

The Place of Desecuritization in the Relations between South Korea and the Islamic World

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Abstract:

Objective: South Korea's relations with the countries of the Muslim world can be seen as having mutual and common interests for both sides. Relationships that are remarkable in the context of relations between a middle power and a great civilization, but in many cases have been challenged due to the considerations of great powers, especially the securitization of issues in the Islamic world. Accordingly, the main question of the paper is that, how do the securitization issue has affected South Korea's relations with the Islamic world? And also how successful have been the efforts to desecuritize these relations?

Methods: The research method is descriptive-analytic and documentary and reliable internet based sources have been used to collect the information.

Results: The findings of the study indicate that although South Korea's relations with Islamic countries have been under the influence of great powers – especially the United States- in numerous cases, both sides have tried, along with maintaining their strategic ties with the great powers, to facilitate the desecuritization of their relations by efforts such as developing public-cultural diplomacy, strengthening economic ties and interdependencies, and also adopting an impartiality or non-interference approach in each other's affairs and crisis.

Conclusions: Islamic countries and South Korea have tried to enhance their relations in different aspects including cultural exchange, economic cooperation and non- intervene approach toward each other that has contributed to the enhancement of their relations and also affected the securitized nature of their relations.

Key Words: Desecuritization, Great Powers, Islamic World, Middle Power, South Korea

1. Introduction

Contrary to popular belief, Islamic history in Korea and Korea-Islamic world relations predate the Korean War by more than a millennium. Striking artifacts from the fourth and fifth centuries allude to an ancient history of commercial and political relations between Korea and the peoples of the Middle East, which continued after the birth of Islam (Hee, 2014). Although the exact date of the arrival of the first Muslims in Korea has not yet been determined, relations between Korea and the Islamic world can be traced to the middle of the ninth century, when Ibn Khurdadhbih mentioned the ancient Korean kingdom of Silla in his *Kitab al-Masalik wa-l-Mamalik*. Sources from the medieval orient have recorded Arab Muslims called 'Ta-shi' traveling to and from the Korean peninsula in the early part of the 11th century, Muslims apparently attempted to make contact with the Korean peninsula from the latter part of the unified Silla period (AD 661-935). From Muslim manuals of navigation that have come down to us, it is clear that Muslim navigators were quite at home in eastern seas, where their own colonies called Fan-Fang were established. In Fan-Fang, men of virtue called Qadi and Sheikh were chosen and appointed by the Chinese government to administrate the colonies in accordance with Islamic law and customs. Through marriage with Chinese or Korean girls, they gradually settled down in the region. According to some Arab travelers who visited China and Korea in the middle of the 9th century such as Sulaiman al-Tajir and Abu Zayid, there were more than 100,000 Muslims in the region even though the report is believed to be a little exaggerated (Lee, 2015: 1-2).

It may be hard to believe that a fifteenth-century Muslim leader recited verses from the Qur'an as he wished the Korean king a long life and prosperous nation; that the traditional Korean lunar calendar was likely influenced by Islamic calendar science; or that there was a grand mosque in Gaegyeong, the capital city of the thirteenth-century Goryeo kingdom. Yet all of these historical circumstances are cited in reliable Korean and Islamic sources. Muslims continued their presence in the Korean peninsula even during the Mongol Empire, Goryeo and Early Joseon dynasty. Muslims in the late Goryeo and early Joseon (1392-1910) dynasties formed their own communities, which allowed them to preserve their cultural customs, traditions, and religious rituals. The members of these communities owned shops that sold products from Muslim lands, and even built mosques called Yegungs. Some Muslim leaders achieved so much status that they were invited to attend court ceremonies, into which they incorporated their own religious rituals, including the recitation of the Qur'an. In addition, several Islamic scientific achievements, such as the lunar calendar, were widely disseminated throughout China and Korea (Hee, 2014).

The above mentioned examples of cross-cultural contact reveal a number of interesting aspects of Korea's 1,500-year relationship with the Middle East and then the Islamic world. Contrary to the commonly-held belief that Korean relationships with the Islamic world started after the Korean War, these relationships have a much longer history. As the evidences suggest, Korea

despite the geographical distance, has consistently maintained its relationship with Islamic countries which presence of Muslim minorities, the existence of Arabic and Persian inscriptions on the peninsula and continuous trade interactions in the old Silk Road can be taken in to account as its major proofs.

In pre-modern Korea, Islamic activities began in the 1920s, when Russian Turks fleeing the Bolshevik regime came to Korea. Around 250 Russian Muslims, mostly Kazan Turks, established permanent settlements in Korea, with their own schools, mosques, and cemeteries. Many supported themselves through profitable regional trade with Manchuria, Korea, and Japan (Lee, 2015: 15). Nonetheless, the recent century developments, while changing the nature of international relations, have sparked major issues and developments both for Korea and the Islamic world, which severely affected their relations. On one side, because of its strategic position, the Korean peninsula has always been the place of power competitions, which created many ups and downs during Korean millennial history. But the 20th century developments can be considered as the most influential shaping factor of Korean relations with other countries including the Islamic ones. Following the decline of Chinese empire, Korean peninsula lost its long influential ally and, due to its geopolitical position, became the target of colonial powers and conflict of their interests. Regarding the raise of Japanese empire and its colonial approach, Korean peninsula was under repressive colonization from 1910 until 1945 when the Allied forces won the Second World War and Japan was forced to surrender. It is worth to mention, due to the social disorder that befell Korea in the aftermath of the Japanese withdrawal in 1945, most of the mentioned Turkic settlers as the remaining Muslim minority left Korea for other countries.

Although Korean people hoped to regain their lost independence after the Japanese defeat, the opposition of the great powers interests once again prevented the creation of a unified and independent Korea. Despite the previous promises by Franklin Roosevelt, president of the United States, Winston Churchill, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom, and Generalissimo Chiang Kai-shek of the Republic of China in Cairo Declaration, Korean independence and integrity was fully undermined. Eventually, these rivalries led to the disintegration of the peninsula and the creation of two countries dependent on the East and West blocs (Shahmoradi, 2016: 20). Further, the bloody war between the two countries and intervention of great powers including the United States, China and Russia, became a full catastrophe, and was resulted in killing of millions of casualties and people from both sides. Although, there was nothing left but a ruin from South Korea after the end of that bloody war, it was able to quickly achieve economic development with the full support of the United States and integrated economic planning. Respectively South Korea began to change from an oppressive dictatorship to a lasting democracy.

Considering its fast economic growth, South Korea has had the one of the top poverty reduction rate in the world in recent decades. In fact, the main achievements and outcomes of development programs have been poverty reduction in the country. In the 1950s, most people in the country were in

absolute poverty and by the mid-1960s, about 60 to 70 percent of South Korean people were living in poverty. During the Korean War, the country's economic infrastructure was hurt and deprivation and hunger expanded vastly. Until the mid-1990s, absolute poverty fell astonishingly to a figure below 3.4 percent of the country's population. The poverty reduction in South Korea was such that its average poverty in 1999 was comparable to that of developed countries (Sheikholeslami & Shahmoradi, 2017: 162).

