

Baghdad in Korean Perspective Lee Myung-bak 's Case**Ghiadaq Abdulmunim Mohammed****College of Arts- University of Baghdad****ghidaq.a@coart.uobaghdad.edu.iq****This work is licensed under a [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)****[International License](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/)****Abstract**

The paper is an attempt to understand the city of Baghdad in the Korean perspective, by studying the case of the CEO of Hyundai Construction Company, Lee Myung-bak, who is the person responsible for the Korean entry into Iraq through the Iraqi market in the seventies of the last century, as before that there were no relations between the two countries, neither on the economic nor on the political levels.

Therefore, we focused on the visits made by Lee Myung-bak to Baghdad, which was the first visit in which he was able to get to know and introduce himself to one of the most prominent officials in the Iraqi government, who is the Mayor of Municipality, Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti which played the vital role in the successful opening of a Korean consulate in Baghdad and the establishment of diplomatic relations between Iraq and Republic of Korea.

Then we took the details of the second visit made by Lee Myung-bak to Baghdad, in which, through his friendship with Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti, he was able to get to know a number of ministers in Iraq who contributed to provide simple facilities to the Hyundai Construction Company in its works in Iraq, all the way to the Minister of Planning, , who was responsible for drawing up economic policies in Iraq, promised Lee Myung-bak that he would look into the issue of opening a Korean embassy in Iraq.

The other visits continued to follow up the implementation of the project contracts that Hyundai Construction Company obtained in various parts of Iraq, which amounted to sixteen projects, which are among the most important strategic projects that contributed to the progress of the process of economic development and building infrastructure in Iraq, and in every visit Lee Myung was there. Lee gave his impressions of the city of Baghdad and the characteristics of the individual within Iraqi society. He also admired of Iraqi cuisine and its most famous dish, which is the Iraqi masgouf.

Key Words: South Korea, Iraq, Hyundai Construction Company, Economic Relations, Political Relations.

ملخص البحث:

البحث الحالي هو محاولة لفهم أهمية مدينة بغداد في المنظور الكوري، من خلال دراسة رؤية المدير التنفيذي لشركة هيونداي للإنشاءات لي ميونغ باك، وهو الشخص المسؤول عن الدخول الكوري إلى العراق من خلال السوق العراقية في سبعينات القرن الماضي، إذ لم يكن هناك قبل ذلك أية علاقات بين البلدين، لا على المستوى الاقتصادي ولا على المستوى السياسي.

يركز البحث على الزيارات التي قام بها لي ميونغ باك إلى بغداد، والمتمثلة بالزيارة الأولى والتي تمكن فيها من التعرف عليها وتقديم نفسه إلى واحد من أبرز المسؤولين في الحكومة العراقية، وهو أمين

العاصمة عبد الوهاب المفتي، الذي أدى دوراً في افتتاح أول قنصلية لجمهورية كوريا في بغداد وإقامة علاقات دبلوماسية بين العراق وكوريا.

جاءت الزيارة الثانية للي ميونغ باك إلى بغداد لتعمق صداقته مع عبد الوهاب المفتي، والتعرف على عدد من الوزراء العراقيين ممن ساهموا في تقديم تسهيلات بسيطة إلى شركة هيونداي للإنشاءات في عملها في العراق، وصولاً إلى وزير التخطيط الذي كان مسؤولاً عن رسم السياسات الاقتصادية في العراق، ووعد لي ميونغ باك بأنه سوف ينظر في مسألة فتح سفارة كورية في العراق.

توالت الزيارات بعد ذلك لمتابعة سير تنفيذ عقود المشاريع التي حصلت عليها شركة هيونداي للإنشاءات في مختلف أنحاء العراق، وبلغت ستة عشر مشروعاً، وهي من أهم المشاريع الإستراتيجية التي ساهمت في توسيع التنمية الاقتصادية وبناء البنى التحتية في العراق، وفي كل زيارة كان لي ميونغ باك يعطي انطباعاته عن مدينة بغداد وعن صفات الفرد العراقي، كما أعجب بالمطبخ العراقي وأشهر طبق فيه وهو طبق سمك المسكوف.

