-eot-da’... Ji-bang-jae-geon-team 4-nyeon Hwal-dong Jong-ryo* (“Afghan Hearts Won”... Provincial Reconstruction Team Ends Four Years of Work),” *MBN News*, Jun. 29, 2014, available at <https://m.mbn.co.kr/tv/552/1074475>.
- 58) The Ministry of National Defense. “*Afghanistan Oshino-bu-dae* (Jul. 2010 – Jun. 2015) (Oshino Unit in Afghanistan (Jul. 2010 – Jun. 2015).” available at https://www.mnd.go.kr/mbshome/mbs/mnd/subview.jsp?id=mnd_010902010000 (accessed on May 21, 2023).

hiring personnel who can speak the local language, the Korean PRT was able to communicate smoothly for tasks that require a lot of interaction with local residents. In humanitarian relief activities, by directly distributing goods to residents rather than going through public officials, the Korean PRT provided practical help to improve the rights to life and the quality of life (Park 2012, 124).

In summary, in public diplomacy, Korea actively shared its unique development experience of transitioning from a recipient country to a donor country in a short time through the provincial reconstruction operations reaching the local level, which contributed to peacebuilding in Afghanistan.

Conclusion

This study examined the performance of the Korean-Afghan PRT in terms of the perspective of public diplomacy. The Korean PRT took the initiative to have various actors of the civic sector engage in the process of rebuilding and stabilizing Parwan and adopted the approach of two-way communications as a way of soft power. It is different from traditional conflict management, which unilaterally provides benefits to residents in conflict areas, relying on military or economic power. In particular, the Korean PRT focused on resident-friendly operations in four areas: education and training, health, rural development, and state advisory, which consequently built a good image of Korea and earned Koreans the trust of the Afghan public and government officials. As such, Korea's peace operations in the 21st century have the potential to achieve positive results not only in the military and security spheres but also in the public diplomacy sphere.

In April 2018, UN Secretary-General António Guterres released the 「Report on Peacebuilding and Sustaining Peace」, which further emphasizes the role of peacebuilding in peace operations. It states that in order for peacebuilding operations to be effective, various international actors, such as international organizations, donor countries, and host countries, must be allowed to participate throughout the entire process of conflicts (United Nations 2018). Amid such heightened international interests in “sustaining peace”, South Korea has been taking on policy coordination and bridging roles between the UN agencies and member states for peacebuilding, serving as the Chair and Vice-Chair of the Peacebuilding Commission (PBC) in 2017 and 2018. The reputation of Korea has been elevated by serving as a pivotal middle power in the field of peacebuilding, which the UN has identified as a mechanism to stabilize post-conflict regions.

To summarize, this study contributes to expanding the boundaries of peace

59) The Ministry of Foreign Affairs. “Official Mission of the Korean Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Afghanistan Ends (Jun. 23), Giving Afghans Hope for the Future and Contributing to Global Partnerships,” Jun. 24, 2014.

operations research by analyzing Korean peacebuilding operations, which have received relatively little attention in academia. Considering peace operations as a matter of public diplomacy, it also reviews the achievements of peace operations that have been recently emerged as a vital means of foreign policy. Based on this, we propose that a basic understanding of diplomacy is necessary for successful peacebuilding operations, which have become a core function of international peacework today.

More importantly, this study hopes to provide valuable lessons for South Korea's anticipated participation in the reconstruction of Ukraine after the Russian-Ukrainian War. Depending on post-war political and economic conditions, government capacity, and democratic development in Ukraine, the reconstruction efforts of Korea in Ukraine will differ from those of PRT in Afghanistan in both the way they operate and the amount of support they provide. Nevertheless, it can be inferred from this study that a public diplomacy approach to win the hearts and minds of the local people is crucial to the success of peaceful reconstruction efforts in Ukraine.

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