Considering its own economic and political problems, the Middle East and Islamic countries were of low importance to South Korea until the late 1960s and the two Koreas had limited interests in the region during those years. The Cold War division and the economic status of the South Korean economy defined the lack of interest in the region until the beginning of the 1970s. The development of the Republic of Korea's economy increased the importance of the Middle East for South Korea. In the mid-1970s, South Korean companies began to trade and get involved in major construction projects in the Middle East and the volume of trade was heightened, accompanied by a significant rise in oil imports from the region (Levkovitz, 2012: 226). Since the mid-1970s, the economic importance of the Middle East to South Korea's economy has increased gradually along with Korea's increased importance to several Middle Eastern nations. During these years, Islamic countries have been the main suppliers of energy for South Korea and their market have been of great importance for Korean companies.

On the other side, while the Eastern part of Asia became the center of geo-economics attentions after the second World War and its countries have become major producers in the world, the western part of the continent (Middle-East) including the Islamic countries have attracted the geopolitics focus of great powers that have so far resulted in permanent conflicts in the region. While the main criteria for competition among East Asian countries has been economic growth resulting in increased level of cooperation, interdependence and also intensified competition among these countries, Middle Eastern countries have been mostly involved in territorial issues and regional conflict rather than economic cooperation or competition. Therefore, the affairs of our region have been subjected to the concept of securitization in numerous cases which have affected South Korean relations with the Islamic countries as well.

South Korea's relations with Islamic countries have been neglected in the literature throughout the years, mainly owing to the focus on Korea's relations with the United States and Asian states and also the attention given to the North Korea–Middle East military trade (Levkovitz, 2010:1). South Korean relationships with the Islamic countries have received less attention from the media and researchers over the years compared to North Korea-Middle East relations mainly focusing on the military trade and security cooperation between Pyongyang and some Middle Eastern states. Although trade gap between North Korea and Islamic countries comparing to those of South Korea seems huge, North Korea has always been in the spotlight while South Korea is barely mentioned in the news. In this regard, the importance of the Middle East for the

South Korean economy influenced Seoul's political and military policies toward the region. Seoul has avoided pursuing any policies that might jeopardize its assets in the region. For example, abstaining from any military intervention in the region and pursuing a very cautious policy toward Israel in order not to endanger its trade with the countries of the Middle East are worth to mention and highlight the importance of security issues in the Middle East.

Therefore, this paper analyzes South Korea's relationships with the Islamic world through the years especially after the 1960s focusing on securitization and desecuritization issue. In this regard, after a brief discussion on the definition of concepts and theoretical framework, we would focus our analysis on three major aspects of desecuritization efforts including economic integration, public and cultural diplomacy and impartiality or non-interference approach while considering desecuritization as an independent variable and the relations between Korea and the Islamic world as a dependent variable.

2. Definition of Concepts

2-1. Middle Power

In international relations, Middle power is a state that holds a position in the international power spectrum that is in the "middle"—below that of a superpower, which wields vastly superior influence over all other states, or of a great power, but with sufficient ability to shape international events. The origins of the concept of the middle power as an analytical tool can be traced to the 16th century, in the writings of the Italian philosopher Giovanni Botero. Even though that concept may seem a relatively straightforward construct, there is disagreement among theorists about how middle powers should be defined and how they act in world politics. There are two ways to define a middle power: one is based on a state's military strength, capabilities and geostrategic position, while a second is based on a state's leadership capabilities. In other words, that such states are perceived as being liberal, oriented toward democracy, and having legitimate concerns in international politics. The first conceptualization stems from a realist paradigm and the second from a pluralist paradigm. Britannica suggests that middle powers are categorically different because of their reliance on diplomacy and the specific conditions under which they pursue foreign policy. Middle powers favor multilateral foreign policy and the formation of coalitions rather than unilateral decision making in foreign policy. The style of diplomacy used by middle powers has been labeled "Niche Diplomacy" mainly because middle powers have to follow limited foreign-policy objectives as a result of their power capabilities. However, middle powers do not challenge the status quo in the international system; they are not revisionist or transformatist states (Britannica, 2018).

In case of Korea, the whole peninsula has always been under the shadow of a greater power. At the beginning of the modern era, Korea went from vassal state of China to colony of Japan. After liberation, Korea was torn in two, the North became part of the Soviet-led communist bloc, and the South became an

anti-communist state under American influence. With the war that followed – which devastated both halves and killed millions of people – Korea hit rock bottom. After the Korean War, South Korea was one of the poorest countries of the world and relied heavily on foreign aid and military protection by the US. However, within just a few decades, South Korea managed to climb back up. It rapidly developed its economic and military capacity to new heights, underwent a process of democratization and started to participate more actively in international society (Van Den Berg, 2016: 1). In terms of its capacity, potential and aspirations, Korea attained the status of a “Middle Power” more than a decade ago. Membership in the OECD’s Development Assistance Committee and G20 signifies the completion of Korea’s transition from an evolving to advanced economy. Korea has emerged as an important player in Asian and international affairs. Its presence and influence have expanded in trade, investment, overseas development assistance (ODA), humanitarian aid and culture (Middle East Institute, 2014). Eventually, South Korea became something it could not have imagined before, a modern middle power. As South Korea’s international status and confidence rose, so did the question of how to be a middle power and deal with the challenges the country faced (Van Den Berg, 2016: 1). South Korea has devised and elaborated the concept of middle power diplomacy for the past several years. Some of its efforts include: 1) to help great powers lessen mutual strategic mistrust; 2) to develop an issue-specific dispute settlement mechanism; 3) to develop multilateral institutions or to actively participate in and further existing institutions; 4) to preemptively import globally established norms and 5) Most importantly, to make a cooperative network among like-minded middle powers to strengthen their positions vis-à-vis great powers in order to lessen great powers influence (Chun, 2015:2).

From another perspective, while the United States has wielded leadership under Uni-polarity, the decline of American power in the 21st century hinders efficient supply of security public goods. This difficulty is combined by the so-called “Return of Geopolitics” in many areas, as manifested in Ukraine, the Middle East, and even in East Asia. These changes provide South Korea with opportunities and difficulties. At the global level, South Korea with its increased national power and status, tries to play the role of a middle power. South Korea has actively participated in global peace operations and dispatched troops to many conflict zones. But regarding its security issues and the North Korean nuclear program, South Korea’s foreign policy strategy options become limited in specific areas (Chun, 2015:3). For South Korea it may be good to know that it will be protected by the U.S. if necessary, but on the other hand its dependence on greater powers also limits its maneuverability. This is exactly the kind of dilemma that a middle power like South Korea has to deal with (Van Den Berg, 2016: 3). South Korea has also worked to make knowledge sharing a global effort in order to prove itself as an important middle power. During its leadership of the G-20, it sought to become a ‘bridge’ between the developed and developing world and to put the issue of development firmly on the G-20

agenda. While not what was envisioned at the time, marrying Korea's efforts through its knowledge sharing program with an augmented version of the G-20 development agenda agreed to in Seoul might be an ideal means to provide and coordinate technical economic assistance from Korea and other G-20 nations (Stangarone, 2011).

