

Chapter 5

Geopolitical Reconfiguration of the Asia Pacific: From the Republic of Korea's Achievements to Colombia's Opportunities^{*}

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25062/9786287818101.05>

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Abstract: This work examines the geopolitical configuration of the Asia Pacific by analyzing the historical division of the Korean Peninsula at the onset of the superpowers' confrontation during the Cold War, the establishment of South Korea, and the opportunities available for Colombia in its political, diplomatic, trade, and military relations with the Asian nation. The turbulent historical events in South Korea, including the war with North Korea and the intense geopolitics on the Peninsula during the twentieth century, were leveraged by South Korea to establish itself as a regional middle power. Due to its rapid national development and strengthening, South Korea has emerged as a significant strategic ally for the Republic of Colombia, which can learn from the Korean experience and decisions and apply these lessons to its own national power strategy.

Keywords: geopolitics; Asia Pacific; South Korea; Colombia; geostrategy; economy; national power

* Book chapter derived from the research project *Relations between Colombia and South Korea: An Analysis of the Impact of National Foreign Policy on the Economic Development and Geopolitical Projection of the Country*, conducted by the Masa Crítica research group of Escuela Superior de Guerra "General Rafael Reyes Prieto." This group is categorized as A1 by the Ministry of Science, Technology, and Innovation (MinCiencias) and registered under code COL0123247. The views and results in this chapter belong to the authors and do not necessarily reflect those of the participating institutions.

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APA Citation: González González, A. M., & Restrepo Montoya, J. D. (2025). Geopolitical Reconfiguration of the Asia Pacific: From the Republic of Korea's Achievements to Colombia's Opportunities. In J. E. Moreno Peláez & A. M. González González (Eds.), *Relations between Colombia and South Korea: An Analysis of Colombian Foreign Policy as a Geopolitical Strategy in the Asia Pacific* (pp. 103-121). Sello Editorial ESDEG. <https://doi.org/10.25062/9786287818101.05>

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

Print ISBN: 978-628-7818-09-5

ISBN digital: 978-628-7818-10-1

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.25062/9786287818101>

Strategy, Geopolitics, and Culture Collection

Sello Editorial ESDEG

Escuela Superior de Guerra "General Rafael Reyes Prieto"

Bogotá D.C., Colombia

2025



Introduction

The Republic of Korea, also known as South Korea, is currently viewed as a formidable political, military, and economic player in the complex geopolitical landscape of the Asia-Pacific region. The division of the two Koreas and the ensuing war on the Korean Peninsula, the second major conflict of the Cold War following the Greek Civil War, has shaped the country's geopolitics ever since. Surrounded by significant geopolitical powers like China, Russia, and Japan, along with the ongoing presence of American influence in the Pacific and the persistent threat posed by North Korea—one of the most isolated countries in the world, marked by inherent instability and possessing nuclear capabilities that could spark a conflict at any moment (Brzezinski, 1998)—South Korea is positioned long-term as a geopolitical focal point of considerable strategic importance and a key element in the balance of power within the Asia-Pacific.

This condition means that the small country of fifty million inhabitants cannot put its own security at risk. This is why it has focused on gradually enhancing its capacity and projection to strengthen its national power, which has led to a concentration on becoming an economic power that supports a significant military force. This allows it to confront the aggressive stance of its neighboring country while maintaining a deterrence capacity and geopolitical influence in a region where numerous economic and military powers converge, such as the Asia Pacific, as illustrated in the map in Figure 1.

According to Brzezinski (1998), the region is characterized by economic dynamism, coupled with significant political uncertainty stemming from its economic growth. While prosperity can obscure the region's political vulnerabilities, it may also affect the order that maintains peace among military powers. The Asia Pacific features densely populated areas within a small territory, alongside intense

nationalism and a lack of effective multilateral organizations. In this context, Asia's geopolitics fosters a potential clash between the United States and China, currently the leading superpowers, with several key players, including Japan and the Korean Peninsula, at the center of this geopolitical dispute (Brzezinski, 1998).

