

Prospects for Iran-Korea Cooperation

Mostafa DOLATYAR

Advisor and Senior Research Fellow
Institute for Political and International Studies, Iran

Dr. Mostafa Dolatyar is Advisor and Senior Research Fellow at the Institute for Political and International Studies (IPIS) in Tehran, Iran. [Editor's Note] Following the historic Iran nuclear deal last year, South Korea and Iran are rapidly expanding their cooperation into new areas. In this issue of JPI PeaceNet, we asked Dr. Mostafa DOLATYAR, advisor and senior research fellow at the Institute for Political and International Studies, to identify specific areas that provide the greatest opportunity for cooperation and collaboration between South Korea and Iran.

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Iran's 80 million person economy and its location at the crossroads of a critical region make it a well-suited partner for Korea.

First, Iran has a strategic location. It enjoys interaction with 15 immediate neighbors with a total population of more than 500 million. Some of these neighbors are landlocked countries that are deeply interested in having access to the rest of the world. Iran is often the best choice—and in some cases the only one—to offer them the needed transit facilities or re-export options.

Second, Iran has favorable demographics. It benefits from a young and well-educated population, including an emerging generation of highly motivated and talented scientists, researchers, and businessmen who are willing and able to engage in mutually beneficial interaction and cooperation with well-matched and reliable partners.

Third, Iran has an excellent geo-economy, with unmatched energy resources in natural gas and oil. Its desire to fast-track development combined with its notable scientific achievements and technological growth make Iran a lucrative market and reliable partner for Korea.

As a high-growth country in East Asia, Korea has an impressive record of social, economic, scientific, and technological growth and development. It also enjoys very good "social capital" in Iran, which can help to facilitate interaction. These circumstances have laid a solid foundation for Iran and Korea to engage in a process of comprehensive collaboration and sustained cooperation in areas as diverse as trade, finance, investment, science, technology, agriculture, health, education, art, and

tourism, among others.

There are four general areas that provide the greatest opportunity for cooperation and collaboration between Iran and Korea:

1. Energy

Oil, gas, refinement, hydropower, wind power, geothermal, solar, and nuclear all have significant potential in Iran. In all of these sectors Iran has its own relative advantages and achievements that could be of great interest to Korea, thereby providing the basis of economic engagement between the two countries.

2. Industry and infrastructure

In its five-year-development plan, Iran has potential for the construction of extensive networks of roads, railroads, irrigation facilities, agricultural upgrades, water resources management capacity building, petrochemical industry development, car industry development, housing development schemes, and other infrastructure developments. Korea has significant stakes in all of these sectors and could be an active partner for Iran to materialize its goals, while accumulating its own profit, experience, and social capital.

3. Science

Iran has made significant headway in fields such as nanotechnology, biotechnology, IT, nuclear sciences, life sciences, pharmacology, and stem cell research, among others. Many parallel interests in Korea provide an opportunity for bilateral scientific cooperation to serve the interests of both countries and their populations. By developing well-educated researchers and academic staff, universities and research centers in both Iran and Korea help to advance scientific development. Exchange of students and researchers would help facilitate this goal.

4. Arts and culture

Iran and Korea share a strong history of peaceful and friendly relations and cultural interactions. There is great potential for increased collaboration in the areas of arts, culture, and people-to-people exchanges. Promotion of handicrafts, fine art, music, film and cultural values can help promote tourism and interaction between Iran and Korea.

Going forward, the two countries must recognize the significant attributes that each brings to the table in order to further develop the Iran-Korea relationship. Stronger cooperation in the areas

outlined above can help develop greater mutual confidence and connectivity. Moreover, these areas can be the basis for the two countries to engage in meaningful collaboration and effective cooperation to address regional and international issues and crises, especially security and economic issues.

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