

Chapter 1

The Historical Process of Strategic and Geopolitical Relations between Colombia and South Korea^{*}

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Abstract: For Colombia, creating and maintaining strategic relations based on a geopolitical scenario with other countries is essential for its national interests. This chapter presents the historical process and relevant aspects of bilateral relations with South Korea after 1953. Consequently, theoretical, historical, documentary, and oral tradition sources are addressed to analyze in detail the various events of 70 years of diplomatic relations. We conclude that, based on the Colombian Military Forces' participation in the 1950 war, a strong alliance with the Asian country has been maintained, allowing for the strengthening of economic and social projects together.

Keywords: diplomacy; strategic alliances; Colombia; South Korea

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RELATIONS BETWEEN COLOMBIA AND SOUTH KOREA: AN ANALYSIS OF COLOMBIAN FOREIGN POLICY AS A GEOPOLITICAL STRATEGY IN THE ASIA PACIFIC

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Introduction

As a result of 70 years of bilateral relations between Colombia and South Korea, in 2022, both nations decided to commemorate this significant milestone with a comprehensive diplomatic agenda (Cancillería de Colombia, 2022), encompassing political, economic, and cultural activities. This event, significant for both countries, demonstrated the good diplomatic relations and continuity in strategic alliances, reflected in the planning and execution of projects that have impacted both South Korea and Colombia.

The decision made in 1962 to join efforts for the benefit of each country's interests represented the starting point of this chapter. From that moment on, diplomatic relations between South Korea and Colombia became an attractive scenario for the international intentions of both nations, which they contemplated throughout the second half of the twentieth century.

According to this first scenario, the historical process of strategic and geopolitical relations between Colombia and South Korea from 1962 until the beginning of the twenty-first century invites us to analyze the effects caused, especially on the Colombian State. Hence, the present chapter proposes the following question: *What have been the most relevant aspects of strategic and geopolitical relations between Colombia and South Korea in terms of historical analysis?*

The problem lies in identifying and describing the relevant historical facts that shape bilateral diplomatic relations, considering each country's strategic and geopolitical projections, such as Colombia's focus on the Asia Pacific and South Korea's interest in entering the Latin American market.

The body of the chapter includes a theoretical section that accounts for several authors' proposals in light of geopolitics, framed within a specific context

that aids in understanding the historical process under analysis. These theoretical references are directly linked to the indicated methodological framework, based on the guidelines provided by historiographic research, which are further developed in the results: a timeline highlighting key milestones or events of significant impact for both countries. In describing each event, we aimed to identify the relevant aspects that shape the geopolitical and strategic relationship between Colombia and South Korea.

Finally, the conclusions emphasize the importance of—and, more importantly, the need for—maintaining the diplomatic channel between the two nations. Despite the significant geographical distance separating them, they share a profound connection through economic and social projects.

Theoretical Framework

The study of geopolitics dates back to the era of classical thought. The issue of territorial space has been framed in a relevant context, generating various theories, not only political but also economic. Therefore, it is necessary to mention authors such as Cohen (2015), who presents, through five stages, the evolution of the concept: “(1) the race for imperial hegemony, (2) German *geopolitik*, (3) geopolitics in the United States, (4) the cold war and (5) the post-cold war era” (Cohen, 2015, pp. 16–33).

For Valdivia, regarding Cohen's proposal, the first two stages are categorized as part of classical geopolitics, which emphasizes concerns about the survival of empires and States. Its foremost exponent was the geographer Friedrich Ratzel (1975), the virtual father of the term, which associates it with “power” as the most important attribute of a State. He defines it as the science that establishes the geographical characteristics and conditions and, primarily, the great spaces that play a decisive role in the life of States, where human society and the individual depend on the dreams they fulfill, letting their destiny be determined by the laws of geography (p. 13).

Specifying the phenomenon of human territoriality pointed out in Ratzel, Bilbao (2015) highlights in his article the intrinsic relationship among the State, institutions, and individuals, noting that a scientific theory must include inquiries regarding the origin and evolution of the State, the relationships between the State and other institutions, the interactions among different social classes, and the objectives of

the State, all of which are essential for understanding society in general (Bilbao, 2015, p. 66).