In this way, the region is presented as a primary scenario for the main world confrontation, alongside Eastern Europe. Although on this regional chessboard, South Korea and Japan are under the protection of American power and work, along with Taiwan, to contain Chinese expansion, Koreans and Japanese have maintained a historical and territorial enmity; in the latter case, this includes the dispute over the islets of Dokdo and Takeshima (Kaplan, 2017). These differences have historically been shaped by various events during which the Japanese government intervened on several occasions, attempting to seize control of the entire Korean peninsula. The Japanese returned in the twentieth century, annexing the entire country and preparing to destroy its culture. The Korean language was prohibited, along with the teaching of Korean history, and worship in the Shinto shrines became mandatory. The decades of repression left a legacy that continues to impact relations between Japan and the two Korean States (Marshall, 2017, p. 260).

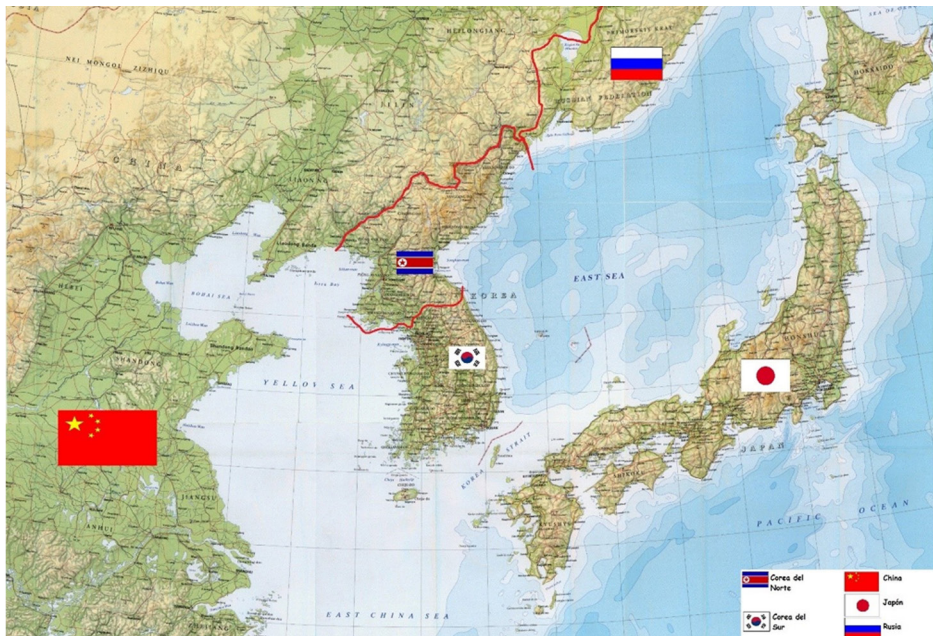
After a history of ongoing conflicts with their neighbors and following the division of the Peninsula due to the Cold War and Japan's defeat in World War II, the Peninsula's history is similarly divided, like how war divides and pits millions of Koreans against one another. Having overcome war and survived under American protection, South Korea is now a vibrant and integrated member of the world's nations, with a foreign policy that is capable of meeting challenges. With open waters to the west, east, and south, and limited natural resources, it has prioritized building modern naval forces over the last three decades, enabling it to venture through the Sea of Japan and the East China Sea to protect the country's interests (Marshall, 2017, p. 267).

The relations between South Korea and much of the world have been shaped by the outcomes of the Korean War and the significant role of commercial exchanges in its national production. One of the relationships that resulted from these factors was the diplomatic, commercial, military, and formal interactions between South Korea and the Republic of Colombia. Both countries established formal diplomatic relations only in 1962; however, they had already collaborated closely, as Colombia was the only country in South America that sent troops to support South Korea against the communist invasion from the North. In this way, Colombia and the Republic of Korea have developed strong ties in every area, with Colombian support during the Korean War serving as a foundation for the establishment and consolidation of good economic and trade relations between the two nations (Kyeongsun, 2019).

Relationships between the two countries have been strengthened since then through more substantial commercial exchanges, highlighted by the signing of a free trade agreement (FTA) in 2013, along with strong military and diplomatic cooperation. The expansion of relations between the two nations, the concentration of major geopolitical players in the Asia-Pacific region, and Colombia's potential given its direct access to the Pacific, as well as its approach to South Korea, can serve as a starting point and opportunity for the country to achieve greater commercial, diplomatic, political, and military ties with the primary global geopolitical tension zone, thus enhancing its own interests in this area and ensuring a position of power, while also bolstering the country's economy through trade with the region's key powers.