Therefore, considering its position as a middle-power, the importance of the Middle East for the South Korean economy has influenced Seoul's political and military policies toward the region. Seoul has avoided pursuing any policies that might jeopardize its assets in the region as long as it does not ruin its alliance with United States. For example, abstaining from military intervention in the region and pursuing a very cautious policy toward Israel in order not to endanger its trade with the countries of the Middle East worth to mention and will be further discussed in the following section.

2-2. Civilizational Power

Civilizational power could be defined as ideational power based on common geo-culture whose people solidarity is ingrained in historical, religious and/or ideological communalities. International Relation's engagement with civilizations coincided with fundamental changes in the global order which ushered decolonization, globalization and the end of the Cold War. A civilization is considered the largest and highest socio-historical phenomenon, and consists of numerous, diverse and distinct cultures within itself. The emergence of the concept of civilizations in International Relations, goes beyond Huntington's "clash of civilizations" and has led to the focus on how and why different civilizational identities have distinct worldviews. As Bettiza describes, 'Civilizations are socially constructed when people somewhere not only identify themselves but are also recognized by others as either the archetypal representatives of a civilization' (Bettiza, 2014: 19). Martin Hall underlines the advent of civilizational identities in International Relations and argues that, 'civilizational analysis is important not least because the concept of civilization is being used'. It seems, 'at this historical juncture that the notion of civilization is a significant carrier of knowledge and of thereby attendant preferences and policies' Nevertheless, how do civilizations acquire political meaning and character? (Hall, 2007:199).

As social collectives, civilizations represent 'imagined communities' similar to nation-states, however, civilizations are manifestly distinct to nation-states, both in temporal and spatial dimensions. This implies that unlike nation-states, civilizations exist at sub-national and supranational levels and therefore, civilizations may be deployed in International Relations to represent 'transnational, inter-human, and de-territorialized cultural communities' (Bettiza, 2014: 4). This expanse of geographical and social diversity implies that civilizations encompass several distinctive constituents and are in a constant state of flux within themselves. Civilizations undergo changes both from their internal diversity and from inter-civilizational encounters (Cox, 2000:

220). Unlike the rigid territorial boundaries of nation-states, civilizations spill over national borders and defy territoriality and boundaries. The inter-civilizational interactions are ubiquitous; Europe's progress to a 'modern' civilization was assisted by such exchanges with China, India, and the Islamic world (Arnason, 2006). These inter-civilizational interactions assume political significance when civilizations are deployed as discursive practices for identity construction. Civilizational identity may be used to define the boundaries of a community by differentiating between self and the other; it can also be used to locate the self at the global, regional, or individual levels and also to evaluate others (Bajpai, 2018: 112).

3. Theoretical Framework

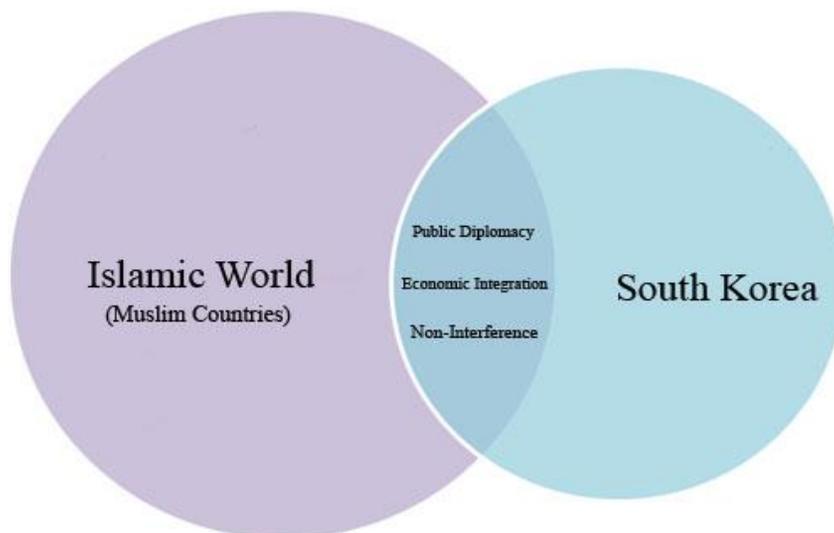
The issue of security has always been of great importance in international relations studies, but following the growing complexity of the international relations' agenda, namely with the rise of economic and environmental challenges count, emergence of the new security challenges, risks and threats, emergence of the new international relations' actors, enormous contribution to the contemporary security studies was made by the so-called Copenhagen School of Security Studies, which offered a quite new perspective on a broad spectrum of security issues, perceiving clearly that security dynamics could no longer be reduced only to the military-political relations of super powers, however important they might be (Šulović, 2010:6).

According to the Copenhagen School, something becomes a security issue when it is presented as posing a threat to an important object, a threat that needs to be dealt with immediately and with extraordinary measures. The main argument of securitization theory is that in international relations an issue becomes a security issue not because something constitutes an objective threat to the state (or another referent object), but rather because an actor has defined something as existential threat to some object's survival. By doing so, the actor has claimed the right to handle the issue through extraordinary means to ensure the referent object's survival. Security is thus a self-referential practice: an issue becomes a security issue only by being labelled as one (Diskaya, 2013). In this regard, by labeling something as "security" an issue is dramatized as an issue of supreme priority. One can therefore think of securitization as the process through which non-politicized (issues are not talked about) or politicized (issues are publicly debated) issues are elevated to security issues that need to be dealt with urgency, and that legitimate the bypassing of public debate and democratic procedures. The Copenhagen school originally studies the dynamics of security across five different, nonexclusive sectors—military, political, societal, economic, and environmental—although later analyses of securitization have sought to expand the number of sectors (Van Munster, 2014). The main argument of securitization theory is that security is a (illocutionary) speech act that solely by uttering 'security' something is being done. It is by labelling something a security issue that it becomes one (Wæver, 2004: 13). By stating that a particular referent object is threatened in its existence, a securitizing actor

claims a right to extraordinary measures to ensure the referent object's survival. The issue is then moved out of the sphere of normal politics into the realm of emergency politics, where it can be dealt with swiftly and without the normal rules and regulations of policy-making (Taureck, 2006: 3).

Because securitization enables emergency measures outside democratic control, the Copenhagen school generally opts for desecuritization, rather than securitization, as the preferable mode of problem solving (Van Munster, 2014). In Wæver's initial statement on securitization, the normative imperative of desecuritization (removing issues from security agenda) was positioned as a central concern, one reflected in the title of his 1995 chapter ('Securitization and Desecuritization'). For Wæver (1995:56-7), 'security' constituted the opposite of 'politics', the latter implying the possibility for more open engagement and dialogue. To be sure, the characterization of security and securitization as a failure of normal politics and as a (usually) normatively regressive development was not abandoned in later work. This normative imperative was certainly downplayed, however, relative to the emphasis on the development of a conceptual and analytical framework for understanding or explaining security dynamics (Mac Donald, 2008: 6).