الكلمات المفتاحية: كوريا الجنوبية، العراق، شركة هيونداي للإنشاءات، علاقات اقتصادية، علاقات سياسية.

1. Introduction:

The current article attempts to understand the city of Baghdad from a Korean perspective, through a case study of Lee Myung-bak¹, CEO of Hyundai Construction², who was responsible for Korea's entry into Iraq through the Iraqi market in the 1970s. Prior to that, there had been no relations between the two countries, either economically or politically. The reasons for the delay in relations between the two countries may be related to the circumstances of both countries in general, and Iraq in particular, when the army launched a revolution that overthrew the monarchy³ and declared the establishment of the Iraqi state with its republican system in July 1958⁴.

As for the Republic of Korea, it was also experiencing unstable conditions on the Korean Peninsula. After Korea's independence from Japanese occupation⁵, and its division into two distinct systems a communist socialist regime in the north and a democratic capitalist regime in the south⁶ the country's internal conditions were unstable⁷. It witnessed a period of coups and internal political conflicts⁸, represented by student demonstrations and social movements aimed at overthrowing the authoritarian regime in Korea, which occurred in June 1987⁹.

Regarding the economic situation between the two countries, it was no better than the political situation. Iraq relied on imports from abroad to meet its basic needs, especially from the United States, Britain, and France. As for Japan, Iraq had close economic relations with it, and it represented the primary source of imports for Iraq. Iraq's imports from Japan in 1959 amounted to approximately (5.8) million dinars. In contrast, Iraq's exports to Japan were small, not exceeding (120) thousand dinars annually¹⁰. Because Japan, a developed industrial country, provided Iraq with many of its needs, Iraq raised the level of diplomatic representation with Japan to the level of an embassy, which was opened in Tokyo in 1960¹¹, while the Japanese commission had opened in Baghdad four years before that date, in 1956¹².

While Iraq had no diplomatic relations with the Republic of Korea, it maintained close economic ties with the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which was hostile to its southern neighbor. This significantly influenced the lack of diplomatic and political relations between Iraq and the Republic of Korea, which refused to establish foreign relations with any country that had relations with the DPRK. This was in accordance with the Holstein Doctrine, which the Republic of Korea relied on in its foreign relations until the early 1970s, when it restricted the use of this doctrine to serve its economic and political interests¹³. This issue is fundamental to understanding the reasons for the delay in relations between Iraq and Korea. Iraq had established relations with its northern neighbor, which was keen to prevent the establishment of relations between them through continuous warnings sent to Iraq¹⁴. At the same time, early economic relations continued¹⁵, contributing to the establishment of political relations between the two countries, which were launched in 1966 with the opening of general consulates in Baghdad and Pyongyang¹⁶.

However, the only exception is due to the first Iraqi dealings with Korea in 1966, as this year witnessed the beginning of rapprochement between the two countries, through the donation of the Iraqi President Abdul Rahman Arif (1916-2007 / 1966-1968) of (1000) Iraqi dinars to the Korean Muslim Federation in the capital, Seoul, to build a mosque there¹⁷, as the document of the Budget Directorate/Secret Services file No. 137 indicates the authorization of the Iraqi Embassy in the Japanese capital, Tokyo, to transfer the donation amount to the Korean Muslim Federation in Seoul for the purpose of building the mosque there, and in implementation of this order, the General Cash Accounts Directorate sent a letter of notification to the Central Treasury Directorate to notify the Central Bank of Iraq to transfer the donated amount. These two documents indicate the beginnings of the Iraqi Korean rapprochement in the 1960s. Although this rapprochement was Iraqi support for Muslim communities in Asia in general and Korea in particular, it represented the beginnings of an Iraqi Korean rapprochement and the first event to shift Iraq's interest toward diversifying its international relations in general, and with Asian countries in particular¹⁸.

