

BOTSWANA-SOUTH KOREA RELATIONS UNDER PRESIDENT IAN KHAMA'S PRESIDENCY: 2014-2018

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Abstract

This paper broadly explores Botswana-South Korea relations during the second term of President Ian Khama's presidency (2014-2018). Botswana and South Korea established diplomatic relations in March 1968, but the relations remained largely on paper and were only revived after President Ian Khama's bold decision to terminate diplomatic relations with North Korea, South Korea's rival, in February 2014. Khama became an instant celebrity in South Korea, and the South Korean government invited him to Seoul in October 2015. South Korea views Botswana as a reliable friend to the extent that Konkuk University awarded Khama an honorary PhD in Political Science during his visit. In Botswana, this sparked divisive debate, with critics arguing that he does not deserve it. Some posited that this 'phony degree' is a 'bribe' by Seoul to access Botswana's mineral wealth. Botswana-South Korea military cooperation has also elicited intense criticisms, mainly from Botswana's opposition political parties. Since 2014, South Korean firms have increasingly won tenders, mainly in the energy sector in Botswana. Khama's strong relations with Seoul, unlike his predecessors, should be contextualised within his sour relations with both North Korea and China. This exploratory paper opens up an avenue for more research into this under researched terrain.

Key words: Botswana-South Korea relations, Korea Aerospace industries, military cooperation, energy sector, Honorary Doctorate, Ian Khama, Park Geun-hye.

Introduction and Context

Botswana established diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea (hereafter South Korea) in 1968, the Democratic Peoples Republic of Korea (hereafter North Korea) in 1974 and the Peoples Republic of China (hereafter China) in 1975 respectively. It did so at the height of the Cold War. Botswana's bold decision to forge relations with communist China and North Korea, including the Soviet Union in 1970, was a huge political risk (Masire 2006; Kwante & Manatsha, 2016). South Africa, the United States (US) and the United Kingdom (UK), in particular, were uneasy about this as Botswana's former president, Quett Ketumile Masire (1980-1998), reveals in his memoirs (Masire 2006). Similar sentiments were echoed by Botswana's first president, Seretse Khama (1966-1980) (Carter & Morgan 1980). The UK was Botswana's colonial master and the US was preoccupied with containing communism, while South Africa was worried about the sustainability of its apartheid policy. Thus, all, for various reasons, viewed any country which forged relations with the communist bloc with suspicion and contempt. During the Cold War, South Korea was in the capitalist bloc, and a staunch US

ally. Therefore, most African leaders saw North Korea as a ‘trustworthy partner...compared to South Korea’s capitalist leaning and alliance with the US’ (Kalu & Kim 2012:284). But Botswana’s leaders were pragmatists, and, thus, forged relations with communists and capitalists alike. ‘[I]t was appropriate for us to recognise and cooperate with any country whenever we thought we might benefit from our relations’, notes Masire (2006:300). Although Botswana-South Korea diplomatic relations is five decades old, it had remained lukewarm until February 2014 when Botswana severed ties with North Korea.

In October 2015, President Ian Khama of Botswana (in power since April 2008 and whose term ends on 31 March 2018) was invited to Seoul by then South Korean president, Park Geun-hye (in power from 2012 to March 2017). Whilst in Seoul, Khama was awarded an honorary PhD in Political Science by Konkuk University (*Botswana Daily News* 22 October 2015). Some Batswana (citizens of Botswana) applauded this gesture, while others criticised and mocked it. Critics opined that it was a public diplomacy stunt by another resource-hungry East Asian giant (in addition to China and Japan) eyeing Botswana’s mineral wealth (see Masokola 2015; Gobotswang 2015; Dipholo 2016). Botswana is the leading producer of diamonds by value in the world (Jefferis 2009). Like Japan and China, South Korea uses ‘soft power’ ‘to boost its global image’ (Kalinowski & Cho 2012:3; Lincan & Voicila 2015:49). Khama’s visit to Seoul was the first by Botswana’s president since 1994, but came 39 years after he had visited North Korea in August 1976. Then a 23-year-old officer in the Botswana Police Mobile Unit (now Botswana Police Service), he had accompanied his father, Seretse Khama, and government officials on a state visit to North Korea and China respectively (Parsons, Henderson & Tlou 1980:334). Despite a five decade relationship, Botswana has no embassy in Seoul, so is South Korea in Botswana. Currently, Botswana’s embassy in Tokyo, Japan, services South Korea, while South Korea’s embassy in Pretoria, South Africa, services Botswana. But South Korea plans to open an embassy in Gaborone, Botswana. On its part, the government of Botswana has indicated that due to financial constraints, its embassy in Japan will continue servicing South Korea (*Botswana Daily News* 20 October 2015).

At the time of forging relations with Seoul, Botswana’s gross domestic product (GDP) per capita was a paltry US\$70. In fact, Botswana was one of the poorest countries in the world. Nearly its entire population was illiterate, and the economy was mainly agrarian-based (Samatar 1999; Masire 2006). Botswana was also surrounded by hostile white-minority regimes in Zimbabwe, Namibia, South Africa, Mozambique and Angola. But with the wise leadership of Seretse Khama and his successor, Masire, Botswana negotiated its survival amidst real military and economic threats. Whilst addressing the first sitting of parliament on 6 October 1966, Seretse Khama had stated that as a poor country, Botswana was ‘unable to stand on its own feet and develop its resources without assistance from its friends’ (Carter & Morgan 1980:14). It was in this context that he forged relations with South Korea, among others. As a close ally of the US since 1966, Botswana’s decision to forge relations with South Korea, another US ally, was acceptable to the US. But the US was uneasy when Botswana forged relations with communist North Korea and China (Grafeld 2006).