Wæver is extremely critical of framing issues in terms of security. For him: 'security should be seen as a negative, as a failure to deal with issues of normal politics'. Because of this, he favors a strategy of desecuritization whereby securitization is reversed and issues are moved out of 'the threat — defense sequence and into the ordinary public sphere' where they can be dealt with in accordance with the rules of the (democratic) political system (Buzan et al. 1998: 29). Although this is clearly a normative statement on the part of Wæver, it is important to notice that it has no bearing on what securitization theory can do. This is because securitization and for that matter desecuritization are political acts and therefore outside of the securitization theorist's personal preference (Taureck, 2006: 3). In case of Middle Eastern affairs, numerous issues have been subjected to securitization by major powers, mostly the United States. But other actors including South Korea have been trying to maintain their security treaties and strategic ties with the great powers, especially the United States, while trying to facilitate the desecuritization of issues related to the Islamic world countries and promote its relations with these countries which will be further discussed.



Shape 1: Desecuritization Dimensions in South Korea-Islamic World Relations

4. Aspects of Desecuritization Efforts in South Korea-Islamic World Relations

4-1. Economic Integration

Officially named the Republic of Korea, South Korea is strategically located between the world's second-leading importer China to the west and fourth-place importer Japan to the east. South Korea shipped US\$573.3 billion worth of products around the globe in 2017. That figure represents roughly 3.6% of overall global exports estimated at \$15.952 trillion for 2016. From a continental perspective, almost two-thirds (63.7%) of South Korea's exports by value were delivered to other Asian countries while 14.7% were sold to North American importers. Regarding the importance of Islamic World countries it would be sufficient to notice, according to the International Monetary Fund, among South Korea's trading partners that cause the greatest negative trade balances, South Korean deficits with Iran (up 328.2%), United Arab Emirates (up 288.5%) and Kuwait (up 44.2%) grew at the fastest pace from 2016 to 2017. Also Indonesia with \$8.4 billion (1.5%) and Malaysia with \$8 billion (1.4%) are among the top 15 trading partners of South Korea in terms of export sales during 2017 (Workman, 2018). These statistics clearly indicate South Korea's economic relations with the Islamic countries especially the West Asian countries, but also represent key opportunities for South Korea to develop country-specific strategies to strengthen its overall position in international trade.

As mentioned before, until the late 1960s, the Middle East and Islamic countries were of low importance to South Korea, and the two Koreas had limited interests in the region during those years. The Cold War division and the economic status of the South Korean economy defined the lack of interest in the region until the beginning of the 1970s. The development of the Republic of

Korea's economy increased the importance of the Middle East for South Korea. In the mid-1970s, South Korean companies began to trade and get involved in major construction projects in the Middle East and the volume of trade was heightened, accompanied by a significant rise in oil imports from the region (Levkovitz, 2012: 226). Since the mid-1970s, the economic importance of the Middle East to South Korea's economy has increased gradually along with Korea's increased importance to several Middle Eastern nations. Therefore, in this part of the paper, the economic relations of South Korea with the Islamic countries and their efforts to promote partnerships resulting in desecuritization of their relations would be briefly discussed.

Until the 1960s, Seoul's policy toward the Middle East could be defined as passive, if not unimportant, owing to Korea's lack of interests in the Middle East. During the first years after its establishment in 1948, South Korea was preoccupied with nation building. The Korean War, which erupted two years later, left South Korea with one main goal, rebuilding the nation and developing its economy. In the first decade after the war, the lengthy reconstruction of the country left the Middle East out of South Korea's scope. Even during the 1960s, the Middle East remained relatively unimportant to the South Korean economy, as evident from the following comparison: The total trade (import and export) in the 1960s between South Korea and Middle Eastern states (United Arab Emirates, Iraq, Iran, Kuwait, Libya, Oman, Qatar, and Saudi Arabia) was \$125 million. During the same years, the total trade between South Korea and the United States was \$2,563 million, with Japan \$2,696 million, and with France \$86 million. (Levkowitz, 2010: 1).

The 1970s symbolized the change in South Korea's foreign economic policy toward the Middle East. Korea's developing economy required foreign markets to sell its products and services, and Korea changed its economic policy toward the region. President Park Chung-hee (1963–79) invested his main efforts in developing the South Korean economy to strengthen the country against North Korea and also reduce its dependency on the United States for its security and economic development in the short term. Park sought to pursue a more independent Republic of Korea that in the long term would not be dependent on the United States for its economic development and security. The development of the South Korean economy and the rise of the South Korean business conglomerates (Chaebol) increased the need to find projects and markets outside of South Korea. The Middle East was seen as a potential target for the expansion of South Korean construction companies such as Hyundai, Dong Ah Industrial, Daewoo and a vital source of energy for South Korea. South Korean construction companies were the dominant South Korean companies in the region, but other Korean companies sold their products in the Middle East: Hyundai, for example, sold pony cars in the Middle East, and South Korea communication equipment companies made market inroads there as well. Between 1974 and 1982, South Korean companies captured 49.2 percent of the network cables sales market in Saudi Arabia. In the early 1970s, the face of the Middle East changed when the oil boom brought a rapid increase in revenues to

oil-producing nations. This led these countries, mainly in the Middle East, to launch ambitious programs of public spending on infrastructure to foreign companies. The 1970s oil boom opened opportunities for South Korean companies to expand to the Middle East and compete with other international companies. Seoul began to regard this region as an attractive market for its industries, mainly the construction companies. The main goals of the government and the chaebol were to increase the competitiveness of South Korea's economy and South Korean chaebol and to overcome the conception that South Korean companies were incapable of competing in international projects (Levkowitz, 2010: 3). The Korean construction boom in the region played a vital role in helping the country's economy to rebound from oil shock. It also led to a cultural exchange. Therefore, most of the Korean economic success, absolutely based on the Middle East during 1970 and 1980's in construction and engineering market (Hee, 2018). The oil shocks in the 1970s prompted the Korean government to serve to emphasize the strategic importance of the Middle East; thereafter it started to pursue amicable foreign policies toward the Middle East countries in order to secure a stable oil supply and construction projects from which the ROK economy benefited (South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

While the developing South Korean economy increased the need to improve Seoul's relations with the Islamic countries to realize Korea's economic potential, it concurrently increased Seoul's dependence on the mentioned countries because of Korea's reliance on oil and gas from the region. Therefore, it shows how important the countries of the Islamic world became for South Korea. Seoul imported most of its oil from the Middle East. As a result, the more developed South Korea became, the greater was its dependence on oil and gas from these countries. This dependency increased the advantage that Islamic countries had over Seoul.

