The Korean Model’s Relevance for Saudi Arabia: Dual-Purpose Industrialization for Defense and Economic Growth

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I. New Security Partnership between Saudi Arabia and South Korea

A landmark agreement is taking shape between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (KSA) and the Republic of Korea (ROK), signaling a new era of military cooperation between the two nations. In October 2023, ROK President Yoon Suk-yeol and Crown Prince and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Salman of the KSA laid the groundwork for a long-term, systematic alliance in defense capabilities. Their meeting was highlighted by discussions of "large-scale defense industry cooperation," accompanied by the signing of contracts and memorandums of understanding in the energy and infrastructure sectors, valued at $15.6 billion. \(^2\) This collaboration is particularly fitting given that the KSA is currently the world's second-largest importer of major arms, while

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1) This paper is adapted from my presentation at the webinar "The Applicability of the South Korean Model for the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia: Dual-Purpose Development for Militarization and Economic Growth," delivered on August 9, 2023. The webinar was organized by Emeritus for the Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI) IMPACT Program.

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The ROK has risen to become the ninth-largest arms exporter globally (2018-22). As the KSA seeks foreign assistance to establish a more independent defense industry, the ROK emerges as an intriguing partner and model. Over the past five decades, the ROK has successfully developed its defense industry while simultaneously boosting its economy, positioning itself as a prominent player in both sectors. This paper explores how the South Korean model of dual-purpose industrialization, where defense advancement has gone hand in hand with economic development, could serve as an inspiring blueprint for other nations, particularly the KSA. The KSA is currently in the process of modernizing its defense industry as part of Mohammed bin Salman’s Vision 2030 initiative. To assess the potential applicability of the Korean model in the KSA, it is important to consider the key factors that have contributed to the ROK’s success in this area.

II. Long-Term Factors Behind South Korea’s Defense Industrialization

South Korea’s defense industry has seen remarkable growth in recent years, with factors such as long-term US military aid and the recent Russia-Ukraine conflict contributing to the increase in Korean defense exports. However, the primary reason behind this progress can be attributed to strategic decisions made over several decades. The success story traces back to the Park Chung Hee government (1961-79), which integrated economic growth with domestic arms development.

In 1973, Park’s administration introduced the Heavy and Chemical Industrialization (HCI) Policy. The policy aimed to establish an independent defense industry that could reduce reliance on US military aid while developing export-oriented commercial sectors. A symbiotic relationship between military and economic development was established, which has been a fundamental principle of the ROK government’s strategy ever since.

The HCI Policy allocated funding to develop new industries such as heavy machinery, shipbuilding, petrochemicals, special metals, and electronics, which had applications in both the civilian and military sectors. These industries became essential for defense production, establishing a domestic defense industry with a private-sector manufacturing base. Large Korean conglomerates (chaebol), including Hyundai, Daewoo, Samsung, Kia, and Hanwha, emerged as defense contractors and major players in both commercial and military production.

The HCI Policy also placed great emphasis on training technical workers, leading to educational reforms and the development of a highly skilled workforce specializing in precision manufacturing. Furthermore, Park’s push for national scientization included the promotion of science and technology (S&T) in the national education curriculum and the establishment of government-funded research institutes, which helped to create the R&D infrastructure necessary for defense industrialization.

Subsequent administrations have continued to prioritize domestic R&D and S&T as pillars of national innovation and competitiveness. By leveraging its technological prowess in heavy machinery, shipbuilding, electronics, semiconductors, robotics, and unmanned technologies, the ROK has successfully developed advanced military systems and weapons. The constant threat posed by North Korea has also driven substantial government investment in military research, which has had positive spillover effects on civilian manufacturing.

South Korea’s holistic approach to defense industrialization has resulted in a robust, versatile private manufacturing sector capable of producing and exporting high-quality and cost-effective products. The country’s experience and transformation may serve as a viable model for other nations seeking to enhance their economic and defense capabilities.

III. The Applicability of the Korean Model

The Korean model of dual-purpose industrialization is highly relevant to the KSA as it seeks to transition from its traditional oil-based economy to a technologically advanced one with a vibrant local defense sector. South Korea and the KSA share several similarities in terms of their defense industries. Both industries are driven by immediate security concerns, with South Korea facing an ongoing threat from North Korea’s nuclear missile program and the KSA facing similar concerns regarding Iran’s military modernization and nuclear armament.