Similarly, the geo-political environment under which the two Koreas found themselves at independence in 1948 influenced their foreign policies. From 1948 to 1991, the two Koreas were mainly preoccupied with winning global diplomatic recognition as the sole legitimate government in the Korean peninsula. This only softened when both were admitted to the United Nations (UN) in November 1991 even though they still do not recognise each other diplomatically (Kalu & Kim 2012:282; Kanik 2015:1). Surprisingly, within four years after its admission to the UN, South Korea closed 11 embassies in Africa (Park 2016:1). It was not until the mid-2000 that it began re-engaging with the continent (Kim. Y 2012, 2016). Like Japan and China, its powerful neighbours, South Korea is concerned with resource and energy security (Darracq & Neville 2014:3). Facing real military threat from its nuclear-armed rival, North Korea, Seoul is courting many friends to mount pressure on Pyongyang at the UN and other international forums, and Botswana is one of the leading voices. South Korea also seeks to contribute to the development of the developing world (Lincan & Voicila 2015:52). In 2016, Korea Africa Forum on Economic Cooperation (KOAFEC) pledged US\$10 billion to the development of Africa (Kim. Y 2016:14).

Botswana had remained out of Seoul's diplomatic radar for years. It was only after it severed relations with North Korea, the country Ian Khama calls a 'rogue state' that the South Koreans' interests on Botswana intensified. Botswana's decision was influenced by the United Nations Human Rights Council Commission of Inquiry which detailed grave human rights violations by the North Korean leaders (United Nations Human Rights Council 2014). In recognition of Botswana's bold decision, the then South Korean president, Park Geun-hye, invited Khama to Seoul. Khama also has tense relations with China, a country he sees as bullish (Ramadubu 2017). This helps us contextualise Botswana-South Korea relations under his administration. It was under him that Botswana entered into military cooperation with Seoul. It was also under him that many South Korean firms were awarded tenders, especially in the energy sector. Historically, Chinese firms have always won government tenders, mainly in the construction sector. This paper explores Botswana-South Korea relations under Khama's presidency (second term in office) in the context of South Korea-Africa relations.

South Korea-Africa Relations in Historical Perspective

South Korea-Africa relations began in 1961 when Seoul made its first diplomatic ties with Cameroon, Chad, Benin, Ivory Coast, Niger and Congo. But Gabon became the first African country to open an embassy in Seoul in 1975 (Kanik 2015:1). In 1982, Chun Doo-hwan became the first South Korean president to visit Africa, travelling to Kenya, Nigeria, Gabon and Senegal. Currently, South Korea has diplomatic ties with 46 African countries, but maintains resident embassies in only 13. Kalu and Kim (2012: 83) opined that Africa 'may not be that relevant to South Korea's strategic and diplomatic priorities. But recent developments, especially the North Korean nuclear threat, force Seoul to intensify its global diplomacy. In the 1960s, both Koreas had competed 'for diplomatic influence in Africa' (Kalu & Kim 2012:283). Expectedly, the North Korean communists won the hearts and souls of emerging Marxist-Leninist leaning African leaders and liberation movements. Thus, South Korea initially

struggled to win friends in Africa, mainly because of its Hallesten Doctrine which prevented it from forging diplomatic relations with any country that recognised North Korea diplomatically. North Korea was also richer and it lured poor African countries with financial assistance and military aid. By the 1980s, it had bilateral relations with about 40 African countries, compared to South Korea's 28 (Kim. Y, 2016:134-135).

The post-Cold War era ushered democracy in the former Soviet Union Republics and Africa. South Korea seized this opportunity and worked hard to attract new friends, mostly North Korea's traditional allies. South Korea's inclusive economic development model appealed to the developing world (Linca & Voicila, 2015). In contrast, North Korea's influence in Africa declined owing to its economic woes. In 2006, South Korean President Roh Moo-hyun (2003-2008) visited Africa after the first visit by President Doo-hwan in 1982. Until 2006, Seoul had disengaged from Africa, but this changed when it faced serious energy and security challenges as noted. President Moo-hyun visited oil-rich Egypt, Algeria and Nigeria and signed trade deals (Kim. Y 2012:1). His visit was 'resource diplomacy' based. Moo-hyun had first used this term before his trip to Russia and Central Asia in 2004. His successor, Lee Myung-bak, actively forged relations with many African countries. His top priority 'became exploring new markets and resources abroad to revitalise the domestic economy' (Kim. Y 2016:132) after the 2008 global economic crunch. Myung-bak's strategy was to achieve self-sufficiency in oil and gas from 4.2% in 2007 to 28% by 2016. This would see South Korea investing US\$17 billion in oil and gas projects by 2016 (Kalinowski & Hyekyung 2012:11).