In this context, the present work aims to briefly analyze the geopolitical configuration of the Asia Pacific through a rapid historical review of the period surrounding the division of the two Koreas. This analysis seeks to understand how South Korea capitalized on this geopolitics to become a regional middle power and how Colombia can leverage this experience and its relationship with South Korea as an opportunity to comprehend strategies for national progress and to consider them as part of its own national strategy.

Figure 1. Map of the Korean Peninsula and Geopolitical Powers of the Region



Source: Historiadores Históricos (2010).

The New Geopolitical Configuration in the Asia Pacific

Historically, the Asia-Pacific region has experienced various complex geopolitical configurations, making it an extremely conflictive area, yet one of great significance for the formation of powerful and highly populated States. First, it served as a strategic geographical zone for the region's powers in the nineteenth century: China, Japan, and Russia. Second, it became a battleground for ideologies and political forces after World War II. Finally, it operated as a space where political forces tended to establish channels for action in a post-industrial era following the Cold War (Villareal Gonzáles, 2007, p. 22).

The global context of the Cold War heightened awareness among the strategists of major powers that Europe was not the only crucial scenario in facing the new threats after World War II. Consequently, the Asia Pacific gained prominence following the emergence of communist governments and the rise of Mao Zedong's China on the world stage. The necessity to implement the policy of containment against the Soviet Union and monitor Communist China turned defeated Japan and the Korean Peninsula into a geostrategic area for the United States, which emerged as the principal player in this eastern landscape, eventually involving the actions of the new Russian Federation and post-Mao China (Solórzano Tello & Carrier García, 2018).

After the containment of North Korea due to the war on the Peninsula, as illustrated on the map in Figure 2, and the onset of the war in Indochina, South Korea remained the primary American bastion in continental Asia. Then, the defense of its ally became a geopolitical imperative for the United States, which also sought to support its European allies. However, the United States made every effort to further solidify its established strength in the Pacific to counter any Soviet intentions to capitalize on its growing military might. This involved establishing a containment line stretching from Alaska, Japan, South Korea, Taiwan, and Indonesia to eliminate any strategic opportunities for the Soviet Union and China. In this context, the development of U.S.-aligned countries in Asia was crucial for the success of the geopolitical strategy, necessitating the enhancement of their economies to ensure they could resist communist influence both militarily and ideologically (Lopes da Cunha & Appel, 2014).

After the 1960s, South Korea and Taiwan adopted aggressive industrial and commercial policies, emulating Japan's consolidated economy. This approach,

supported by U.S. officials, bolstered the economies of Washington's allies in the region and advanced U.S. interests during the Cold War (Lopes da Cunha & Appel, 2014). Unlike other nations caught in the ideological conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union, these countries developed differently due to the immediacy of what was termed *development upon invitation*. At times, the United States sacrificed its own interests to promote the collective growth of the capitalist bloc, thereby solidifying its long-term geopolitical interests in the region (Lopes da Cunha & Appel, 2014). U.S. foreign policy in this context remained in effect long after the Cold War ended, at a time when the Soviet power ceased to be a direct threat to Europe and gradually diminished in the Asia Pacific.

Following the collapse of the Soviet bloc in 1991, the ideological landscape in the region shifted, but its geopolitical dynamics remained unchanged. The United States did not intervene directly in the development of its allies but sought to influence their foreign policy to continue safeguarding its interests in the Asia-Pacific. Primarily, this was directed at China, the emerging economic power, which had undergone a significant internal transformation under Deng Xiaoping's directives. China's rapid economic development, coupled with the growth of its military strength, has made Washington keenly aware of its next geopolitical competitor, prompting it to take the lead in addressing issues in the Asia-Pacific region.

Similarly, the proliferation of nuclear weapons in the region—where China and Russia, two countries near the Korean Peninsula, possess nuclear weapons, and following North Korea's acquisition of atomic capability—makes the geostrategic balance much more complex and delicate, due to the ease with which nuclear warfare can occur from even the smallest calculation error. These factors, combined with South Korea's geographical position, make defining Korean foreign policy in Asia crucial for understanding the balance of power in this region (Pérez Gavilán, 2017, p. 213).