Despite their strategic alliances with the United States, both nations are striving for greater arms independence, as reflected in the policies of their respective Defense Acquisition Program Administration (DAPA) and General Authority For Military Industries (GAMI), both of which prioritize the localization of defense production.

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7) Kwon, “Mars and Manna.”
9) Kwon, Cornerstone of the Nation.
10) Kwon, “Mars and Manna.”
However, the defense industries of the ROK and KSA have progressed differently in terms of their orientation and success. South Korea’s defense industry is distinguished by its wide range of homegrown products, high technological sophistication, and strong export orientation. In contrast, KSA has mainly relied on imported arms and technological aid, with heavy dependence on countries such as the United States, the United Kingdom, Spain, and France (although it has recently diversified its suppliers). While KSA allocates a large defense budget for imports, the ROK has cost-effectively manufactured most of its arms and attracted a growing international clientele.

Amidst the recent strain in US-KSA relations, the KSA is increasingly placing its focus on enhancing its military self-reliance capabilities. This emphasis is a key aspect of the government’s ambitious Vision 2030 initiative, which aims not only for economic diversification but also for “the localization of 50% of the Kingdom’s total government defense spending” by the end of the decade. Playing a vital role in this vision is the state-owned Saudi Arabian Military Industries (SAMI), which was established in 2017 and aspires to be among the top 25 global defense companies by 2030. SAMI’s objectives go beyond merely localizing defense production; they also encompass fostering the nation’s security independence and promoting economic diversification. At present, Saudi Arabia has achieved a localization rate of 15% for its defense products.

The KSA can gain valuable insights from South Korea’s experience. The latter’s strategy of dual-purpose industrialization has proven successful in achieving localized arms production, economic diversification, and technological innovation. The ROK government’s consistent support and strategic investment in R&D have played a central role in fostering a competitive and innovative defense industry. As a result, South Korea has achieved an impressive indigenization rate of over 77% in its defense production. These outcomes are aligned with the goals of the KSA.

To adopt the strategies of the ROK model, the KSA should consider the following approaches. First, the KSA leadership should synchronize defense industrialization with the economic development strategy. This entails promoting the defense industry not only for national security purposes, but also for stimulating economic growth. The ROK’s defense industrialization has improved national security while driving technological advancements and initiating growth in sectors such as shipbuilding, heavy machinery, and the automobile industry, leading to economic diversification. Likewise, the KSA should expand the scope of defense industrialization to create new sectors and maximize the spin-off effects of technology. Such developments will generate employment opportunities and enable the defense industry to become more than just a security apparatus, but also a significant catalyst for economic development and technological modernization.

Second, the government must provide full support for localized production. To establish a potent defense industry, consistent investment in the domestic advancement of R&D is essential, along with the development of industrial technologies related to defense. Furthermore, emerging technologies such as artificial intelligence (AI), big data, robotics, unmanned aerial and naval systems (UAVs and UUVs), and cybersecurity should be prioritized. The KSA should focus on indigenous R&D to advance core technologies that can be utilized for both defense and civilian applications, similar to the approach taken by the ROK. By localizing production, the KSA can reduce its dependence on foreign weapon imports, decrease costs, and expand its domestic market for defense products. This strategy can help establish a firm foundation for the KSA to develop, produce, and maintain its own defense systems.

Third, although the KSA’s defense industry is predominantly state-owned, there is a need for increased collaboration with the private sector. A prime example of successful collaboration can be seen in South Korea: Park Chung Hee’s HCI Policy in the 1970s helped to converge the government, military, and private sectors for effective collaboration, forging strong public–private sector ties, which have been maintained since then. In addition to providing support to SAMI, a public enterprise, the KSA government must create an environment that encourages the active involvement of private companies, both large corporations and small and medium enterprises (SMEs), as contractors and subcontractors in defense projects. The key to South Korea’s rapidly growing defense industry lies in the government’s collaboration with an innovative and resourceful private sector that is capable of efficiently manufacturing high-quality weapons as per government direction and orders. The participation of private companies and their advancements can enhance defense production, spur economic

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18) While the ROK continues to rely on US military aid for critical weapon systems in aerospace, naval, and surveillance equipment, it has effectively utilized this aid to develop domestic weapons products, such as R2 Black Panther tanks, K9 Thunder howitzers, and the T-50 jet trainers.
20) Ivoire, Cornerstone of the Nation.
development, and facilitate export opportunities.