The first Korea Africa Forum was held in November 2006 in Seoul following President Moohyun visit to Africa. During his visit, he had announced Korea Initiative for Africa's Development, which provided a framework for Korea Africa's cooperation (Kim. Y 2012). This became the 'key policy agenda of subsequent high-level meetings' (Kim. S & Gray 2015:649). The 2006 Korea Africa Forum was attended by delegates from 15 African countries. In November 2007, Seoul organised and funded the Inter-Sessional Conference for Korea Africa in Johannesburg. The South Korean delegates 'promised to transfer economic development experience, especially for rural areas, to other participants' (Kim. T.H 2012:123). In October 2008, the second Korea Africa Forum was held in Rabbat, Morocco, and Seoul pledged to engage with Africa, not only as a destination of Korean goods, but as a partner. It recognised Africa's ideological, cultural and religious diversity. At the 2008 Korea Africa Forum on Economic Cooperation (KOAPEC), Seoul pledged US\$760 million worth of economic cooperation projects by 2010. Ministers from Africa and South Korea agreed that 'there would be increased cooperation in infrastructure and energy development' (Kim. T.H, 2012:123). In 2012, KOAPEC was attended by 35 African countries, and it was organised by the Export Import Bank of Korea, Korea Ministry of Strategy and Finance, and the African Development Bank. In total, 150 delegates, including representatives from regional institutions in Africa, attended. The 2012 KOAPEC expanded the discussion to include development cooperation, trade, investment, peace and security (Kim. Y 2012:1).

In 2010, President Myung-bak made African diplomacy a main goal of his foreign policy. He visited South Africa, the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) and Ethiopia in 2011. South Africa is a regional power, and it is the largest economy in Africa, while the DRC is rich in minerals. Ethiopia has special relations with Seoul in that during the Korean War (1950-53), it sent troops as part of the UN mission to defend South Korea. The political instability in the Middle East frustrates Seoul, which depends on imported energy. Thus, Myung-bak's Africa strategies and policies 'became explicitly mercantilist' in pursuit of resource and energy security (Kim Y 2016:132). During his and Moo-hyun's tenures, even high level officials and businesspersons shared this mercantilist approach. This slowed down under President Geun-hye. Nonetheless, in May 2016, Geun-hye visited Uganda, Ethiopia and Kenya. She introduced Korean Aid, which 'included the provision of health care, mobile food, spread of Korean culture, food, music and films' (Kim, Y, 2016:134). Presidents from Africa have also visited Seoul over the years to discuss trade and bilateral relations. In 2013, Mozambique's, Ugandan and Ivory Coast's presidents visited Seoul. Botswana's president visited in 2015 (Agyapong 2012:2). In 2016, at the fifth KOAFEC summit held in Seoul, South Korea pledged US\$10 billion as cooperative package to Africa until 2018 (Kim, Y, 2016:14).

South Korea's Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa rose from US\$64.1 million in 2006 to US\$357 million in 2012 (Kim, S & Gray 2012:649). South Korea uses ODA to internationalise its capital which has been facing accumulation crisis since the 1980s (Kim, S & Gray 2012:650). Presidents Moo-hyun and Myung-bak's visits to Africa were linked to Seoul's national growth strategy of the post-Cold War era. Seoul had readjusted its economy to the imperatives of globalisation. In 2012, South Korea's grants to Africa totalled US\$96.6 million (10.3% of its total grant). It was shared as follows: education (30.4%), public administration and governance (20%), agriculture, fishery and forestry (18.4%), and health (17.6%). The top recipients were Ethiopia, Tanzania, Ghana, Rwanda and Morocco accounting for 49% of the total disbursement to Africa (Kim, S & Gray 2012:654). The Economic Development Cooperation Fund (EDCF) manages and disburses South Korea's loans 'which are more likely to reflect the donor's strategic interests' (Kim, S & Gray 2012:655). In Africa, these loans are concentrated in the development of economic and social infrastructure. In 2011, the total loans disbursed to Africa by EDCF accounted for 13.1% of the total EDCF flows worldwide. After President Moo-hyun's visit to Africa in 2006, the speed and amount of loans have grown tremendously. Between 1987 and 2006, 12 projects (worth US\$245.54 million), in only seven African countries were approved. But between 2007 and 2011, 29 projects (worth US\$1.07 billion) in 12 African countries were approved. South Korea gives out more tied loans than grants. This does 'not only reduce the effectiveness of ODA, but [is] clearly aimed at promoting the economic interest of the donor' (Kim, S and Gray 2012:655). Tied loans means that the recipients must use it 'to purchase goods and services imported from the donors' (Kim, T.H 2012:125). The next section broadly explores Botswana-South Korea relations in the context of common interests.

Botswana-South Korea Relations: Common Interests, Common Enemy?

Botswana-South Korea relations started in March 1968, but remained largely uneventful. Like South Korea, Botswana follows a free market economic model. It was only in 1984, that the two countries established trade relations, and signed a Trade Agreement. In 1986, South Korea's Daewoo Engineering Construction Corporation was awarded a tender to tarmac a road from Serowe (the birth place of Seretse Khama) to Orapa, a diamond mining town in Botswana. In 1993, South Korea's Hyundai Motor Distributors established an assembly plant in Gaborone. However, the plant closed down in 1998 owing to high production costs and lack of domestic market (Republic of Botswana, 2014b). After these two projects undertaken by Korean firms, the relations between the two countries remained lukewarm until President Ian Khama reinvigorated them in 2014. The second president, Masire, had visited Seoul in 1994.