Friedrich Ratzel introduced the concept of vital space into the vocabulary of geopolitics and international relations. Although he did not provide an express definition of "vital space" (*Lebensraum*), it can be inferred that he considered it a geographical region where living organisms existed (as cited in Cairo, 2012, p. 340). In turn, following Karl Haushofer (1975), it is significant to note that he focused his analysis on space as a key factor in determining the history of humanity; hence, its importance in adapting to the population's needs (Haushofer, 1975, p. 85). During the interwar period, his postulates were aligned with continental pan-regionalism, which was based on the close relationship between natural resources and the people (Cohen, 2015, p. 25).

Halford Mackinder (1919), as cited in Cohen, presented Eurasia as the world's economic and political hub, referring to it as the "Heartland," which would serve as the *pivot of the world* for its maritime supremacy. He further affirmed: "Who rules Eastern Europe commands the Heartland: Who rules the Heartland commands World-Island: Who rules World-Island commands the world" (as cited in Cohen, 2015, p. 19). This theory was crucial for understanding the time; specifically, part of the twentieth century witnessed Mackinder's thesis, as two World Wars were fought for the *Heartland* of Eurasia.

In the book *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations* by Cohen (2015), it is also argued that Alfred T. Mahan contributed to the geostrategic analysis focused on Eurasia because, like Mackinder, he placed Russia as a dominant power due to its geographical location, despite some disadvantages regarding access to the sea. Years later, he asserted that global domination fell to the geographical interests of the United States and its influence on the Pacific Islands (Cohen, 2015, p. 23).

The contribution of German *geopolitik* in the second stage of the classification of modern geopolitics highlights the necessity of analyzing States based on their geographical positions to understand their strategic interests in gaining political power. The theories proposed by German authors played an essential role in the historical events that shaped the first half of the twentieth century, particularly during the two World Wars.

Within the third stage of Cohen's classification, as of 1942, we find Nicholas Spykman, considered an exponent of the American geopolitical postulate, who took into account Mahan's theory and was inspired by Mackinder. He asserted

that "the Eurasian coastal lands (including maritime Europe, the Middle East, India, Southeast Asia, and China) were the keys to world control because of their populations, their rich resources, and their use of interior sea-lanes" (Cohen, 2015, p. 26). However, he consistently advocated for American hegemony and national security through the strengthening of naval military bases to prevent the power imbalance in Eurasia (Valdivia, 2017, p. 71).

The fourth stage outlines the Cold War, which, in the words of Brzezinski (1997), introduced a new geopolitical dimension to strategic interests, pitting North America against Eurasia in the global dispute. "The winner would truly dominate the globe. There was no one else to stand in the way, once victory was finally grasped" (Brzezinski, 1997, p. 6).

At the end of this bipolar order, the last stage of modern geopolitics, as identified by Cohen and evidenced in the nascent theoretical debate within the discipline, was presented. A central point is determined by the object of study itself and by the classification of some authors in relation to categories of the same geopolitics: for example, Mamadohud (2015, as cited in Valdivia, 2017, p. 75) warns of the existence of other geopolitical approaches: geostrategy, geoeconomics, post-structuralist, subversive, feminist, neomarxist, and political geography.

Along the same lines, Gearóid ÓTuathail (1996) introduced a reinterpretation of geopolitics from a theoretical problematization, abandoning the classical European accusations. He criticized in depth the object of geopolitics and the discourses on the geographical characteristics of international relations. This approach belongs to a broad school of postmodern social sciences involved in discourse analysis.

The extensive knowledge of the concepts mentioned earlier and their authors in classical and critical geopolitics reached South America through two major avenues. On the one hand, the influence of attachés and military exchanges, particularly from the German perspective, which initially showed signs of this discipline's emergence, notably during the first half of the twentieth century in countries such as Brazil, Argentina, and Chile, before spreading to the rest of the continent. On the other hand, it was also shaped by the interpretation of geopolitical writings produced during the Cold War, especially those concerning shifts in the political landscape and the specific interests of nations (Child, 1979).

As mentioned by Cabrera (2017), geopolitics was directly associated with the arrangements made by the Armed Forces (AFs) of countries, particularly in the Southern Cone, where each State assimilated geopolitics according to its own needs, understanding it as a tool that, in one way or another, allowed for the

explanation of social phenomena within the conflict scenario, including those countries with common disputes.