Fourth, the KSA government needs to invest in developing human capital by making comprehensive reforms in the national educational system and fostering collaboration with academia and industries to provide in-field training programs. These initiatives would aim to cultivate a highly skilled workforce that can meet the technical demands of the defense industry. The importance of a well-trained workforce is exemplified by South Korea’s success, which owes much to its strategic, long-term investment in technical education and vocational training for skilled workers, including engineers, craftsmen, and technicians (going back to the 1970s). The KSA can follow this example by tailoring educational objectives to the needs of the defense industry, especially in the S&T fields, to develop young local talents skilled in advanced research and manufacturing techniques. By providing training to the local workforce, the KSA can gain a steady supply of skilled labor and promote technological self-sufficiency at a national level.

Lastly, the KSA must establish robust technological partnerships. The KSA should aggressively form strategic alliances with leading foreign defense manufacturers to obtain technology transfers. These partnerships will expedite the development of KSA’s defense industry from a recipient to a creator of defense technologies. From the early days of building its defense industry, the ROK Ministry of National Defense (MND) and the Agency for Defense Development (ADD) demanded the transfer of original technologies in their deals with foreign defense firms from the United States and other countries. By capitalizing on joint research and technology transfer agreements, South Korea has assimilated and innovated upon outside technologies, thus upgrading its own capabilities and localizing production. The KSA can adopt a similar approach by forging extensive partnerships with global defense firms and actively bringing in technical expertise. The collaborations can range from co-development projects to co-production, academic exchanges, and various other forms of inter-governmental and industry-to-industry technical agreements.

V. Conclusion

The goal of defense industrialization requires long-term strategic planning, internal unity, and international collaboration. The obstacles faced by the KSA, such as localization, workforce development, technology acquisition, and finding the right balance between international assistance and independent defense industrialization, reflect those encountered by South Korea in the past. By adopting strategies akin to those of South Korea, the KSA can establish the foundation for a future where its defense industry not only becomes a cornerstone of national strength but also an engine of economic development.

21) However, more recently, South Korea has increasingly faced worker shortages, partly due to a declining population rate.

22) APDR staff, “Hanwha Aerospace places steel order with Risalloy for Egyptian K9 program,” Asia-Pacific Defence Reporter, May 17, 2023, https://asiapacificdefencereporter.com/hanwha-aerospace.places-steel-order-with-risalloy-for-egyptian-k9-program/?fbclid=IwAR1v5lLPEPzW6wC8tVkahSo8oAHTJUyM5Sh8Q763l51a3Sb6VM6EJjC5J2Qm8F1WZqTm.
30-Year UN Peacekeeping Operations of South Korea: The Achievements and Its Future

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On October 2, 2023, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution approving a Kenyan-led police mission to combat gangs in Haiti. It is to restore security in Haiti and to protect its citizens from the indiscriminate activities of armed gangs. Since the withdrawal of the UN Stabilization Mission in Haiti (MINUSTAH) in 2017, domestic security instabilities have been aroused. The local gangs have been engaging in acts of violence and plunder, as well as murder, in order to disrupt various political and economic gains. The situation escalated further after the assassination of Haiti’s President in 2021, leaving the government unable to fulfill its role and deepening societal unrest. The recent skirmishes between “vigilance committees” and the gangs resulted in an increase in the deprivations and insecurities of innocent civilians. In response, in October 2022, Prime Minister of Haiti requested the international community to deploy specialized security forces. UNSC resolved to dispatch a multinational mission.

The UNSC resolution regarding Haiti holds special significance for South Korea as well. First of all, Haiti is a place where the ROK Joint Support Group for Haiti (Danbi unit) performed UN PKO for approximately three years from 2010 to 2012. There, the Danbi unit successfully completed the disaster recovery and local stabilization mission in the Leogane area assigned by MINUSTAH and withdrew in 2012. Also, South Korea was the first country to deploy troops to Haiti when the UN requested international support for earthquake recovery of Haiti. Thirdly, the dispatch of the unit’s troops in 2010 was the starting point for the Korean government’s dispatch process and system change, including the enactment of the dispatch law, the expansion of the PKO center, and the establishment of a Standby Force. Therefore, I believe that this UN SC resolution on the Haiti mission serves as an excellent opportunity to reflect on the 30-year history of Korea’s UN PKOs.