South Korea became intensely interested in Botswana after the latter cut diplomatic relations with North Korea in 2014 as noted. Ian Khama adopted an 'ethical foreign policy' (Malila & Molebatsi 2014:5) departing from the 'quite diplomacy' favoured by his predecessors. Khama's administration insists that North Korea is not a 'worthy partner' as it continues to violate international laws and the UN resolutions. On 27 March 2014, shortly after Botswana had severed relations with North Korea, the South Korean ambassador to South Africa, also accredited to Botswana, Lee Yoon, visited Khama. The speed at which he did that indicates his government's eagerness to reinvigorate its relations with Botswana. South Korea was/is impressed that Botswana was bold enough to publicly criticise the intransigent North Korea. For this, ambassador Yoon conveyed an appreciation message to Khama from President Park Geun-hye, 'who re-affirmed the friendship that existed between the two countries based on their peoples' shared commitment to democracy, good governance and the promotion of international peace and understanding' (*Botswana Daily News* 31 March 2014).

Ambassador Yoon told Khama that the interview that he (Khama) granted on the reasons why Botswana severed diplomatic relations with North Korea was published in a leading South Korean newspaper, *Chosun ilbo*. According to him, it 'aroused great interest among Koreans about Botswana' (*Botswana Daily News* 31 March 2014). In the interview, Khama had sturdily condemned North Korea. Since then, he calls it a 'rogue state'. His vice, Mokgweetsi Masisi, when addressing the UN General Assembly in September 2016, referred to North Korea as an 'evil nation', and urged members to cut relations with it (Hong, 2016). Khama's former minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Phandu Skelemani, had also used similar undiplomatic language on North Korea (Wasosa, 2015). When ending the relations, Khama's administration had harshly said: 'The Government of Botswana does not wish to be associated with a Government which continues to display such total disregard for human rights of its citizens' (Republic of Botswana, 2014a). The statement also said that this was not a punishment to the innocent Koreans who are inhumanly treated by their leaders. It also insisted that Botswana sees North Korea as a threat 'to international peace and security' (Republic of Botswana, 2014a). President Ian Khama had explained to Ambassador Yoon that in Botswana, the rule of law and the respect for human rights are enshrined in the constitution and are strictly

adhered to. He emphasised that this is reflected in Botswana's 'international stand in favour of multilateral human rights frameworks and the upholding of international law' (*Botswana Daily News* 31 March 2014). Nonetheless, Khama insisted that Botswana would support any international efforts geared towards addressing the North Korean crisis. Khama Assured ambassador Yoon that the South Koreans 'shall continue to have Botswana's support in their dealings with their hostile neighbour in the North' (*Botswana Daily News* 31 March 2014). It was in this context that President Park Geun-hye invited Ian Khama to Seoul in October 2015. This historic visit reinvigorated and cemented the relations between the two countries. Ian Khama and Park Geun-hye focused on cooperation in infrastructure development, energy and trade, among others (Republic of Botswana 2015).

The Khama administration realised that it could learn and borrow a lot from Seoul. South Korea is regarded 'as one of the world's most dynamic and successful economies, which at times has grown faster than any other post-World War II economy' (Shelton, 2009:5). South Korea and Botswana have relatively strong democratic cultures and institutions. But Botswana can learn a lot from South Korea's inclusive development. Botswana's mineral-led economy has failed to diversify. For instance, diamonds contribute about 32% to Botswana's GDP and 80% to its exports. Official figures place unemployment rate at 18%, and about 40% of this are the youth. Poverty rate is about 20%, while the Ginicoefficient is 0.64, one of the highest in the world (Manatsha & Maharjan 2009:19-46). Overall, South Korea is doing excellently well in all the above areas, and is ranked amongst the top in the Human Development Index.

Botswana-South Korea Summit in 2015: Paving Way for Korean Firms in Botswana

On 23 October 2015, President Khama, flanked by the then Botswana's Ambassador to Japan, Jacob Nkate, the Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Venson Moitoi, the Minister of Trade and Industry, Vincent Seretse, and senior government officials, held a summit with their South Korean counterparts, led by President Park Geun-hye. The summit focused on cooperation in the energy and infrastructure sectors. South Korea entirely imports its energy, and relies on fossil fuels for 85.6% of its energy consumption. It also imports 80% of its food (Kanik, 2015:1). In 2014, it was the fifth largest importer of crude oil and the fourth importer of natural gas. It struggles to diversify its energy sources. For instance, it imports 71% of its oil from the Middle East, with a large share coming from the cheap Iranian oil. This worries the US, its ally and a fierce critic of Iran. Since the Fukushima Nuclear disaster in Japan in 2011, South Korea is also worried about the overreliance on nuclear power. Therefore, in a bid to diversify its energy sources, it has turned to the resource/mineral rich Africa (Darracq & Neville, 2014:3). Although Botswana has no oil, it is rich in coal and other minerals. In 2013, Japan Oil, Gas and Metals National Corporation (JOGMEC) exploration discovered 3.3 billion tons of untapped coal in Botswana (JOGMEC 2013). Botswana is also the leading producer of diamonds by value worldwide as already noted.