The above demonstrates the main reasons that contributed to the delay in relations, both economic and diplomatic, between Iraq and the Republic of Korea. Korea has major pioneering projects in many countries in general, and Arab countries in particular. However, as mentioned above, the Iraqi market was closed to Korean companies. This closure was temporary until the arrival of Hyundai Construction, represented by its head of internal operations, Lee Myung-bak. Through personal adventure, he managed to enter Iraq and subsequently establish economic relations, resulting in the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries¹⁹.

2. Sinbad's Baghdad in the Eyes of the Disguised Asian Visitor:

Baghdad bore the imprint of history as a bridge between East Asia, the Far East, and the western shore of the Mediterranean. Korea and Japan were looking to extend their economic influence in Iraq after their recovery in the 1970s and 1980s. Hyundai Construction began expanding its business ventures by securing new investment contracts worldwide and specifically in the Arab world. Hyundai aimed to enter the Arab market, particularly the oil-rich Gulf states²⁰, and to secure long-term contracts, most notably infrastructure projects. The company successfully secured work contracts in Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and Kuwait²¹. At the same time, Iraq was moving toward major economic development to improve its economy. After Iraq nationalized oil in 1972²², which led to the accumulation of wealth, in addition to settling its border disputes with Iran²³, this indicated a state of stability in the mid-1970s. The Gulf market began to suffice with development projects in the mid-1970s, and some

problems arose for Korean workers in Saudi Arabia. Hyundai therefore began to explore new markets²⁴. This was the right opportunity for Hyundai Construction²⁵. when it won the contract to build a sewage treatment plant in Basra in 1978²⁶.

Korean workers could not find a way to enter Iraq, and entering Iraq for Koreans represented a great risk. The difficulty of the issue increased after the expansion of the rapprochement between Iraq and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, and consequently the closure of the Iraqi market to Korean companies. However, the first Korean entry into Iraq came through Hyundai Construction Company winning the contract to build a sewage treatment plant in Basra, the second largest city in Iraq after the capital, Baghdad. The reason for winning this contract was that Hyundai Company offered the lowest price to carry out the project in a desperate attempt to gain a foothold in the Iraqi market. Immediately, arrangements began to ensure the arrival of Korean equipment and workers to Iraq to begin implementing the project. To ensure that the procedures were proceeding properly, Lee Myung-bak traveled to Iraq, but he was unable to obtain an entry visa to Iraqi territory, which forced him to stay for a period in Kuwait waiting to enter Iraq. Indeed, he was able to cross the Iraqi border illegally²⁷, and it took him several days to reach Baghdad. Here, Lee Myung-bak describes his feelings when he arrived in Baghdad secretly, saying, **"I was the head of the company that had just won a contract in a country where I was not allowed to... "I entered, and I was not granted a visa. I felt like a secret agent in a spy thriller"**²⁸. Pak was captivated while he was in Baghdad, which was a dream for Korean companies.

Lee Myung-bak was impressed by the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, even though he toured it secretly, using the term "stealthily," with the help of a local employee. Several days later, Lee Myung-bak was able to meet the Iraqi official in charge of the project. The first words the Iraqi official addressed to the Hyundai manager were, "How did a South Korean company win the contract?" The official couldn't believe it, confirming the extent of the Iraqi apprehension about dealing with South Korea. The two sat down and drank tea. Lee Myung-bak promised the Iraqi official that Hyundai would do its best to complete the project and asked the official to help the company achieve this goal. In return, the Iraqi official promised to provide the necessary assistance, but, according to Lee Myung-bak, the promise was vague²⁹.

Lee Myung-bak's impressions of the situation in Baghdad can be seen in his stay in the capital for several days, desperately trying to find a way to the new leadership, which would provide the necessary assistance to ensure the entry of Korean workers and equipment into Basra to complete the project. Several days later, while Lee Myung-bak was sitting in a nightclub called the Moulin Rouge³⁰, an Asian woman approached them and asked, "Would you like to join us?" She introduced herself as a Japanese citizen. When Lee Myung-bak got up to go to the bathroom, she surreptitiously followed him, looked around to make sure no one was watching them, and then whispered, "You came from South Korea, right?" Here, Lee Myung-bak describes his surprise that the woman was in fact from South Korea, but out of self-preservation and fear of deportation, she claimed to be from Japan.