The nuclear capabilities of North Korea compel South Korea to strengthen and maintain its defense ties with the United States. This consideration is explored in greater detail through the examination of the White Book of South Korean defense, which focuses on actions to establish robust military relations with the USA (Ho, 2020) to enhance national security and deterrence against North Korea. Additionally, the increasingly concentrated economic production in the Atlantic Basin shifting to the Pacific—driven by Chinese development and the so-called "Asian Tigers"—necessitates a global strategy focused on this area (Serbín, 2018). Thus, China's economic boom, changes in Japanese security policy, the Korean

crossroads, and the new Indian diplomacy are among the most significant forces reshaping an order that has been dominated by the USA for half a century (Serbín, 2018, p. 15).

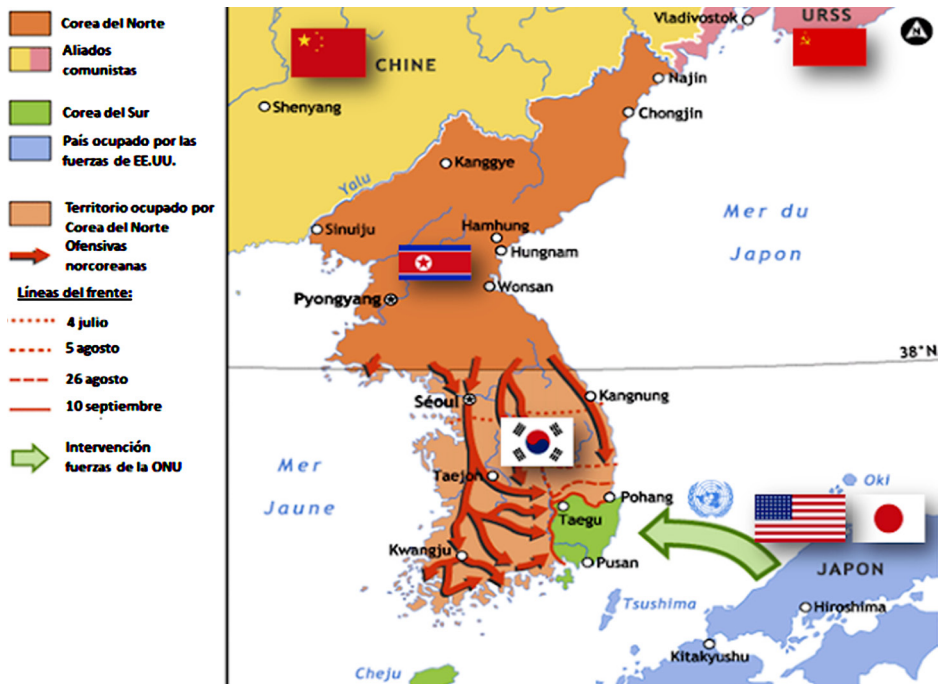
The North Korean nuclear program and China's rise compel Japan and South Korea to align their political and military objectives with those of the United States in Asia (Serbín, 2018). This alignment has resulted in a new geopolitical reconfiguration of the region, characterized by a clash between Washington's forces and interests and those of Beijing, with the two Koreas positioned at the center of this tension, Japan eager to engage more actively, and several neighboring powers, mainly Russia and India, which, limited by their distant geographical positions, can merely observe. Consequently, the interests of private actors align with their capabilities, prompting them to seek support from their respective powers. In this context, Seoul faces a strategic dilemma, exacerbated by its leaders' conviction that the country cannot realize its full potential in the international arena without a non-conflicting relationship with Pyongyang and a more balanced relationship with Washington. The pursuit of these objectives in the new Asian geopolitical landscape has led South Korea to redefine its national strategy, with the primary aim of resolving the conflict with the North and progressing toward reunification. Achieving this goal would not only eliminate the main threat to its security but also enable Seoul to end its dependency on the United States (Serbín, 2018, p. 19).