Khama and Park Geun-hye's discussion on cooperation in infrastructure and energy was in line with the resolutions of the KOAFEC summit held in 2008, where Seoul pledged US\$760

million worth of economic cooperation in infrastructure and energy development (Kim. T.H 2012:123). In sub-Saharan Africa, Botswana, Rwanda and Mauritius have ‘strong regulatory environments for infrastructure development’ (The Boston Consulting Group, 2017:16). And South Korean state-owned firms have strength in the construction of infrastructure and power plants (Kim. T.H, 2012:124). This appealed to Botswana, which struggles to turn its coal reserves, solar energy and water resources into sustainable energy supply. Botswana imports electricity, mainly from South Africa. In 2012, it imported electricity worth US\$1.2 billion. An attempt to address this through the construction of a huge coal-powered plant (Morupule B) worth US\$1 billion in Palapye, in the Central District, did not materialise after China National Electric Engineering Company delivered a poor quality project. This project, among others, led to diplomatic mistrust between Botswana and China (Mguni & Benza, 2013; Ontebetse, 2015; *Botswana Daily News* 4 February 2016). During the Botswana-South Korea summit, ‘The two countries [also] agreed that more Korean firms should participate in Botswana’s National Development Plan, worth some USD 2.6 billion. This long-term development plan involves the construction of solar and coal-fired thermal power plants, and the installation of large networks of water pipes’ (Republic of Botswana 2015). A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed to this effect.

The two countries also signed a MoU on e-government cooperation, which was expected to ‘boost cooperation on ‘informatization’ and people-to people exchanges’ (Republic of Botswana, 2015b). South Korea has established itself as a knowledge-based economy in a bid to diversify its economy. Sedimo, Bwalya and Du Plessis argue that unlike Botswana, South Korea has put in place ‘robust strategies’ geared towards bridging the digital divide and these have helped it to transform ‘into a fully-fledged knowledge society’ (2011:1). Thus, Botswana can learn a lot from South Korea. In February 2017, the Khama administration engaged a South Korean company, Korea IT Consulting, to develop the e-government service Enterprise Architecture (EA) and Interoperability Framework at the cost of BWP89 million (US\$9 million). Some senior government officials have attended leadership training on the EA in Seoul (Pinielo, 2017). Thus, South Korea is using ‘soft power’ to reach out to African countries. This includes initiatives such as educational exchanges, scholarships and the provision of health care (Park, 2016). In 2011, only 163 South Koreans were living in Botswana, but the numbers have risen steadily with the increase of young Korean volunteers.

When visiting Africa in 2016, Park Geun-hye announced that her government would provide education and vocational training to 6,000 Africans in the next five years (Kim.Y, 2016:134). She also hailed the ICT sector as one of the packages that would benefit Africa. South Korea ‘has highly mature ICT penetration and currently boasts the world’s highest per capita Internet and mobile penetration’ (Sedimo, Bwalya & Du Plessis, 2011:2). Botswana has also shown growth in the number of internet users. For example, in 2009 it had 120,000 internet users, and in 2010 there were more than two million mobile phone subscribers in the country (Sedimo, Bwalya & Du Plessis, 2011:4). Speaking at a business forum on 22 October 2015 in Seoul, President Khama explained that ‘Botswana has been advocating for an international, open economy’ and the country ‘hope[s] to have more business opportunities with Korea not only

in energy resources but also in broader areas such as manufacturing, agriculture, construction and education' (Republic of Botswana, 2015b). Botswana provides opportunities for doing business, not only for South Korea, but other countries as well. During Khama's visit to Seoul, the Botswana Investment and Trade Centre (BITC) accompanied him, and organised an investment and trade mission in Seoul to identify investment opportunities (BITC, 2015).

South Korea's state-owned corporations and *chaebols* (private corporations) have the capacity to undertake huge projects in many sectors. They include: Electric Power Corporation, Korea National Oil Corporation, Korea Gas Corporation, Korea Resource Corporation and Korea Land and Housing Corporation (Darracq & Neville, 2014:5; Kim.Y, 2016:133). These firms have not successfully penetrated the Botswana market. But following Khama's visit to Seoul, some *chaebols* have been awarded tenders in the energy sector. In 2014, Khama's administration cancelled a lawful tender won by China Major Bridge Engineering Corporation to construct a bridge connecting Botswana and Zambia over the Zambezi River. It re-awarded the job to the second best bidder, South Korea's Daewoo Engineering Construction. Japan's Shimizu and South Africa's Stefanutti had also bid for the project, but became third (Benza, 2013). The on-going project, which includes the bridge, one-stop border post and staff houses, cost US\$259 million. It is funded with loans from the African Development Bank, Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA), and the governments of Botswana and Zambia. JICA was supposed to invest US\$110 million into the project, but pulled out of the bridge component as a protest against the interference by the Khama administration in the tender process (Benza, 2013; Manatsha & Malebang, 2016).

The Khama administration had persistently complained about the poor workmanship of some Chinese companies, and their reluctance to invest in the country. In June 2015, Botswana's Minister of Foreign Affairs and International Cooperation, Venson Maitoi, travelled to China to formally complain to the Chinese government about some Chinese companies' poor workmanship. She met with her counterpart, and on return she gave an interview to the local press: 'I had to meet him to inform him that our country suffered because of Chinese companies which did not invest in the country, but only came on contracts to make money, and go out after delivering the projects' (Ontebetse, 2013). In March 2016, the government of Botswana awarded a tender worth BWP8.7 billion (US\$600 million) to a consortium of South Korea's Pohang Iron and Steel Company (POSCO) Energy and Japan's Marubeni to refurbish Morupule B Phase 11, a coal-powered electricity plant located in Palapye, Central District. This went against the expert advice tendered by the engaged consultancy firms, Team Delphos International and Aurecon, which had recommended another South Korean company, Korea Electric Power Cooperation (KEPCO). The government of Botswana opted for POSCO and Marubeni because they are said to have quoted less. The project is financed by Export-Import Bank of Korea, Japan Bank for International Cooperation (JBIC) and an international commerce bank. The developers will 'recover their costs by selling power to the BPC [Botswana Power Corporation] through a 30-year Power Purchase Agreement' (*Sunday Standard Reporter* 14 March 2016).