During 1990s, South Korea's relations with the Islamic countries were hugely affected by regional conflicts. These regional wars showed the high risk that Korean companies were taking while working in some of the Middle Eastern countries. As an example, the Iran-Iraq War (1980–88) influenced trade between South Korea as well as Iran and Iraq. Trade was not stable throughout the war years. For example, South Korea imported a total of \$642 million in petroleum products from Iran in 1980. In 1984, imports rose to \$1,135 million, and by the end of the war (1988) Seoul's imports declined to \$518 million (Levkowitz, 2010: 5). Since the 1990s, The Korean government has been exerting efforts to lay the foundation of sustainable cooperation with the Middle Eastern countries in response to economic strategies of the Middle East countries to prepare the post-oil era. Korea has expanded the range of cooperation with Middle Eastern countries into higher value-added business including traditional cooperation in the energy and construction fields (South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018).

The new millennium demonstrates an incremental change in Seoul's foreign policy, which began in the mid-1990s when Seoul gradually increased its

involvement in international organizations in Asia such as the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation, the ASEAN Regional Forum and global organizations such as the UN (Levkowitz, 2010: 6). Korea's enhanced material capabilities and international standing are well reflected in its interactions with the Islamic countries of the Middle East. At the same time, these countries have never been as important to Korea as it is today. In his closing remarks at the 10th annual Korea-Middle East Cooperation Forum held in Seoul in October 2013, South Korean Foreign Minister Yun Byung-se described how his country's relationship with the region had changed from one "of choice" to a relationship "of necessity". Over 80% of Korea's oil and 50% of its gas supplies are sourced from the Persian Gulf. In 2012, Korea's trade with the region climbed to more than \$164 billion. In recent years, Samsung Engineering and other Korean companies have grabbed a large and growing share of the region's infrastructure and construction projects (Middle East Institute, 2014).

In case of Malaysia, trade and cultural exchange were very limited during the first twenty years of diplomatic partnership between the two countries, but there was a fundamental change, when Malaysian Prime Minister, Dr. Mahathir Mohammad introduced the 'Look East Policy' in the early 1980s, as a way to learn and benefit from the success of Japan and South Korea. Following the policy establishment, economic relations between Malaysia and Korea has since developed and grown as important cooperation partners in various fields. The involvement of Malaysia and Korea as ASEAN+ 3 member countries also intensifies the partnership between the two. After the establishment of the Look East Policy and progressive economic development in both countries, Malaysia began to register a growing trade surplus with Korea, reaching close to US\$ 60 million in the late 1980s. One of the contributing factors for the persistent trade surplus is due to huge demand for raw materials by Korea, whereas Malaysia's import from Korea has remained small, but growing. Malaysia's import from Korea surpassed its export volume from 1994 to 2000 due to increasing demand for Korea's manufacturing products. Due to the surge of imports by Malaysia, trade balance began to decline in the early 90s. Import volume started to decline with the occurrence of Asian Financial Crisis in 1997 that led to significant drop in both export and import volumes. The trade balance also suffered due to larger import volumes compared to exports. The situation improved in 2000 and the trend continued until the world's economy was hit with another crisis in 2008. After recovery, export to Korea continues to grow on a steady path and trade surplus has continued to improve until today, thus highlighting the long-term trade growth prospects between the two countries (CEFIA, 2016).

Although before 1991, Korea was nowhere in the list of the ten largest Malaysia's trading partners. The situation has changed and since then, as bilateral trade between the two countries improves, Korea became one of the key trading partner of Malaysia in terms of import and export. In 2013, Korea became Malaysia's seventh largest trading partner, behind U.S., Thailand and Indonesia. And In 2017, South Korea was the 13th largest source for Foreign Direct Investment and the sixth largest investor in the manufacturing sector in

Malaysia. As of December 2017, a total of 359 manufacturing projects with Korean participation worth US\$18.5 billion have been implemented. The projects and investments from South Korea have created 51,000 jobs for Malaysians so far, and from January to March 2018, three investment projects from South Korea worth US\$41.2 million created more than 200 jobs (Ravichandran, 2018).

Korea and Indonesia too have developed an increasingly robust economic relationship over the past 40 years. Since the two states established diplomatic relationship in 1973, bilateral trade volume and Korean foreign direct investment (FDI) to Indonesia have increased tremendously. At present, Korea and Indonesia are influential trade partners for each other, while Indonesia has been an important place for Korean FDI for a long time. Korea has also enhanced efforts to help the development of the Indonesian economy by strengthening cooperation on the governmental level and providing a substantial amount of official development assistance to Indonesia. With technical assistance and knowledge sharing programs, Korea has helped to enhance the quality of Indonesian institutions. With Korean-Indonesian Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), the two countries have broaden the scope of tariff free items to get substantial benefits (Kang, 2013: 47). South Korea and Indonesia have also agreed to strengthen bilateral ties and boost people-to-people exchanges, while their leaders expressed determination to increase bilateral trade to US\$30 billion within the next five years. Both countries agreed to expand cooperation in railways, real estate development and smart transportation systems. The two countries also seek to promote cooperation in the automobile, information, communication and agricultural sectors (Straits Times, 2018). Korean exports to Indonesia have fluctuated greatly over the years after quickly increasing from 1977. During this period they show a steadily increasing trend, except in the mid-1980s and the three subsequent economic crises: the second oil shock (1997), Asian financial crisis (1997), and global financial crisis (2008). Indonesian exports to Korea also show a similar trend to Korean exports to Indonesia, although there were more fluctuations. In 1977, Indonesia exported \$345 million to Korea. Exports to Korea increased to almost \$1 billion in 1988, despite some ups and downs. They increased to \$4.1 billion in 1997. However, Indonesia also experienced a plunge in exports to Korea, due to the effect of the 1997 Asian financial crisis. Exports were reduced to \$3 billion in 1998, then increased steadily from 1999 to 2008. Indonesia recorded almost \$11 billion in exports to Korea in 2008. In 2009, exports decreased to \$9 billion due to the effect of the 2008 global financial crisis. In 2010, once again they turned around and reached almost \$15.7 billion in 2012 (Kang, 2013: 47-49).