Lee Myung-bak's first opportunity came through a gift he gave to a local employee, who he hoped would lead them to the mayor of the capital, Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti³¹. The Korean trade delegation was unaware of the possibility of reaching the mayor without the help of this local employee, reflecting the extent of Koreans' ignorance and lack of knowledge about Iraq. Lee Myung-bak's attempts to meet the mayor failed until a final attempt was made through communicating with the interpreter at the secretariat building, who told him he needed a few

minutes to meet with the mayor. The meeting did take place, and Lee Myung-bak expressed to the mayor Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti Hyundai's desire to improve the economic situation in Iraq and its expertise, particularly in the field of infrastructure and its development³². This was because Korea had pioneering experience in economic development, starting with its own country³³.

Lee Myung-bak describes the mayor's relief at hearing this from the Hyundai Construction manager, despite his initial skepticism, given that South Korea was an ally of the United States, which Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti described as an imperialist state. Lee Myung-bak describes the first meeting with the mayor as fruitful, as it was an introduction between a Korean company official and an Iraqi official. However, the meeting did not resolve the obstacles facing the entry of Korean workers and equipment required to implement the project in Basra. Korea did not have a consulate or any diplomatic representation in Iraq. Therefore, the Korean workers had to go to Kuwait and wait there for weeks until their visas were issued, costing the company irreparable effort, money, and time. Therefore, Lee Myung-bak contacted the Korean Foreign Ministry in Seoul and proposed the idea of opening a Korean consulate in Baghdad, but they refused, claiming that relations between Korea and Iraq were not close and that there was no justification for Korea to establish a consulate general in Baghdad³⁴.

2. Returning to Baghdad:

Lee Myung-bak was forced to travel to Baghdad for the second time and requested a meeting with the mayor, Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti. The meeting took place at the Iraqi Hunting Club³⁵, where Lee presented the mayor with a turtle ship, a traditional Korean heritage. Lee Myung-bak took the opportunity to raise the issue of issuing visas for Korean workers. He informed the mayor that, as a director of Hyundai Construction, it took him four days to obtain an entry visa to Iraq, so how could ordinary workers, hundreds of whom were waiting for their visas to enter and work on the project, be allowed to do so? When the mayor asked what he suggested, Lee Myung-bak replied that the Iraqi government should issue a group visa for all Korean workers. The mayor then requested the necessary paperwork for the Korean workers and promised to issue them group visas. At the end of the lunch, the mayor embraced Lee Myung-bak and told him that he was happy that they had become good friends, that they were like brothers³⁶.

Lee Myung-bak, the mayor of the capital, describes Abdul Wahab al-Mufti as cultured, educated, and well-versed in literature, art, and ancient books, despite being deeply involved in politics. Abdul Wahab fulfilled his promise. The next day, the Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued group visas to all Korean workers in Kuwait, allowing them to enter to begin construction of a sewage treatment plant in Basra³⁷.

4. Baghdad, Hyundai's Gateway to Iraq:

Lee Myung-bak returned to Baghdad for the third time, where he invited the mayor, Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti, to lunch at one of Baghdad's best restaurants, expressing his gratitude for his assistance in issuing group visas for Korean workers to enter Iraq. Lee Myung-bak learned from the mayor that two of his friends would be attending lunch with him. They later turned out to be the Minister of Industry and the Minister of Housing and Construction. Lee Myung-bak told him that he would need these two men if Hyundai wanted to continue operating and secure new contracts in Iraq. The meeting with the three officials took place in the restaurant, and Lee Myung-bak welcomed the mayor and his two colleagues and spoke with them about the extensive experience Korean companies have in the fields of economic

development and infrastructure development. Lee Myung-bak realized that it would be impossible to meet these two ministers without the assistance of the mayor, Abdul-Wahab Al-Mufti, especially the Minister of Housing and Construction, who was primarily responsible for the project to build a sewage treatment plant in Basra. This meeting marked a significant turning point in the ongoing developments in Baghdad for a Korean citizen who had entered Iraq as the director of a major economic company. Lee Myung-bak felt reassured when he sensed that the two ministers were at ease during this friendly meeting, especially when the Minister of Industry asked Lee Myung-bak to tell him more about Hyundai's experience in power plant construction³⁸.