In 2015, another controversial tender on the energy sector involving a South Korean company in Botswana surfaced. The Khama administration awarded a BWP2.4 billion (slightly over US\$200 million) job through an unsolicited tender to South Korea's Doosan Heavy Industries and Construction to refurbish Morupule A power station, also in Palapye (Letsididi, 2016). Four companies had tendered, and Doosan was not among them. These were Fluor Daniel Holdings, Jeffer, Mitsubishi Hitachi Power Systems Europe Service, and SK Engineering and Construction Company (also South Korean). Except for SK, it is said that others failed to submit all the required documents. But SK did not get the job because it is said to have quoted 'ridiculously high' hence the tender was nullified. The four companies were asked to re-tender, and only SK and Mitsubishi did. SK quoted US\$338.69 million and Mitsubishi US\$374.08 million. The BPC officials arranged a meeting with the two companies and after clarifications, the quotes were adjusted: SK (US\$339.45 million), and Mitsubishi (US\$379.18 million). In the midst of this, Doosan approached the Botswana government with an unsolicited tender, and quoted far less. The tender is now giving the government headache because Doosan realises that it had under quoted (Letsididi, 2016; *Sunday Standard* 23 October 2015). Since its bad experience with some Chinese firms, the Khama administration favours Korean firms, which also enjoy the full support of their government. South Korea lobbies African governments through its embassies, diplomatic missions and Korea Africa Forums. This provides assurances, especially where political instabilities and security challenges, and rigid bureaucracy make doing business difficult (Darracq & Neville, 2014:5). The above discussion shows how the Khama administration favoured Korean firms.

Konkuk University Awards President Khama an Honorary Doctorate

When Khama arrived in Seoul on 21 October 2015, he was welcomed with an honorary PhD in Political Science by Konkuk University, a private institution. The views of Botswana who criticised Konkuk University for awarding Khama this degree were published in the local private newspapers, and extensively discussed on social media. When honouring Khama, Konkuk University President, Kim Kyung Hee, said: 'President Khama has been recognized for his strong leadership in challenging circumstance for steady economic growth and stable governance. Internationally, he is recognised as a voice of rationality, democracy, human rights and the rule of law' (*Botswana Daily News* 22 October 2015). Whilst in Seoul, Khama had told his counterpart and journalists that he severed relations with the North Korean regime because of its obstinacy and disregard for human rights. Using firm and undiplomatic language, he ridiculed the North Korean leaders and likened them to 'Stone Age' creatures. He also said that the North Korean leaders' days in power are numbered suggesting that there would be a revolt by the oppressed people in that country. Khama's berating of Kim Jong Un in his doorstep was very unusual for an African leader. Khama bravely went on:

As a democracy with our own principles, we just felt that they [North Korea] are not worthy, for us anyway, of having relations with. Coupled with that was the constant aggressive stance, military stance that they'd been taking, threatening their neighbours like yourselves. [T]hat convinced us that, well, it doesn't look like

things are ever going to get better there and therefore we need to make a statement. And for us, we live many miles away, so the best thing we could do is just to sever diplomatic relations with that kind of regime. Their kind of behaviour and their kind of conduct is totally unacceptable in today's world [...] It's just a matter of time before that system will be overthrown (Lee 2015).

Critics in Botswana argued that Khama's PhD was a political stunt by Seoul which is also eyeing Botswana's mineral wealth. They insist that Khama has failed to govern the country well, and does not deserve the honour. They cite corruption, high unemployment rate and police brutality, among others (Masokola, 2015; Gobotswang, 2015; Dipholo, 2016; Boko in Enos, 2015; Boko in *The Voice* 6 November 2015; Boko in *The Patriot on Sunday* 10 November 2015; Khan in *Sunday Standard* 29 November 2015; *Sunday Standard* 29 November 2016). Duma Boko, the leader of opposition in Botswana's Parliament, when responding to the State of the Nation Address in November 2015, mocked Khama's PhD: 'I note that the President, in addition to the already numerous names and titles by which he goes, has conspired to add an Honorary Doctorate to the list' (Enos, 2015). At a political rally in Gaborone in November 2015, Boko had said that the Koreans honoured Khama to thank him for the US\$450 million he spent purchasing T50 trainer fighter jets from Seoul for the Botswana Defence Force in May 2015 (*The Voice* 6 November 2015). He was wrong because Korea Aerospace Industries and the Khama administration had not finalised the deal. His colleague, Mohammed Khan, also mocked Khama's PhD when addressing parliament by arguing that 'doctorates just fly around' (*Sunday Standard* 29 November 2015). Critics also argued that these 'phony doctoral degrees' 'are used as bribery to attract favours' from African leaders (Masokola, 2015; Gobotswang, 2015). Critics forget that conferring honours and awards is an age-old practice used in public diplomacy. It is, however, helpful to quote one Masokola to show why some Botswana criticise Konkuk University's decision:

[I]nstead of basking in the adulation of illusory doctoral degree, President Ian Khama must figure out the wider implications of this uncharacteristic gesture from the South Koreans. Lest [sic] we find ourselves being used as a political pawn in the east-Asian struggle for power and influence between China and South Korea. The question is: What does South Korea seek to achieve in our relationship and how do they [sic] intend to frame their interest in the context of our apparent "complicated" relations with China?...Whatever the answer, it would be ignorant to assume that the South Koreans are not aware of Botswana's government's dissatisfaction with Chinese companies (Masokola, 2015).