Indonesia has long been an important place for Korean FDI. When Korean firms started investing abroad in the 1960s, the primary destination was Indonesia. Of the total FDI in 1980, the percentage of Korean FDI to Indonesia was 40.6 percent. As Korean firms diversified their FDI destinations in the 1980s it decreased. By 1985, Korean FDI to Indonesia amounted to only 10.6

percent of Korea's total FDI. For a moment, though, it increased to 19 percent in 1990. Afterwards, Korean FDI to Indonesia continued to decrease from the 1990s to the 2000s, as many Korean firms diverted their FDI to China and Vietnam to take advantage of low wages. FDI fell to 6.3 percent in 1995, then falling to 1.9 percent in 2000, and 1.4 percent in 2005. However, Korean firms strengthened investment activities in Indonesia as the two countries became strategic partners in 2006. Since then, the portion of Korean FDI to Indonesia among the total Korean FDI increased to 3.6 percent in 2010, to 4.7 percent in 2011, and to 4.2 percent in 2012 (Kang, 2013: 48). As the statistics suggest, regarding the source of investment in Indonesia, the five leading countries in the first half of 2018 are: Singapore (US\$ 5.04 billion, 33%), Japan (US\$ 2.39 billion, 15.7%), mainland China (US\$ 1.34 billion, 8.8%), South Korea (US\$ 1.15 billion, 7.5%) and Hong Kong (US\$ 1.1 billion, 7.2%) (Ministry of Commerce People's Republic of China, 2018)

On the other side, Islamic countries are well aware of their position and importance for South Korean economy. According to the South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the Middle East is a region which contains 6% of the world's population, 60% of the world's oil reserves and 45% of the world's natural gas reserves. Due to its abundant natural resources and strategic importance, the security of the Middle East region is closely linked to the stability of the rest of the world and global security (South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). Also regarding their needs for economic development, Islamic countries have especial intention for technological assistance and investment by Korean companies. In this regard, considering the principle of interdependence, both parties have tried to promote their economic relationships in order to the decrease of the impact of the great powers and ultimately make their relations desecuritized.

Table 1: Korea-Islamic World Trade Statistics in 2017

Country	Export	Import	Trade Volume
Iran	4.02	7.99	12.1
Saudi Arabia	5,160	19,561	21,386
UAE	5,870	6,941	12,811
Kuwait	1,163	9,606	10,769
Qatar	436	11,264	11,700
Oman	641	2,333	2,974
Bahrain	290	394	684
Libya	280	645	925
Tunisia	135	53	188
Yemen	89	43	132

Unit: \$1,000,000

Source: The Korea International Trade Association (KITA, www.kita.net)

4-2. Non- Interference Approach

South Korean approach toward the countries of the Islamic World, specially the Middle Eastern countries has been adopting non-interference as long as the United States does not oppose it. As it is argued in the following, even in cases of military involvement, South Korea has tried to behave in a way that might not adversely affect its economic relations with these countries or considered as an anti-Muslim country.

South Korea's security relations with the Middle East were very limited until the 1990s. Seoul did not perceive military involvement in the Middle East as serving its political and economic interests. In 1960s, in the midst of the détente between East and West and the birth of newly independent nations in the Middle East and Africa, the ROK Government established diplomatic relations with the Middle Eastern countries, initiating from the consular relations with Egypt in 1961 (South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). During those years, South Korea's diplomatic and political relations with the Middle East and Muslim countries were part of the Cold War division between the pro-U.S. camp to which Seoul belonged and the pro-Soviet Union camp, to which Pyongyang belonged. The Cold War defined for Seoul its trading partners in the region and in which countries it could establish diplomatic relations. Regarding such a context, in the 1950s and 1960s, the Middle East's political relevance played a role in the competition between Seoul and Pyongyang on the legitimacy of Korea. Both Seoul and Pyongyang competed for Korea's legitimacy by establishing diplomatic relations with countries around the world. Seoul was able to establish diplomatic relations with pro-U.S. nations such as Jordan, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Tunisia and a decade later with several more Middle Eastern states. On the other side, Pyongyang established diplomatic relations with the more radical pro-Soviet nations such as Yemen, Syria, Sudan, and others. Years later, Seoul established diplomatic relations with the Middle Eastern and North African nations that were not part of the pro-U.S. camp, such as Yemen (North Yemen in 1985, South Yemen in 1990) and Sudan in 1977 (Gills, 1996: 64–65). In case of other Islamic countries, the official diplomatic relationship between Korea and Malaysia was formally signed on 23 February 1960. Indonesia and South Korea officially established diplomatic relations on 17 September 1973. The first decade of diplomatic partnership between Korea and the two countries can be described as unremarkable and low key in nature. This was to be expected as these countries were still undergoing formative development, and Korea in particular, were still facing internal political instabilities and the aftermath of Korean Wars (CEFIA, 2016).

Country	1950s			1960s			1970s			1980s		
	E	C	T	E	C	T	E	C	T	E	C	T
Bahrain							S					
Egypt				S	S/N							
Iran				S			N					
Iraq				N							S	
Jordan				S			N					
Kuwait										S/N	S/N	
Lebanon						N			S	S		
Libya							N	S		S		
Oman				S								
Qatar							S					
Saudi Arabia				S								
Sudan				N			S	S				
Syria				N								
Tunisia				S	S		N					
Turkey	E											
United Arab Emirates										S		
Yemen (North) Arab Republic				N								
Yemen (South) People's Democratic Republic				N								

Table 2: South Korea's and North Korea's Diplomatic Relations with Muslim countries, 1950s–80s. Source: (Levkowitz, 2010: 2)

Currently, rather than Indonesia and Malaysia, South Korea has diplomatic relations with 17 Muslim Middle Eastern countries, where there are seventeen Embassies and two Consulate Generals. Countries with which Korea has diplomatic ties include: Saudi Arabia, Iraq, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, Mauritania, Bahrain, the UAE, Algeria, Oman, Jordan, Iran, Egypt, Qatar, Kuwait, Tunisia and Yemen (South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). The point is that, from the very beginning of its relations with Muslim countries, securitization issue and consideration have been an important shaping factor but the economy influenced Seoul's policy throughout the years. For example, Seoul's relations with Israel have always been among sensitive matters. Although South Korea's economic involvement in the region increased over the years, its diplomatic and military policy toward the region was very restrained and limited. Although power politics has always influenced Seoul's behavior but the ultimate goal has been economy during decades. As an example, while South Korea did not establish diplomatic relations with Syria on account of

Syria's objection to South Korea's diplomatic relations with Israel, this did not prevent the two states from trading with each other.

Korea's first military involvement in the Middle East was during the first Persian Gulf War, which posed a dilemma for Seoul. Washington requested that Seoul send military forces to join the operation to free Kuwait from Iraqi occupation. Until then, the only time that South Korea had sent military forces outside of Korea was during the Vietnam War – to assist the US forces during the Cold War era – under Park Chung-hee's presidency (Balbina, 2008: 131). The global arena and the Korean political arena in 1991 differed completely from the Vietnam War era. Rejecting President George H. W. Bush's request to assist Washington in Operation Desert Storm might have adversely affected the alliance between Seoul and Washington, since American forces were – and still are – stationed in South Korea and Seoul was expected to consent to Washington's request, as its protected ally. Moreover, the military operation to free Kuwait from Iraqi occupation was defined as a collective security action by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), as it was during the Korean War. The UNSC resolution legitimizing the military operation meant that South Korea had to send forces to Iraq if it wanted to be perceived as an important player in the global arena, and if it wanted the future assistance of the UNSC against North Korea. Seoul had to consider the implications of its involvement in the war on the Arab world, even though it was legitimized by the UNSC. Finally, because of the overwhelming global support the US received, and the 34 countries that sent military forces to the Persian Gulf to assist the UN forces, Seoul was able to cope with the pressure from Washington to participate in the war. Korea eventually sent only 341 soldiers – for logistic assistance – who did not participate in combat. Seoul was able to participate without being labeled by the Middle East as siding against the Persian Gulf states and shattering its “relatively ideal neutrality” – and without clashing with Washington (Levkowitz, 2013: 10-11).