In this line of thinking, Seoul aims to maintain an alliance with the United States while securing economic cooperation with China to become a genuine pivot in Northeast Asia. This position can significantly enhance South Korea's geopolitical capacity, as the Peninsula, particularly Seoul, would function as a balancing zone between the two superpowers (Serbín, 2018). However, South Korea's and Japan's foreign relations and policies indicate that there is no cohesive Asian power, both politically and militarily, due to the lack of Chinese-Japanese integration. The rivalry among neighboring powers renders an Asian project unfeasible, a situation that is exploited by the United States. Despite the tensions among Asian economic powers, South Korea seeks to establish a policy of *détente* with Pyongyang to ensure its safety and maintain a strategic balance with China. Koreans do not anticipate complete Chinese hegemony in the region, but they are aware of the diminishing influence of the U.S. in the area (Carretero, 2005).

The new geopolitical configuration of the Asia Pacific reflects an American power that aims to maintain its influence over Korea and Japan while countering Chinese claims in the region. However, South Korea and Japan harbor differences

and distrust toward each other, making these divergences a key issue that American foreign policy must navigate in the geopolitics of the area. With the concentration of Russian power in Europe, the rise of Indian influence, and the escalating confrontation between China and the United States, the geopolitics surrounding the Korean Peninsula serves as the pivot for the new and future geopolitical shifts in the region.

Figure 2. Korea War Map (1950–1953)



Source: León Pérez (2016).

From War to the Republic: The Transformation of South Korea in the Twentieth Century

South Korea is a country that, in just fifty years, has undergone significant transformations in political, economic, and military aspects. This nation could easily be compared to certain Latin American or African countries; however, over the years, it has emerged as an undeniable economic power and, in fact, ranks

as the tenth-largest economy in the world. In 1960, South Korea was one of the poorest countries in the world. In just half a century, it has transformed into a global player, boasting a robust industrial base and a remarkable presence in new technologies. The primary lesson from the Korean case is that convergence in per capita income with industrialized economies is attainable, and thus, the immediate concern is to investigate the policies and contexts that have facilitated this significant achievement (Rosales, 2021, p. 1248).

The so-called "Miracle on the Han River" was a process that involved strong macroeconomic foundations, including high savings rates and a qualified workforce. The application of active industrial policies and the strengthening of technological advances aimed to translate competitive exports into external markets, consolidating the external market and replacing imports from other countries, primarily China and Japan. However, the process of the economic miracle and the strengthening of South Korea's national power was influenced not only by the sensible economic decision-making of competent officials who correctly applied economic models, but also by turbulent political episodes that the country suffered.

In 1961, a coup d'état led to General Park Chung-hee, head of a provisional military board, seizing power. By 1963, Park was elected president and initiated a shift in the development strategy. Aimed at increasing the growth rate and decreasing reliance on external financing, the first five-year plan was established in 1962 to promote manufacturing exports through protectionist measures. This plan concentrated on stimulating new industries in essential infrastructure and sectors with significant growth potential, primarily focusing on manufacturing exports. The political counterpart of this economic miracle was authoritarianism, corruption, and the persecution of opposition leaders, which included extended periods of martial law and the suspension of civil liberties and freedom of the press (Rosales, 2021, p. 1252).

However, General Park Chung-hee has been criticized as a merciless dictator who imposed political oppression without restrictions. Nevertheless, many of his critics and analysts also highlight that his administration significantly contributed to economic growth (Camacho, 2017). Park held the presidential office until his assassination in 1979. After his death, South Korea became a highly developed country with one of the world's fastest-growing economies, and by 2009, it ranked as the ninth country with the highest income from its exports (Camacho, 2017).

Along with boosting economic production, the quality of South Korean education served as a crucial factor in implementing significant advances

in innovation and new technologies through a highly skilled workforce. The enhancement of educational attainment and substantial investments in this area allowed companies to access a prepared labor force with reasonable flexibility, enabling them to eliminate production sectors that were not entirely competitive.

On the other hand, the government intervened in certain strategic sectors of the economy. It maintained key corporate alliances with major companies, thereby strengthening export processes and reducing imports in the domestic market (Álvarez, 2016). Interest in the education process, linked to consciousness and national projects, has also focused on relations with North Koreans and the potential reunification exercises that could occur between the two countries. Since 1953, the idea of reuniting with northern brothers has been latent in Seoul. In 1969, the Ministry of Unification was established to create pillars of trust between the two Koreas and ensure peace on the Peninsula, thereby facilitating subsequent reunification (Álvarez, 2016).