In his diatribe, Kesitegile Gobotswang contends that Botswana is 'being sold in exchange for pieces of paper they call honorary doctorate degrees and silly little fake academic gowns' (Gobotswang, 2015). He laments that these degrees have been 'dished out mostly by external academic institutions, some which don't even offer undergraduate degrees' (Gobotswang 2015). He says that those who are honoured are mainly politicians in the ruling Botswana Democratic Party (BDP), in power since 1966. He concludes by saying: 'When it comes to

politicians who acquired doctorate and medical degrees through training it is the BCP [Botswana Congress Party (BCP), his party] that leads the pack' (Gobotswang 2015). But that Khama has 'sold' Botswana in exchange for an honorary PhD is nothing, but political rhetoric. It is true, as Masokola notes, that South Korea is worried about China's influence in Africa (Darracq & Neville 2014:3). Gobotswang's criticism of Khama's 'PhD' is primarily influenced by his political leanings as the BCP vice president. In diplomatic relations, soft power is a way in which countries first soften relations for future mutual benefits.

In February 2016, having noted that there was intense criticism and mockery of Khama's PhD, the Permanent Secretary in the Office of the President issued a directive to all Permanent Secretaries, Directors and Botswana's diplomatic missions and embassies, spelling out the president's 'new' official name: 'His Excellency the President Lieutenant General Dr Seretse Khama Ian Khama' (*Mmegi* 11 February 2016). This was an instruction to all to address him by his new title, 'Dr'. One observer notes: 'For a very strange reason, Botswana is the only country in Southern Africa (probably in Africa if not the whole world) where people use this honorific without the usual restrictions' (*Sunday Standard* 29 November 2016). In November 2016, Kenneth Dipholo, a seasoned critic of Khama, wrote that the frequency at which honours and awards are heaped on him is worrisome because it renders the 'honours system at both national and international levels scandalous, cheap and laughable' (Dipholo, 2016).

Like China, South Korea suffers from image problem because of a land-lease scandal in Madagascar, illegal fishing, and a controversial diamond mining deal in Cameroon involving its firms (Soyeun & Gray, 2016:656). From a public diplomacy angle, it is understandable that one of its leading universities honoured Khama, a staunch conservationist. For most South Koreans, Khama deserves it, not only for economic reasons, as critics in Botswana argue, but for the wider geopolitical and global politics. For instance, the honour came after Khama had severed diplomatic relations with North Korea in February 2014. This was significant to the Koreans. Khama's bold decision reinvigorated the relations between the two countries. Konkuk University recognised Khama's great contribution to this (*Botswana Daily News* 22 October 2015). This award also fits well in South Korea's soft power strategy in Africa. This paper concurs that 'South Korea has carefully observed and studied the confrontations, competitions, and cooperation among major powers with regard to Africa and its resources' (Kim.TH, 2012:121). The Khama administration went further and initiated military relations with Seoul. This is not surprising because Khama is a tried and tested soldier and pilot.

Botswana-South Korea Military Relations

South Korea has military relations with four African countries (Gabon, Ethiopia, Uganda and Botswana). Botswana-South Korea military relations date back to 30 October 2013 when Botswana's then Minister of Security and Defence, Brigadier Dikgakgamatso Ramadeluka Seretse, a cousin of Khama, attended the Seoul International Aerospace and Defence

Exhibition. He met with his South Korean counterpart, Kim Kwanjin, and discussed military cooperation (*Mmegi* 19 January 2017). For the first time, the media reported that Botswana sought to acquire 16 T-50 supersonic trainer jets to replace its old CF5 C/D fighters from Korea Aerospace Industries LTD (KAI) (*The Bulletin* 25 November 2013). KAI was launched in 1999 under the direction of the South Korean government ‘As part of its drive for economic reform’ following the financial crisis in 1997 (Cho, 2003:43). It was originally a joint venture of Samsung Aerospace, Daewoo Heavy Industries (aerospace division) and Hyundai Space and Aircraft Company. KAI was established ‘to prevent excessive competition and overlapping investment in the aerospace industry’ (Cho, 2003:43). This was seen as hindering South Korea’s competitive position in the global aerospace industry.

In November 2013, the media reported that a high-profile delegation from the South Korean Ministry of Defence would visit Botswana for the first time (*The Bulletin* 25 November 2013). A South Korean senior military official had explained that the visit was ‘aimed at providing government support to facilitate the export of the T-50 or the FA-50’ (*The Bulletin* 25 November 2013). He further noted that ‘We hope the upcoming visit could help pave the way for South Korea to tap into Africa, expanding its overseas market focused in Southeast Asia, Latin America and Europe’ (*The Bulletin* 25 November 2013). The military official’s views resonate well with South Korea’s ‘developmentalist model’. The South Korean government’s close relations with big business/*chaebols* started in the 1960s (Shelton, 2009; Darracq & Neville, 2014; McCartney 2015). To assist the *chaebols* and state-owned corporations to penetrate overseas markets, the South Korean government uses its diplomatic relations, including aid and grants (Darracq & Neville, 2014:6; Kim.Y, 2016:133). For instance, the South Korean government fully supports KAI’s efforts to sell T-50s to Botswana. When Khama visited Seoul in October 2015, the T-50 deal was on the agenda. Thus, he toured the KAI headquarters in Seoul. He is said to have indicated that he expected his army ‘to make its final decision on the purchase by the end of the year after considering options in two other countries’ (Lee, 2015). Indeed, in 2017 Khama visited Sweden, and, again, the proposal to purchase eight second hand Gripen C/D jets for the army dominated his trip. He toured the plant manufacturing Gripens in Stockholm. Facing domestic criticism and in Sweden, Khama defended his decision during a televised media briefing in Sweden.