Throughout this article, I first intend to organize the history and current status of UN PKO, and then examine the history of the Korean government and its achievements in UN PKO missions over the years. Finally, I aim to investigate the direction that future UN Peacekeeping activities of the Korean military should take.

UN and Peacekeeping Operations

After the termination of the Second World War, the international community established the UN...
on October 24, 1945. They aimed to suppress war and achieve world peace and security through the organization. For this purpose, the UN established Peacekeeping Operations (PKOs) based on the UN Charter to uphold global peace and security.

The first-ever UN PKO was the United Nations Truce Supervision Organization (UNTSO), established on May 29, 1948. UNTSO was created to mediate the first Middle East War (May 16, 1948 - February 24, 1949), and its mission continues to this day. Since the foundation of UNTSO, the UN has established a total of 71 peacekeeping missions. Over one million peacekeepers from 125 countries have served in these missions, and as of July 2023, 12 peacekeeping missions are operational, spread across Africa (6), the Middle East (4), Asia (1), and Europe (1).

UN Peacekeeping Operations have been greatly influenced by changes in the international arena. For over 40 years during the Cold War period, UN peacekeeping activities primarily focused on mediating interstate conflicts or monitoring compliance with ceasefires. The logic of control driven by the power and ideologies of superpowers affected not only the peripheral countries but also UN PKOs. However, the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991 led to the United States becoming the sole superpower; Furthermore, the realism that had dominated the Cold War era started to decline, while liberalism began to take the lead with an emphasis on international norms and institutions. Above all, the end of the Cold War marked a decisive turning point, allowing rather subdued peripheral nations living under the shadow of the "Balance of Terror," an ideological confrontation of great powers, to demand a change of longstanding dictatorships and to raise their national consciousness. This led to conflicts in various regions, and in line with these global trends, the UN entered a period of increased activation of PKOs. As seen in [Table 1], in the early post-Cold War years, 35 new UN peacekeeping missions were established within the first decade of this transitional period.

**[Table 1, PKO Missions]**

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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>71(12)</td>
<td>18(5)</td>
<td>35(2)</td>
<td>12(1)</td>
<td>6(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>31(6)</td>
<td>3(–)</td>
<td>15(1)</td>
<td>9(1)</td>
<td>4(4)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>America</td>
<td>10(–)</td>
<td>2(–)</td>
<td>6(–)</td>
<td>1(–)</td>
<td>1(–)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Asia/Pacific</td>
<td>10(1)</td>
<td>4(1)</td>
<td>4(–)</td>
<td>2(–)</td>
<td>–</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>9(1)</td>
<td>–</td>
<td>9(1)</td>
<td>–</td>
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<tr>
<td>Middle East</td>
<td>11(4)</td>
<td>9(4)</td>
<td>1(–)</td>
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The UN has been expanding its peacekeeping activities and functions in response to the multidimensional nature of international affairs. On the other hand, another security activity that requires UN approval is Multinational Forces operations, or MNF operations. MNF operations are the armed forces from two or more countries working together under the leadership of a specific country or regional security organization such as NATO or AU to achieve common objectives. These forces operate with the approval of the UN Security Council, which assesses the necessity and operational area of such missions.

**30 Years of Korean UN Peacekeeping Activities**

- **History of South Korea’s UN PKOs**

The end of the Cold War marked a significant historical moment that enabled South Korea’s membership in the UN and participation in UN PKO. In September 1991, South Korea officially became a member of the UN, expressing its willingness to participate in and contribute to all activities promoted by the organization. Engagement of Korea in UN PKOs commenced...
than 700 soldiers carried out individual missions across 18 mission areas as military observers and military staff officers. As of July 2023, South Korea currently has 2 units actively engaged in UN peacekeeping missions: the Hanbit Unit under the UN Mission in the Republic of South Sudan (UNMISS) and the Dongmyeoung Unit under the UN Interim Force in Lebanon (UNIFIL), with a total of 519 personnel. On an individual basis, 23 military personnel are serving as military observers and military staff officers in five different mission areas, contributing to UN PKO missions.

1) In July 1993 when an Engineering Construction BN of the ROK Army was deployed to the United Nations Operation in Somalia II (UNOSOM II). Over the past 30 years, South Korea has been actively involved in UN Peacekeeping missions, including unit deployments and individual assignments, with more than 20,000 personnel serving in 25 different UN mission areas. Regarding unit deployments, a total of 7 units have participated, comprising over 19,000 personnel. These units include four Engineering units, two Infantry units, and one Medical unit (refer to [Table 2] for details). In addition, more than 20,000 personnel served in 25 different UN mission areas. Regarding unit deployments, a total of 7 units have participated, comprising over 19,000 personnel. These units include four Engineering units, two Infantry units, and one Medical unit (refer to [Table 2] for details).