The geopolitical factor that influenced the development of the South Korean economy was fully leveraged by Seoul, which was aware of U.S. interests and what could be achieved, given that the Peninsula was at the center of the Asian geopolitical landscape (Lopes da Cunha & Appel, 2014). The South Korean State's interest in promoting its economic power was rooted in avoiding political, military, and economic adversities, as the progress of this project was not an end in itself but a means to eliminate limits on projections of national power and ensure the State's survival against adjacent threats (Lopes da Cunha & Appel, 2014). In this way, the alignment between the private and public sectors, which concentrated the Korean political and economic elite, capitalized on the benefits of its geopolitical context and the international financing from the capitalist bloc in line with the interests of Seoul. Ultimately, Korea was able to develop its own interests while also promoting the interests of the United States in the region, thus consolidating its economic power and geopolitical position for the twenty-first century.

Colombo-Korean Diplomatic Relations: Colombia's Opportunities in the Geopolitical Reconfiguration Stage of the Asia Pacific

After analyzing the new geopolitical configuration of the Asia-Pacific region and the transformation that South Korea has undergone, as well as understanding

the current capabilities of Asian countries regarding their economic development and technological advancements—which represent the primary interests of these countries today (Gaitán, 2021)—it is crucial to assess how Colombia can leverage this geopolitical opportunity through its relations with South Korea while also considering strategic advantages.

In geopolitical terms, South Korea views itself as an island due to its land isolation from North Korea and its surrounding bodies of water, including the Sea of Japan, the Yellow Sea, and the South China Sea. Colombia's geopolitical position is notable for its access to both the Atlantic and Pacific Oceans, making it one of the most strategically important countries on the American continent and affording it the best geostrategic position in South America. Consequently, the geopolitics of South Korea and Colombia share similar conditions that can be approached with common strategies. The geopolitical landscape of South Korea necessitates a strong naval presence given its artificial island status. This maritime strategy, along with American geostrategic support and the previously mentioned elements—such as a strong commitment to educating its population, technological development, and an industrialization plan—were crucial for South Korea's transformation (Kyeongsun, 2019). In terms of maritime development, the establishment of maritime universities, a highly capable maritime logistics system, and the creation of a robust shipping industry, framed within a technological focus on long-term competitiveness, represented a concerted effort by South Korea's maritime capabilities, in addition to advancements in next-generation armament (Kyeongsun, 2019).

With the signing of the FTA between Colombia and South Korea in 2013, the exchange of technology, goods, and services between the two countries intensified, strengthening their diplomatic and trade relations. This commercial approach allows Colombia to act as a bridge for Korea's advancement in Latin America, and vice versa, with Korea serving as a bridge to East Asia (Kyeongsun, 2019, p. 32). However, despite the advantages that can be gained from collaboration between Asian countries and Colombia, specifically Korea, certain observations must be considered to analyze these approaches in greater detail. According to Palomares García and Londoño (2015), at least four elements should be taken into account:

1. An advantage of Colombia over other Latin American countries is that Colombia is less prone to international crises, since its performance has not been closely linked to its exports.

2. The Republic of Korea serves as a gateway to Asia, not only due to the vibrancy of its economy but also because it has fortified relationships with neighboring countries through trade agreements.
3. The appeal of investment opportunities in high-tech sectors, aimed at generating wealth and employment.
4. The export of primary sector products to Korea is favorable due to its large population relative to its small territory and the advantages that Colombia has for entering the South Korean market with these products.

In general, Colombia has competitive advantages in various products, including high-quality coffee, flowers, fruits, and meats, making the South Korean market highly attractive for these national products (Yepes & Ruiz, 2017). However, Colombia must seek other export products with greater added value and more industrial processing if it truly aims to influence Asian markets, beginning with South Korea. Overall, according to Arévalo (2014), theory and empirical evidence indicate that international trade and economic integration are crucial for promoting economic growth, enhancing the organization of the production base, and effectively utilizing resources—all factors that contribute to generating wealth and modernizing a nation's industrial infrastructure (p. 162).