South Korea's second military involvement in the Middle East was during operation Iraqi Freedom in 2003. International legitimacy in this case was more limited than the 1991 Persian Gulf War, which is why Washington intensified the pressure on its Asian allies, South Korea and Japan. Washington demanded that Seoul and Tokyo send significant military forces to assist the U.S. in the war and place them in the battle zone (Kyudok, 2005: 31). This time, Seoul was aware of the fact that refusing to send forces to Iraq would damage its relations with Washington and will potentially lead to the withdrawal of a portion of the U.S. forces stationed in South Korea. The alliance with Washington carried a price tag that Seoul had to pay. South Korea understood that sending its forces to Iraq was part of the cost of the alliance. It understood that although it was able to stave off some of the pressure from Washington during the First Persian Gulf War, 2003 was a different game and it would have to send forces to Iraq. Another factor that influenced Seoul's decision was the perception that sending soldiers to Iraq would allow it to be perceived as a “middle power” in the global arena. Seoul eventually sent military units to Iraq, but was unwilling to comply

with all of Washington's requests. The US demanded that Korea send troops to a combat zone in Mosul, Iraq. Seoul opposed this demand, and in 2004 dispatched 3,500 soldiers, the Zaytun Division, to non-combat zones in Irbil and Kirkuk where they worked mainly on civilian tasks, including local civilian reconstruction projects. These soldiers were the third-largest foreign military force in Iraq (surpassed only by the US and UK; Japan, for example, only sent 600 soldiers). The South Korean government publicly emphasized the civilian nature of its forces so as not to be tagged in the Arab world as an anti-Muslim country, an image that might adversely affect its economic relations with the Middle East. Seoul's concerns about the potential effects of its involvement in Iraq on trade with the Persian Gulf states were refuted. Since then, South Korea has dispatched its military forces as part of the UN peace-keeping forces. The South Koreans realized that playing a more significant role in the Middle East requires involvement beyond the economic and political realms and playing a military role, albeit not as part of active combat units (Levkowitz, 2013: 11-13). Beside military involvement in crisis of the Islamic countries, South Korea has avoided partiality in order to keep its friendly relations with all Islamic countries unless the considerations of the United States forced them to change Korean leader's decision. Even in such cases, South Korean officials have tried to maintain the economic and political relations as much as possible, paving the way for their return after problem solvation. Such a pattern of behavior could be seen in various occasions that will be further discussed.

Regarding the developments in Arabian countries known as Islamic Awakening or Arab Spring there was political coverage inside South Korea that focused on the causes of the Arab Spring but never really went into in depth analysis or official response. South Korea, as an ever increasing middle power, had very little use in covering the story or official response indeed. Most of the newspapers took tones that reflected a possible sentiment similar to what people would feel in China and in North Korea but never really sought far to compare the two. Political coverage was dim because of the lack of national interest in such behavior or partiality (Ha and Donghee, 2016: 536-556). It is worth to say, Islamic Awakening developments were important for South Korea from this perspective that it could provide a unique opportunity to gain a broader understanding of the challenges South Korea could face during any future reunification with North Korea. Each economic and political transition has its own characteristics and challenges, as well as the means of addressing them. Should reunification occur, having a broader understanding of how other nations have successfully integrated the elites of the former regime, or handled the reform a non-market economy, provided South Korea a knowledge advantage for reunification (Stangarone, 2011).

In case of Iranian nuclear issue, the South Korean government gave mixed signals in regard to joining international sanctions against Iran on many occasions. Seoul often asked for exemptions from U.S. and EU sanctions, with varying success. For example, Korean companies doing business in Iran were exempted from U.S. sanctions on Iran's non-oil trade in March 2012. The

Obama administration granted Seoul temporary waivers from these sanctions if Seoul reduced its Iranian oil imports by 10 percent. In addition, Seoul hesitated for several years at the Obama administration's request for independent sanctions on Iran amid concerns that oil trade disruptions would deal a serious blow to the domestic economy. Therefore, only after a series of pointed U.S. discussions that highlighted the fact that Seoul's cooperation on Iran sanctions was "absolutely vital" and that the United States had supported South Korea following the sinking of its navy vessel by a North Korean submarine in March 2010, Seoul moved toward implementing sanctions. South Korea's policy dilemma on the sanctions targeting Iran lied partially in its calculations of its broader relations with the United States. Seoul's policy on the Iranian nuclear issue has always influenced by the possible long-term consequences of a weakening security alliance with the United States (Chang, 2014). After negotiation which resulted in JCPOA, South Korea started to boost its relations with Iran and regain its lost position in the country's economy. In 2016, President Park visited Iran, and it was a historical event as it marked the first presidential visit since the establishment of diplomatic relations between Korea and Iran in 1962 (South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2018). In sum, it seems Seoul has faced a tough balancing act between protecting its commercial and energy interests in Iran, on the one hand, and responding to U.S.-led pressures to restrict trade and financial links to the Islamic Republic of Iran, on the other (Chang, 2014). Even after U.S. illegal withdrawal from the JCPOA, South Korea has called the United States for "maximum flexibility" to impose sanctions on Iran. In this regard, BBC reported that the country was calling for "maximum flexibility" by the United States for its request to exempt Korean companies affected by the resumption of Iran sanctions (BBC, 2018), In order to keep its economic and political relation.

Such a non-Interference approach could be seen in numerous events inside the Islamic countries, including Mohammed bin Salman seizure of power from the rightful crown prince of Saudi Arabia, the 2016 Turkish coup d'état attempt in which South Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs confined to recommend its citizens to leave the country and more recently in case of Jamal Khashoggi scandal, which South Korean officials refused to state any comment on a subject that had so far attracted attention from all over the world. On the other side, Islamic countries have always refused to interfere or comment on South Korean regional and domestic issues, especially in case of North Korean nuclear and missile issue which has been critical in recent years. As an example, Islamic Republic of Iran is among the very few countries who has established friendly relations with both Koreas and in spite of all barriers, could have saved its relation with both countries during different periods of time. Iran has always tried to make some kind of balance in its foreign policy approach toward South and North Korea and this non-interference approach is the reason for such friendly relations with both South and North Korea (Shahmoradi, 2017:182). Also, Iran has always supported and welcomed the idea of Korean reunification and the peaceful initiatives from South and North Korean leaders to deal with

crisis on the Korean Peninsula and the desire for reunification (Institute for Political and International Studies, 2009: 137-139). Even in case of the 2016 political scandal in Korea which resulted in the impeachment of Park Geun-hye, South Korean president, none of Islamic countries declared any official reactions, but also their press considered the event as a sign of democratic maturity in South Korea and its self-healing abilities.