In the power game that accounts for the historical, political, and ideological processes of border conflicts in Latin America during the second half of the twentieth century, Cairo and Lois (2014) analyze how the region was an epicenter of territorial confrontations among different nations due, above all, to geopolitical causes linked to the bipolar dispute of world powers at the time. However, with the passage of time, in the last two decades of the twentieth century, the opening to a competitive and globalized world changed the geopolitical and strategic direction of several Latin American countries. In some cases, this shift was for the benefit of internal stability, while in others, it aimed to avoid international armed confrontations.

Methods

The methodological perspective for treating the chapter focused on the qualitative stage, which enables the analysis of the research object's complexity through various techniques. One of these—infallible in historical research—is the documentary review. Some authors point out that the qualitative methodology “is not based on a unified theoretical and methodological concept. Various theoretical approaches and their methods characterize the discussions and the research practice” (Flick, 2009, p. 16). Others argue that qualitative research is interpretive; it maintains a hermeneutical conception, and its collection methods allow for access to data that can be observed, described, and interpreted (Ñaupas et al., 2014, p. 350).

Topolsky (1992), on the other hand, emphasizes the need for the field of interest in historical research, pointing towards the historian's reflections on the same object of analysis: “past events,” which in this case are the diplomatic, geopolitical, and strategic relations between Colombia and South Korea for a certain period. In line with the previous premise, Arostegui (1995) notes that the historical event serves as the decisive nucleus and determining element in the historical process. The event is, metaphorically speaking, the agent of history (p. 115). Hence, this approach also directs its gaze to the various historical facts that comprise the diplomatic relations between the two countries, which are taken into account to build the research object for the chapter.

In the historical research methodology, Ramírez Bacca (2010), an expert historian in historiographic research, emphasizes the distinction between method

and technique to avoid confusion within the comprehensive methodological process. For this chapter, the historical-critical method addresses the problem posed: it is characterized by the chronological succession of events in different stages, allowing for the understanding of the evolution and development of the research object. It historically contextualizes or problematizes the phenomenon or case under study. Moreover, this method reveals the history of the phenomenon or case and facilitates the analysis of the concrete projection of a hypothesis or theory within a specific historiographic context (Ramírez Bacca, 2010, p. 43).

Regarding the technique employed for developing the chapter, the criticism of historical sources enables the interpretation of the different historical events we aim to examine. This allows us to identify the significant aspects and effects in the geopolitical and strategic relationship between Colombia and South Korea from 1953 to 2010. Various historiographic schools have approached source criticism with care; perhaps, the most orthodox were the positivists, who categorized some underlying principles of general criticism, emphasizing the historian's need for a responsible and argumentative assessment of their value judgments.

The historical sources used to develop the chapter have various characteristics, including an institutional approach (applied to the Official Gazette and the Ministry of War reports) and personal memories from individuals involved in specific historical events between Colombia and South Korea. These sources are assembled with previously published academic texts.

Results

In the mid-twentieth century, the world was divided by World War II and the onset of the Cold War. Colombia was no stranger to this international reality, as it experienced a period of contest between the two traditional parties: liberal and conservative. Following the murder of liberal leader Jorge Eliécer Gaitán on April 9, 1948, the country was plunged into serious political polarization, which further exacerbated violence of partisan origin (Barbosa, 2004).

By 1950, the global political order had become highly complex. The expansionist and containment strategies of the power blocs shaped future diplomacy, generalizing the struggle against communism in certain regions. The United States and the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, the two powers that divided global dominance, defined the era of post-war distrust, while political tension intensified the looming threat of the Cold War.

Seeking to avoid another world conflict, the Organization of American States (OAS) and the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (TIAR, as it is known by its Spanish acronym) were established, a development that strengthened international relations in the region. For instance, between 1944 and 1948, the United States facilitated the incorporation of Latin America into the new power structures. Following that, opportunities for participation from other continents emerged. The selection of Colombian Alberto Lleras Camargo as the first Secretary-General of the OAS was no coincidence: He was one of the most prominent representatives of the Latin American political elite willingly integrated into the new world order. Drekonja (1983) notes that, with this background, a chain of events unfolded that would ultimately lead to Colombia's participation in the Korean War.