Globalization and international trade have been facilitated by reduced production costs due to improved transportation systems and enhanced communication networks. Globalization scholars consider it an opportunity for developing countries to leverage elements that can boost their economies, such as the adoption of technology from other countries and foreign investment in general (Arévalo, 2014). In this regard, Colombia has the potential to capitalize on the benefits of its entry into the Asian economy, particularly by focusing efforts on implementing optimal public policies to improve infrastructure, education, and ethics to combat public and private corruption, invest in science and technology, and understand international economic relations (Arévalo, 2014).

The economic and production weakness of Colombia, characterized by its reliance on the primary sector for export, combined with the lack of competitiveness in these products due to insufficient infrastructure and capital for low-volume, wide-scale production, limits the country's ability to influence the international market, particularly in the Asia-Pacific region and through South Korea. Given this situation, agreements with South Korea represent an economic opportunity for Colombia to penetrate the Asia-Pacific market (Ho, 2020). Nonetheless, the vast expanse of the Pacific, as indicated on the map in Figure 3, along with the

challenges it presents for establishing connections with Asia, necessitates that Colombia adopt a bold and proactive maritime strategy to navigate the unfavorable geographical factors (Kyeongsun, 2019).

Thus, South Korea's technological development enables it to overcome the challenges of its geography, making the South Korean experience valuable for Colombia, which lacks the technological capacity to address its geographical difficulties. The logistical ease in South Korea for transporting products in the international market, through investment in railways, roads, ports, and airports, aims to ensure the country's competitiveness (Ho, 2020), providing Colombia with an example to model its infrastructure investments on for navigating its complex geography.

The ambitious and extensive infrastructure projects, along with investment, have garnered support from South Korea's defense sector. Therefore, Colombia must also view this sector as a critical area for maneuvering within its industry, as it involves millions of dollars and showcases the markets of countries that successfully consolidate innovation and new technologies in this field. Meanwhile, the ongoing cooperation between South Korea and Colombia in the armaments industry, including the provision of ships and Colombia's acquisition of the C-Star missile, has reinforced the military ties between the two nations and primarily bolstered Colombia's strategic capabilities. However, despite these advancements, Colombia has lagged behind in enhancing its military capacity, unlike South Korea, which has made significant progress and maintained deterrent capabilities in conventional warfare against its northern adversary, while refraining from using its nuclear forces.

South Korea has greater geopolitical incentives to guarantee and strengthen its national power, given the imminent threat posed by another State. Although both nations were once a single country for centuries, they also experienced one of the bloodiest armed conflicts after World War II. The 1950 confrontation with North Korea, the arms race, and the constant clashes between the two countries have shaped both States and defined the character of the Republic of Korea. War shapes States, their structure, and the nationalism of their populations, thus influencing national power with this objective in mind. In the absence of war, it becomes challenging to cultivate a strong sense of nationalism; therefore, it is essential to develop government institutions that monopolize the use of force and taxes (Centeno, 2002, p. 21).

War creates States; war has always been a constant companion of humanity. It existed before the emergence of the State and plays a crucial role in its development

(Orenstein, 2018). Consequently, the South Korean configuration has been further solidified due to its external adversary, with which, as previously mentioned, it originally shared the same State. The communist ideology has shaped the differences and led to war between the two nations, unlike Colombia, where the conflict involves communist guerrillas, resulting in civil war and struggles within the same population and State.

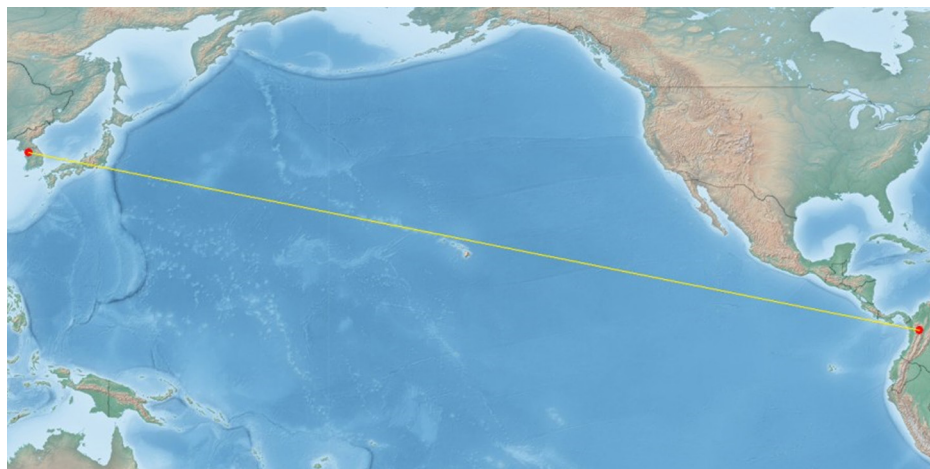
In other words, war compels the establishment of modern and efficient administrative structures that can direct the population's resources toward a "common" use. It is evident, then, how the lack of geopolitical pressures in South America may have contributed to the persistence of historically weak States, which are fragmented and lack legitimacy in the eyes of the population (Lopes da Cunha & Appel, 2014, p. 101).