Therefore, it seems both parties have so far preferred the non-Interference approach toward each other's affairs as long as possible unless they are forced to do the otherwise under pressures from global powers, especially the United States whose footprints are present in domestic and international affairs of both South Korea and the countries of Islamic world. It seems, South Korea's security relations in the Middle East will continue to be relatively limited compared to its economic relations and Islamic countries would continue their current approach for non-Interference in South Korean domestic and regional issues. The final objective of these efforts would be the mutual contribution to desecuritization of their relations and result in further cooperation which has proven to be mutually beneficial.

4-3. Cultural and Public Diplomacy

South Korea's labor dispatch to the Middle East, led many South Koreans to convert to Islam. Later in 1976, the first mosque in the country was established in the capital, Seoul. The laborers who came back to South Korea acted as cultural ambassadors, raising the country's interest in Middle Eastern culture. After 1976, more departments on Middle Eastern studies – including Farsi and Turkish language departments – were established. (Hee, 2018). Islamic Studies in Korea began with the demand for specialized knowledge about Middle Eastern countries during the oil boom after the Arab-Israeli War in the 1970s. It was then that the Korean government paid special attention to the Middle East. A pioneer of the Middle East and Islamic Studies in Korea is Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS). The university has departments of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, Malay-Indonesian and Central Asian Languages, and offers some Islamic-related curricula. The emphasis on the Middle East as pursued by Korea led to the inauguration of The Institute of the Middle East Studies (MES) at HUFS in 1976, The Korean Association of the Middle East Studies (KAMES) in 1979, and finally The Korean Association of Islamic Studies (KAIS) in 1989 (Chang, 2010).

After its fast economic growth and influence, South Korea has considerably focused on its image in public global arena. Therefore, the country has committed to the development of its public diplomacy. In this regard, the term "Korean Wave" (also known as Hallyu) describes the cultural phenomenon whereby various aspects of Korean culture such as music, television series, and movies have become globally popular. Since the late 1990s, the Korean Wave has attracted many foreigners to Korean culture and influenced unexpected fields as Hallyu industries have become more diversified and specialized, in turn increasing the exportation of Korean goods. Hallyu has overall enhanced

Korea's public image abroad, deepening foreigners' familiarity with the country. It is anticipated that the exportation of Hallyu industries will expand in the future. (Saber, 2018). Korean public diplomacy, a core part of Hallyu, is led by the public media and includes television series, music and movies. When Hallyu first began, it was disseminated through television and movies. The first program introduced in the Middle East was the cartoon Cute Jjoggomi, which was sold to Jordan in 1998. Youth was the first television drama sold in the region; it was released in Jordan in 2002. However, Korean cultural media content was not initially successful in the Middle East. It began to receive significant attention when television dramas such as Jumong, the 1st Shop of Coffee Prince, and Winter Sonata became popular in the Middle East. Dae Jang Geum was broadcast in 2008, and was a big hit in Islamic countries. This led to Hallyu television series being actively distributed, which helped spread Korean culture as well (Suwan, 2017: 259). Hallyu has enhanced Muslims' familiarity with the country and South Korea's public image, leading to increasing interest in visiting South Korea. The by-product of South Korean drama and music has been the promotion of Korean language, food, cultural products, and tourism among Middle Easterners and others. Additionally, South Korea is increasing its investments in order to attract more tourists from Muslim countries. One way of doing so was by adopting Halal certification. This introduction will increase the availability of halal food within South Korea and exports of Korean food products to the Islamic countries. By 2013, 987 Hallyu-related organizations were active, encompassing 9 million members worldwide. In the United Arab Emirates (UAE), in particular, such groups are present mainly in higher education institutes such as UAE University, the American University of Sharjah, and Middlesex University Dubai (Saber, 2018).

On the other side, rising number of Muslims in South Korea and their influence is worth to mention. In 2001, there were only 34,000 Muslims living in Korea; today there are more than 150,000. Furthermore, there are over 45,000 ethnic Korean Muslims. With the continuing increase in international migration over the past decade from Muslim-majority countries, the Korean Muslim community is transforming into a significant social and religious force (Kwon, 2017). Regarding the rising number of Muslims in South Korea, in 2008, the Korea Muslim Federation opened the first Islamic elementary school founded by KSA, with the objective of helping local Muslims to understand their religion better. Kim Hwan-yoo, secretary general of the organization, explained that the main goal is correcting the distorted view of Islam in Korean society (Kim, 2008). It seems, Muslims who have left their homelands to settle in the non-Islamic countries, regardless of the external factors that led to their migration, see themselves as missionaries rather than immigrants in the usual sense of the term. With more than 150,000 Muslims now living in Korea, the Korean Muslim community has shown surprising growth potential. Driving this growth have been different modes of migration driven by a variety of purposes, including marriage, education, and employment (Kwon, 2017). These has become a social force which attracts Muslim leaders to use as tool in their

relations with South Korea. As a result, both South Korea and Muslim countries have shown their interests to use public and cultural diplomacy to enhance their public image and contribute to their relations. The mentioned efforts have been a significant tool for desecuritizing bilateral relations between South Korea and Islamic countries.

5. Conclusion

The development of the South Korean economy was an important factor that influenced relations between South Korea and Islamic countries, as it led Korean companies to search for markets outside of Korea. The Middle East, mainly the Persian Gulf and Muslim countries, became a favored market for South Korean companies due to the increased number and volume of projects they won there. The second economic factor was the increasing need for energy to fuel the development of the South Korean economy, which caused Seoul to become dependent on Islamic countries especially the Persian Gulf region for its oil and gas needs. But both South Korea and Islamic countries have understood that in the global era, economic interest is not enough. Therefore cultural and historical relations should be highlighted along with development of economic and political relations.

The issue of securitization have been an important factor considering South Korea`s relations with Islamic countries which can be seen in cases such as first and second Persian Gulf war, Muslim- Israel confrontations, the American so called war on terrorism and Iranian nuclear issue. But where there have been no such consideration, the bilateral relations of South Korea and Islamic countries shows considerable growth as it is the case for Malaysia and Indonesia that are now among top 15 economic partners of South Korea. Therefore the issue of securitization and efforts to overcome this barrier have a special position in South Korea`s relation with Islamic countries.

South Korea`s policy toward Islamic countries tries to make a balance between economic interests and strategic considerations related to their special alliance with United States. The billions of dollars of contracts with the Muslim countries, mainly the Persian Gulf states, are too important for Seoul to loose but its strategic and military relations with United States are vital at the same time. On the other hand, South Korea has become a permanent costumer of oil and gas from the Islamic countries that highlights South Korea`s position for these countries as main producers of fossil energy. Also, regarding the developing approach of Islamic countries, they have especial intentions toward technological and investment assistance from Korean companies.

As a result, although relations between South Korea and Muslim countries have proven to be of mutual benefit, these relations have faced barriers by superpowers in numerous cases. While the considerations of these superpowers have been of great importance for both South Korea and some of Islamic countries, both parties have tried to enhance their bilateral relations in different aspects including cultural exchange, economic cooperation and non- intervene

approach toward each other that has contributed to the enhancement of their relations and also affected the issue of securitized nature of these relations.

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