Many historians agree that, as a result of Colombia's participation in the Korean War, the *respite polum* doctrine, coined in 1914 by the diplomat Marco Fidel Suárez, later became the main objective of Colombian foreign policy. This development fostered Colombia's unwavering loyalty to Washington, which emerged with the signing of the Thomson-Urrutia Treaty in the 1920s, along with various reparations acts by the United States. This tradition has retained its constituent elements to this day (Arango, 2010; Drekonja, 1983).

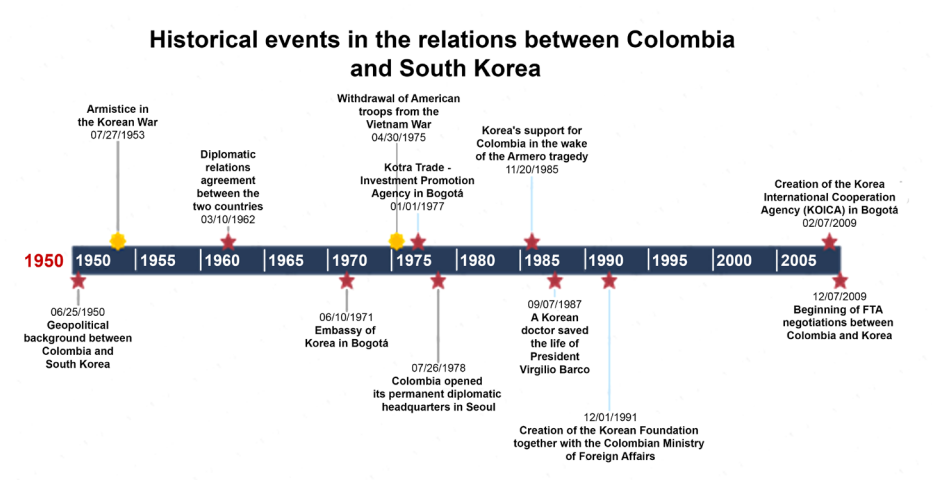
The doctrine stated that Colombia should guide its foreign policy in alignment with the United States. According to Tokatlian (2000), the north of our foreign policy must be there, in that powerful nation, which more than any other is decisively appealing to the peoples of America (p. 140). Contradictorily, paying \$25 million in gold as compensation for the secession of Panama allowed Colombia to gain American economic influence. The capital of the northern country achieved the gradual withdrawal of British investments; the Kemmerer Commission provided Colombia with a modern administrative and financial structure, enabling the South American State to be oriented by the U.S. dollar (Drekonja, 1983b).

Colombia not only experienced American interference in its foreign policy but also exhibited it through the implementation of socio-economic programs from other parts of Latin America. For instance, in the development policies of the fifties, it assured the Economic Commission for Latin America (ECLAC) that it would pursue industrialization via an import substitution policy. During President Carlos Lleras Restrepo's administration (1966–1970), the country sought to enhance and expand ECLAC's recommendations, with a focus on promoting exports and regional integration.

Colombia opened a new door to South America in 1966 and, in March 1967, another door to Europe and Asia with Decree-Law 444, "On the Foreign Exchange and Foreign Trade Scheme," exploiting its geopolitical power and its significant position as a Caribbean (with a coast on the Pacific), Amazon, Western, Andean, Equatorial, and South American nation, featuring three major mountain ranges and four important watersheds, but with limited production in the geopolitics area. According to Londoño (1949), Colombia is a country with weak geographical awareness, which appears to overlook the fact that the course of history is largely determined by space (p. 8). This situation, commonly referred to as geopolitical "short-sightedness," has diminished the importance of geographical position due to internal problems affecting the country.

However, due to the country's need to establish large-scale international relations, a strong political and economic bond with South Korea has developed over time, dating back to the mid-twentieth century, and it remains as of today. Thanks to the participation of the Colombia Battalion No. 1, which fought within the framework of the United Nations forces in the Korean War in 1950, diplomatic relations between the two countries were cemented.

Figure 1. Historical Events between Colombia and South Korea



Source: Own elaboration based on the historical sources consulted.

Geopolitical History between Colombia and South Korea

Colombia played a significant role in the United Nations (UN) during the first five years following its establishment on October 24, 1945. This period was significant, occurring after the end of World War II and the subsequent beginning of the so-called Cold War, a scenario that undoubtedly shaped the international system for four decades. In fact, during this time, the UN established its institutional policies, which had a considerable impact on Latin America (Bermúdez, 2010).