2) Achievements and Advancements

The South Korean government and military have consistently made efforts to expand their participation in UN PKOs. First of all, the government has built its international position through financial contributions to the regular UN budget and PKO budgets. According to data from the 76th UNGA in September 2021 session, South Korea's contribution rate (assessment) for the UN regular budget and PKO budgets for the years 2022 to 2024 is 2.574%, making South Korea the 9th largest contributor worldwide. Considering that South Korea's contribution rate was only 0.69% when it first joined the UN in 1991, this marks a remarkable 3.7-fold increase over 30 years. Second, the South Korean government established legal standards for the participation of its military in UN PKOs. On January 25, 2010, the National Assembly enacted the 'UN PKO Participation Act,' enhancing the legality and immediacy of South Korean military deployments in PKOs.

Third, South Korea focused on strengthening the capabilities and expertise of its overseas deployment personnel. Firstly, the government enhanced the size and professionalism of its PKO Center, the only training institution specialized in overseas deployment. In the initial stages of overseas deployments for the Evergreen Unit sent to Somalia in 1993, preparations were conducted at the 189th Engineering Construction BN, the home base of the unit. As the need for a dedicated department for overseas deployments grew, the PKO Training Division was temporarily established within the Joint Staff College in August 1995, gradually expanding its role as the institution responsible for PKO training. As South Korea's role in UN PKOs expanded in the international community, and opportunities for participation increased, needs for comprehensive research and development of doctrine related to overseas deployments grew, as well as training.

[Table 2, ROK Military PKO Missions]

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Mission period</th>
<th>UN Mission</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Evergreen unit in Somalia</td>
<td>1993.7–1994.3</td>
<td>UNOSOM II</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Engineer unit in Angola</td>
<td>1995.10–1996.12</td>
<td>UNAVEM III</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Danbi unit in Haiti</td>
<td>2010.2–2012.12</td>
<td>MINUSTAH</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hanbit unit in South Sudan</td>
<td>2013.3 – current</td>
<td>UNMISS</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Evergreen unit in East Timor</td>
<td>1999.10–2003.10</td>
<td>UNAMET,UNTAET,UNMSET</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dongmyeong unit in Lebanon</td>
<td>2007.7– current</td>
<td>UNIFIL</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ROK Armed Forces Medical Assistance Group in Western Sahara</td>
<td>1994.8–2006.5</td>
<td>MINURSO</td>
</tr>
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1) At the end of this year, South Korea plans to deploy its first South Korean military peacekeepers to two mission areas, UNDOF in the Golan Heights and UNTSO in the Middle East.
to run mutual exchange programs.

Secondly, it is necessary to establish a mid-
to long-term PKO vision plan to provide the
direction and plan of Korea’s peacekeeping
activities.

Lastly, continued public relations efforts are
essential to enhance awareness of South Korea’s
involvement in peacekeeping operations.
Establishing a course like the ’UN PKO
Academy,’ similar to academic initiatives such as
the ’International Security Academy’ organized
by KNDU, would be a promising approach.

Next 30 Years of South Korea’s
UN PKO

I personally served as a staff officer in the
MINUSTAH from 2009 to 2010. The prolonged
conflict and the terrible earthquake made the
citizens suffer from chronic anxiousness and
some even demanded the withdrawal of the
UN mission, citing its inconsistent activities.
However, the reactions of Leogane citizens,
where the Danbi Unit conducted its mission,
were different. They referred to the Danbi Unit
as the "Angel of Leogane" and wished for their
continued presence. They said the Danbi unit
melted Haitian hearts frozen by the horrors of
conflict, just as the Danbi unit tore through the
run-down land of the Leogane region to provide
clean water for residents. The Danbi unit was
able to earn the residents’ gratitude and trust
through sincere activities and communications.

I believe that over their 30 years of UN PKO
missions, South Korea’s government and military
have accumulated the greatest assets in the form
of ‘communication and trust. So, I wish that
Korea, building upon its UN PKO achievements
of the past 30 years, continues to participate even
more actively in UN PKO activities in the future.