In January 2017, South Korea and Botswana signed a MoU to promote military cooperation during a meeting in Seoul (*Mmegi* 19 January 2017). It was signed by the South Korean Defence Minister, Han Min-koo, and his Botswana counterpart, Shaw Kgathi. They discussed the ways in which the two countries could promote high-level defence meetings and facilitate defence industry deals. Han Min-koo ‘explained the current security situation on the Korean Peninsula, citing North Korea’s nuclear and missile development programmes’ to Kgathi. He then ‘asked Botswana to join international efforts to pressure Pyongyang to give up its nuclear programme’ (*Defence Web* 19 January 2017). In April 2017, Khama addressed local and foreign diplomats in Gaborone and told them that ‘Botswana remains concerned about the blatant human rights violations in the rogue state of North Korea’ (*APA News* 2017). When North Korea conducted a nuclear test in early 2017, his government issued a strong

condemnation, and applauded the US for deploying the controversial anti-missile system in South Korea. Botswana disregarded the fact that the South Koreans are sharply divided on this issue. China and Russia also oppose the deployment. Undeterred, Botswana considered it 'appropriate and justified' 'to counter threats by North Korea' (Republic of Botswana 2016). Whilst in Seoul, Kgathi also met with South Korea's Minister of Defence Acquisition Program Administration, Chang Myoung-jin, 'to discuss possible cooperation in the defence industry' (*Defence Web* 19 January 2017). It was reported that the Botswana Defence Force had also planned to purchase K2 Black Panther tanks from South Korea. It is unclear how the military cooperation between the two countries would address Seoul's security/military threats from Pyongyang. Khama wittingly/unwittingly answered this when he told Koreans that Botswana 'live many miles away, so the best thing we could do is just to sever diplomatic relations with that kind of regime' (Lee 2015) he called 'a rogue state'.

The Khama administration's negotiations to purchase military hardware from South Korea and Sweden has been criticised by opposition parties and some citizens. In November 2015, the BCP vice president penned a scathing opinion piece criticising Khama's visit to Seoul as wasteful: 'It is not by coincidence that President Khama was awarded an honorary doctorate degree by a South Korean institution while on a state visit (or was it a shopping visit) to negotiate deals to purchase T-50 Trainer Jets' (Gobotswang, 2015). Duma Boko, Botswana's leader of opposition in Parliament, dismissed Khama's honorary PhD as nothing, but a reward for his purchase of the T-50 jets worth US\$450 million from Seoul (Boko in Enos, 2015). Similar criticisms form the basis of many opinion articles published in the local media. The Khama administration has not yet purchased the T-50s and Gripen jets from Seoul and Stockholm respectively. But this has not quelled the criticism. Media reports show that most Botswana are against the purchase of military hardware. Therefore, the public perceptions may negatively affect the (re)invigorated Botswana-South Korea relations. South Korea should be mindful that it already suffers 'reputational damage' after some of its *chaebols* and state-owned corporations were involved in dubious economic deals in Africa (Agyapong, 2012; Kanik, 2015:2). Ironically, President Park Geun-hye, whom Khama met and signed economic cooperation deals with worth more than US\$2.6 billion, was impeached and later removed from office on allegations of corruption in March 2017. She is on trial. KAI is also besieged with corruption scandals, which led to its chief executive officer, Ha Sung-yong, resigning in July 2017 (Tomkins, 2017; *The Korean Times* 14 July 2017).

Conclusion

This paper has argued that under President Ian Khama, Botswana-South Korea relations have been reinvigorated. The previous administrations had not engaged Seoul with the intensity and vigour witnessed under Ian Khama. Khama's decision to sever diplomatic relations with North Korea aroused interest in South Korea. The paper also contextualised Botswana-South Korea relations within the Korea Africa strategy. Seoul's relations with Africa dates back to 1961, but it briefly disengaged from Africa following its admission to the UN in 1991. In the post-2000, it came back to Africa, mainly for economic reasons. Like China and Japan, South Korea

is in a global rush to secure energy sources. Although Botswana has no oil, it is rich in coal and diamonds. When Khama visited Seoul in October 2015, he discussed ways in which Botswana and South Korea can cooperate, especially in the energy and infrastructure sector. Khama and Park Geun-hye then signed an agreement worth US\$2.6 billion in which South Korean firms would undertake development projects in Botswana. Since then, South Korean firms have secured lucrative deals in the energy sector in Botswana. In some cases, the awarding of such tenders has been controversial, and, thus, in principle, deemed 'corrupt'.

Despite all the controversies, Botswana can learn a lot from South Korea in the areas of ICT and education. Botswana may also secure markets for its diamonds. In conclusion, this paper posits that the bad publicity of South Korea in the local print media and by some opposition politicians may undermine the cordial diplomatic relations.

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