In this same historical context, on the other side of the Pacific, on Sunday, June 25, 1950, the North Korean tanks crossed the 38th parallel, marking the beginning of the confrontation that lasted until the armistice of 1953. This is how

The Truman administration reacted almost immediately [...] On June 27, Truman authorized General MacArthur to use U.S. air and naval forces at his disposal to support the ROK Army. [...] he went directly to the United Nations and called for a resolution giving the United States authority to intervene. This passed quickly [...] The UN Security Council resolution called for the withdrawal of forces by the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) and called for UN members to assist the ROK. On July 7, the UN Security Council established a unified military command under the United States. (Seth, 2011, p. 346)

Colombia responded to the UN's call in October 1950, with President Laureano Gómez already in office, who had spoken in favor of U.S. intervention and offered his government's full support for the defense of South Korean "democracy." Both Valencia Tovar and Torres del Río agree that in the final months of that year, Colombia maintained constant communication with the Pentagon regarding military backing for national troops in the Korean conflict. In fact, the newspaper *El Tiempo* stated that, during the Korean War, the Colombian nation would align with the forces of democracy and the brave American army, and that Section 43 of the San Francisco Charter would need to be implemented, which established that UN members would provide their armed forces and necessary aid to the Security Council upon request, including the "right of passage" through their territories to maintain world peace and security (Torres, 2010, p. 168).

On December 26, 1950, Laureano Gómez, the Colombian president, established an infantry battalion called the Colombia Battalion through Decree No. 3927, with the goal of sending troops to Korea to fulfill international commitments stemming

from Law 13/1945 (Valencia, 2003, p. 62). The conservative government, which was ideologically anti-communist and pro-USA, decided to dispatch troops to the Korean War in support of anti-communism and the free allies, amidst a backdrop of political chaos caused by political violence.

Diplomatic Relations Agreement between the Two Countries

Relations between South Korea and Colombia began after Colombian troops were sent to the Korean War in 1951, which led to the establishment of diplomatic channels on March 10, 1962. On July 10 of that same year, the South Korean ambassador to the United States, Jung Il-Gwon, was appointed as the deputy chief of mission to our country. On July 9, 1964, the then-ambassador to Japan, Enrique Molano Campuzano, was designated as the deputy chief of mission to South Korea (Guido, 2014, p. 78).

As time passed, the necessity for the Korean embassy in Bogotá became increasingly clear. In June 1971, Ahn Jin-seng presented his credentials to Colombian President Misael Pastrana (Guido, 2014), marking the consolidation of diplomatic relations between the two countries in political and economic matters. By the 1970s, Korea had begun a substantial program to enhance its manufacturing production and exports.

Two socially impactful events marked this significant historical moment for the two countries: the Korean government built a commemorative pagoda featuring the names of 213 soldiers who died in the war, to be installed in downtown Bogotá. Additionally, by 1976, it constructed the Colombia Memorial Park in the center of Incheon (Guido, 2014, p. 79).

These two architectural constructions reflect the closeness between the two nations and the positive socio-economic projects that may arise from diplomatic relations.

Korea's Support for Colombia in the Wake of the Armero Tragedy

During the eighties, diplomatic relations between the two countries held significant geopolitical and strategic importance, according to their respective interests, both

for the Asia-Pacific region and for Colombia in Latin America. As noted by Professor and former Ambassador Song Guido (2014), several bilateral agreements were concluded on visas, scientific and technical cooperation, trade, and education.

At the same time, a significant moment occurred between the two nations due to the tragedy caused by the eruption of the Nevado del Ruiz volcano in 1985. The Colombian President stated in writing that among all the distant countries, the greatest help for the victims came from Korea (R. C. Zambrano, Personal Communication, June 17, 2022).

On November 13, 1985, Korea became aware of the Armero avalanche tragedy. Immediately, many South Koreans expressed sympathy, to the point that the Colombian embassy was overwhelmed by the influx of donors who brought everything from flashlight batteries to cash. It became necessary to open an account at the Korean First Citizen Bank to receive donations from cities and villages across Korea. During this time, the Korean Foreign Ministry contacted the Colombian embassy daily to learn about the situation and to encourage its government to increase aid (R. C. Zambrano, Personal Communication, June 17, 2022).