Civil wars ultimately undermine a country's strength and divide its forces, not only on the battlefield but also in terms of political will and resolve. South Korea has successfully mobilized its population against its external enemy, and in this respect, it has been quite effective, given the nature of that external enemy. However, Colombia will struggle to concentrate its own national power and unify its population, as it lacks an external enemy or adversary; the primary focus of its national security is internal. This situation keeps its population divided and even hostile toward the State, which, in turn, results in a continual internal weakness that has persisted due to the prolonged nature of its civil wars and the current internal conflict.

Even the militarized governments of South American history seem to have identified internal actors rather than external ones as their primary enemies, thereby further contributing to the fragmentation of power. Even during the Cold War, the United States' support for South America primarily went to right-wing authoritarian governments, whose main opponents were internal popular forces. This situation is very different from that of the Eurasian board, where capitalist and communist countries fought against each other. It reveals how compliance with the United States' ideological line, on the one hand, stifled South America's integration into a development-friendly environment, and, on the other hand, facilitated Eastern Asia's integration into it (Lopes da Cunha & Appel, 2014, p. 102).

Ultimately, this situation highlights one of the primary geopolitical differences between Colombia and South Korea: the dynamics of external and internal conflict. The cohesion of Korean society has facilitated its development processes, while the division within the Colombian nation is the root of the problem and manifests in various symptoms that reflect national weakness.

Figure 3. *Maps of South Korea and Colombia*



Source: Distancia (<http://distancia.1km.net/co/bogota/kr/seoul/>)

Conclusions

The Asia Pacific has become the primary global geopolitical focus, and this situation is likely to intensify as powers direct their attention to the region due to its economic and political significance. In this way, the strategic importance of the Asia Pacific will increase as the region's economic weight gradually grows (Mindreau, 1997). The global trade center, the main geostrategic tensions, and the shifting of production areas to this region compel countries to make strategic decisions in this new world landscape, closely monitor the economic and geopolitical movements of the area, and seek the most effective methods to influence, intervene, or establish points of understanding within the region.

South Korea is a pivotal point in the region, located halfway between three major geopolitical powers—Russia, China, and Japan—which makes its foreign policy both sensitive and influential. Korea emerges as a promising and autonomous nation amid territorial disputes between historical powers, namely Japan and China. From being a Chinese tributary State to a Japanese colony and satellite State, the division of the Peninsula for the interests of the Cold War and the subsequent confrontation between the two new countries has shaped history since then (Lopes da Cunha & Appel, 2014).

Despite a century of occupation and 70 years of conflict, including three direct and 67 indirect armed conflicts as well as constant tension, South Korea has managed to strengthen its national power and maintain control over its complex geopolitical landscape due to the country's economic and military development. Effective and ambitious economic policies, framed around technological advancement, innovation, and high-value-added manufacturing, alongside decisions focused on education and invaluable U.S. support, have strengthened the country and enabled it to meet its geostrategic challenges in the Asia-Pacific region.

Despite the vast distance between them, caused by the size of the Pacific Ocean, as illustrated on the map in Figure 3, Colombia and South Korea share their primary commercial access through this ocean. South Korea is more developed than Colombia, which continues to focus on the Atlantic. This situation presents Colombia with a strategic and commercial opportunity in the Pacific, provided that it explores the potential to develop its economic and strategic capacity in this ocean. By doing so, Colombia could exert influence in the region through its relationship with South Korea and help shape the new region, which will in turn impact global geopolitical designs.

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