In the streets and squares of Seoul, groups of singers collected won's for their Colombian "blood brothers." Similarly, an art exhibition donated by its creators was opened, and in the main hall of the Lotte Hotel, a grand beneficence dinner was organized, featuring performances by the country's best-known artists and singers.

In response to so much solidarity, the Colombian ambassador sent multiple thank you statements and, to reach unknown donors, the same emissary wrote the poem of thanks *Corea en la tragedia colombiana [Korea in the Colombian Tragedy]*, which, translated into Korean, was published in the main newspapers of the city and the provinces. His verses communicated the binational brotherhood arising during war and Korean generosity in our tragedy, which was reflected in two of its stanzas, as follows:

Omaira Sánchez al cerrar sus ojos en Armero,
lleno de lágrimas los rostros seulitas,
de empresarios, de banqueros, de empleados;
motivó cantos sentidos y plegarias puras,
agitó manos cargadas de pan y esperanza,
y una ayuda emotiva a partir desde el oriente,
llevando un abrazo a mi país distante.
Desde Seúl, desde Pusán y desde Kuangyu,

gentes amables donaron sus bahjis, sus chinas;
en las escuelas los niños colectaron wones;
pintores subastaron sus cuadros de escenas orientales;
universitarios cambiaron monedas por canciones
y una nueva avalancha ya no de lodo sino de corazones
golpeó esta vez el alma de Colombia.¹ (Zambrano, 2014, p. 256)

Gratitude means remembering Korea's recognition of Colombia for its participation in the war. The monuments in Incheon, Bogotá, and Cartagena, along with the scholarships and trips received by some Colombian veterans of the war and their descendants, attest to this (Zambrano, 2014).

A Korean Doctor Saved the Life of President Virgilio Barco

In September 1987, the streets of Seoul were adorned with Colombian flags to welcome the president of Colombia to Korea. On the eve of his arrival at Kimpo Airport, *Las brisas de la Pamplonita* played in the background, as Virgilio Barco, the Colombian president, was born in a municipality of Norte de Santander, and Ambassador Chang aimed to surprise him with 300 female voices perfectly singing this bambuco (Zambrano, 2014).

This ruler from Cucutá attended the magnanimous encounter; however, he suffered medical difficulties that forced him to leave the event in less than an hour for the Shila Hotel, where the Colombian president received president Chun Doo-hwan for 20 minutes, after which Barco could bear no more and succumbed to acute diverticulitis, with symptoms that began during the flight to the East, from Alaska. The Embassy decided to take him to the Seoul National University Hospital, and given his serious health condition, with a significant risk of death, a guest professor from Harvard University performed a high-risk surgery to save his life.

¹ Omaira Sánchez, when she closed her eyes in Armero, / filled with tears the eyes of Seoulites, / entrepreneurs, bankers, employees; / she inspired heartfelt songs and pure prayers, / she incited hands laden with bread and hope, / and emotional aid from the East, / carrying a hug to my distant country.
From Seoul, from Pusan, and from Kwangju, / friendly people donated their *bajis*, their china; / children collected won in schools; / painters auctioned their paintings of oriental scenes; / university students exchanged coins for songs / and a new avalanche of hearts instead of mud / hit the soul of Colombia this time.

This significant event represented another step in the friendship between Colombia and South Korea. Undoubtedly, it promoted the fraternity ties that were established through the heroic work of the soldiers during the 1950 conflict. This foundation has enabled the development of socioeconomic strategies for the country's growth; however, within the framework of initiatives proposed by successive governments, some have not achieved the expected success.

Initiatives that Never Came to Fruition

For retired Major Ramiro Zambrano Cárdenas, former ambassador and current president of the Colombian Academy of Military History, relations between the two countries began after the armistice of Panmunjom, with a consulate in Tokyo. Following that, the embassy was established in Seoul. From the outset, the diplomatic relationship has consistently sought to improve economic and social conditions, particularly for Colombia, with proposals aimed at advancing the country's development (R. C. Zambrano, Personal Communication, June 17, 2022).

The first ambassadors were military figures, responding to the same dynamics that war produced. Ramiro Zambrano reminded the authors of this chapter of significant events within the historical context of the geopolitical and strategic scenario among countries; indeed, he was one of Colombia's first ambassadors in Seoul.

The strong diplomatic link produced excellent business proposals. One of them, conceived during the government of Virgilio Barco (1986–1990), was the project to connect the Caribbean Sea with the Pacific Ocean. It consisted of a railway line that would unite the Colombian coastlines between Bahía Ceverá in the Atlantic and Punta de Aguacate in the Pacific. The project would be 221 km long and include 8 km of tunnels. An investment of \$3.5 billion was contemplated, and if realized, it would have been crucial for the country's economic development, as significant investments would have followed the project. However, it was not executed (Mundo marítimo, 2011, para. 14).

Zambrano was responsible for presenting the project to the president of South Korea after Virgilio Barco became the first Colombian president to visit that country. As a civil engineer, the president from Norte de Santander conducted a detailed study. As a result of this work, Korea promised to finance the project, while Holland would handle technical analysis and supervision. This project was designed in three compendiums: a railroad, a road, and a pipeline, to complement the Panama Canal.

At the time, the canal was already operational due to its locking system; in fact, when there was insufficient water, the transit of large-draft ships was halted, creating a need for a complementary canal that would benefit the Department of Chocó. Unfortunately, this huge project ended up on the shelves of the Central Bank because, according to Zambrano, the Gaviria government was not interested in projects from President Barco and therefore ordered the architectural proposal to be put on hold (R. C. Zambrano, Personal Communication, June 17, 2022).

Creation of a KOICA Office in Colombia

After the armed confrontation in Korea, by the second half of the twentieth century, the Asian country gradually began to position itself in the international market; Suh and Chen (2007) mention that “45 years after the full-scale, government-led industrialization drive that started in the early 1960s, Korea's GDP per capita has increased more than 12-fold, [...] which is on par with the medium economies of the European Union” (p. 4).

In fact, since the 1970s, Korea has faced the need to transform its economy. Its agricultural and industrial base was then organized around the *knowledge economy*, described by experts as the tool that “uses knowledge as the key engine of economic growth. It is an economy in which knowledge is acquired, created, disseminated, and used effectively to enhance economic development” (Suh & Chen, 2007, p. 3).

In his article, López (2016) presents the country's economic transition and its impact on the international market. He affirms that in the 1980s, the Korean nation took a pioneering leap when establishing the Economic Development Cooperation Fund, a move that enabled it to create KOICA four years later. In 2010, Korea was accepted as a member of the Development Aid Committee (DAC) of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) (p. 12).

With the opening of KOICA in Colombia in February 2009, planning, organization, and implementation of large-scale projects began to benefit the most vulnerable Colombian populations. Today, the agency has opted for sustainability, clean energy management, industrial development, and agricultural productivity. Some of the projects that are underway include (KOICA, 2023):

- Resilient rural communities: a commitment to rural development through training, partnership, and innovation
- Establishment of the activation of the foundation for the Colombian shipbuilding industry

- Strengthening the agricultural economy of the Department of Putumayo, through the cultivation and commercialization of alternative crops
- Project for women's empowerment, food security and nutrition, and rights in post-conflict areas

A few years ago, as a sign of the strong friendship linking the two countries and as evidence of their excellent cooperation, KOICA offered valuable support from the Korean Government for the development of important projects in Colombia. For example:

- The construction of a comprehensive rehabilitation center for members of the Public Force: This project was financed with over \$11,500,000 to support the rehabilitation of wounded soldiers and police officers in Colombia amid the armed struggle, which has lasted for more than 60 years. Construction of the rehabilitation center commenced in February 2013 and was completed on August 29, 2016. It features 56 residential rooms to accommodate 94 people, a dining room for 200, an adapted pool for rehabilitation exercises, a psychological treatment room, an audiovisual room, and additional facilities. Additionally, it will be equipped with the latest technological devices, taking into account the mobility and transportation challenges faced by wounded soldiers and police officers. Currently, it is the responsibility of the Ministry of National Defense (Ministerio de Defensa Nacional, 2014).

Beginning of Conversations about the Free Trade Agreement between Colombia and South Korea

Reflecting the dynamism of bilateral relations between the two countries and taking advantage of the meeting between leaders Álvaro Uribe Vélez of Colombia and Lee Myung-Bak of Korea during the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) Summit in Lima on November 21-22, 2008, the announcement was made to start negotiations for an FTA with the Asian nation.

According to the regulatory and contextual framework between the two countries, as set forth in Law 1747/2014, negotiations for the FTA began in December 2009 in Seoul (Congreso de la República, 2014). In this initial encounter, the negotiating leaders of Colombia and South Korea outlined the structure, modes, and scope of

the agreement. Conversations that highlighted industrial, energy, and information and communications technologies had already begun (Legis Comex, 2013, para. 3).

As of March 2009, the feasibility study for the Colombo-Korean FTA began, and its completion occurred in August 2009. Subsequently, the first round of negotiations between the two governments took place in Seoul from December 7 to 9, 2009. The results included a preliminary presentation of the issues to be negotiated, the definition of objectives, principles, and structures to guide the negotiations of this agreement, and the selection of the date for the next round of negotiations, which was held in Bogotá from March 1 to 5, 2010.

This round concluded with agreements in certain sectors, including online services and businesses. Likewise, matters concerning transparency, commercial competence, and tariff exemption were clarified.

As reported in the press, Colombia and South Korea signed their FTA in 2013. The trade pact, which required approval from the parliaments of both countries before taking effect, eliminated tariffs on 96.1 percent of Colombian products in South Korea and 96.7 percent of South Korean goods in Colombia for 10 years (El Espectador, 2013, para. 3).

Relationship of the Duque Administration with South Korea

The relationship between Colombia and the Republic of Korea during the government of Iván Duque Márquez (2018–2022) was very positive. In August 2021, President Duque made a state visit to South Korea, where he met with President Moon Jae-in and other political and business leaders from that country (El Tiempo, 2021). During that visit, various agreements were established in areas such as trade, technology, education, and culture. In addition, in October 2021, both nations issued a joint statement emphasizing the importance of strengthening cooperation in key sectors, including the economy, science, technology, culture, and education. In June 2020, President Duque expressed his gratitude for the scientific assistance provided by South Korea in the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (Asociación de Estudios Coreanos en Colombia, 2021).

In March 2022, the sixtieth anniversary of diplomatic relations between Colombia and South Korea was celebrated at an event where Duque highlighted Colombia's historical involvement in the Korean War and his state visit to the Asian country in 2021. Overall, the relationship between the two nations has focused on strengthening

commercial, technological, and cultural ties, as well as collaborating on global issues, such as the fight against the COVID-19 pandemic (Cancillería, 2022).

Conclusions

Without a doubt, between Colombia and South Korea, there have been signs of political, diplomatic, and economic maturity throughout history, not to mention the evolution in science and technology, as well as the design of public policies for project execution. The relatively short time elapsed between the two countries has allowed for the recognition of the strategic importance of alliances, as evidenced by the various historical events that occurred between Colombia and Korea from 1953 to 2013.

1. Geopolitical history between Colombia and South Korea
2. Diplomatic relations agreement between the two countries
3. Korea's support for Colombia in the wake of the Armero tragedy
4. A Korean doctor saved the life of President Virgilio Barco
5. Initiatives that never came to fruition
6. Creation of a KOICA office in Colombia
7. FTA conversations and signing between Colombia and South Korea

Currently, the relationship between South Korea and Colombia has been strengthened not only by the dynamics of exchange between the two governments but also by the significant interest in doing business among entrepreneurs from both nations. This is reflected in the large number of trade missions and two-way business-to-business meetings, which have led to a more balanced trade exchange, increased investment levels, and a higher influx of tourists.

During his state visit to South Korea in September 2011, Colombian President Juan Manuel Santos Calderón stated that "the Colombian people are willing to help one and a thousand times in situations in which Korean sovereignty is threatened." This statement reflects Colombian pride in participating in such a noble cause and reaffirms the strong bilateral relationship currently in place (Zambrano, 2014).

The responsibility that Colombia and Korea share before the world regarding peace and security, the fight against poverty, and climate change signifies that their partnership in economic matters is founded on similar commitments to addressing global issues. This is reflected in how both countries supported their roles as non-permanent members of the UN Security Council: Colombia (2011–2012) and South Korea (2012–2014). Then, South Korea became Colombia's gateway to Asia, and Colombia became South Korea's connection to Latin America and the Caribbean.

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