It is worth noting the focus on Lee Myung-bak's impressions as he describes Iraqi society, and his amazement at the speed with which Iraqis formed friendships with a person who was not long ago suspicious, not for any reason, but simply because he was from a country that had no economic dealings or diplomatic relations with Iraq. Lee Myung-bak states in his book (*The Rough Road*): "The speed with which we became very close friends was amazing." Lee Myung-bak continued in his description of Iraqis by saying that Iraqis are known for being a fiercely proud people. He relies here on history, as he mentions in his book that Iraq has always been a major power in the region, and describes Iraqis as being extremely proud of this fact. Iraqi society also has a respectful side to diversity, and they have a great passion and interest in the arts, literature, and culture. They also valued friendship greatly, and honor was above all else. This made it easy for someone like Lee Myung-bak to become a close friend and remain a friend of Iraqis for a long time³⁹.

5. Korean modernity seeps into Baghdad through Hyundai and Pak:

Lee Myung-bak, CEO of Hyundai Construction, visited Baghdad for the fourth time, a month after his third visit, in 1978, to follow up on the progress of the construction of the Basra sewage treatment plant. Upon his arrival in Baghdad, some Iraqi friends contacted him, most notably the Minister of Industry, who invited him to dinner. The same day, the Minister of Housing called the CEO and invited him to dinner, but Lee Myung-bak declined, citing a prior appointment with the Minister of Industry. Lee Myung-bak describes the dinner as a lavish affair, held in a luxurious restaurant on the banks of the Tigris River, in a building dating back approximately 400 years. This place offers a beautiful view, allowing visitors to see the majestic Tigris River below. Upon arrival, he was greeted by his host, the Minister of Industry, along with the Minister of Housing, the Mayor of the Capital, and another person he did not know. It turned out that he was the Minister of Heavy Industries and Mineral Resources. The Minister of Industry was impressed by Lee Myung-bak's explanation of Hyundai's work in power plant construction. He therefore believed that Lee Myung-bak should meet the Minister of Heavy Industries and Mineral Resources, since power plants fall under his ministry's purview. Lee Myung-bak thanked the Minister for this kind gesture⁴⁰.

Lee Myung-bak describes how he enjoyed himself that night while having dinner with his Iraqi friends. They then drank a drink that was similar to the Korean drink Soju, as he mentions that the name itself was identical between the two drinks. They touched on many things in their informal discussions, the most prominent of which was the great similarity in some words in the Arabic and Korean languages. For example, Lee Myung-bak mentions that the Korean words Ae-bi and ae-mi are pronounced the same way in Arabic. Here, Lee Myung-bak was not surprised by this great similarity in some words in Arabic and Korean. Here, we see that he went back to history for the second time, as he mentioned that historical records dating back to the fifth century BC, dating back to the ancient Silla Dynasty, which

ruled Korea, mentioned that merchants from the Arabian Peninsula came to Korea by sea, and the merchants did not only bring goods with them, but also brought Middle Eastern culture. Here, Lee Myung-bak describes that Korea and Iraq were at opposite ends of the spectrum. The two sides of Silk Road⁴¹.

Lee Myung-bak recalled that throughout the night at the dinner, they all spoke about how close Iraq and Korea were in many ways. One of the Iraqis in attendance spoke passionately about Iraq's new desire to engage with Korea on a deeper level. He noted how Iraq works with other countries, such as Japan, Germany, France, and the United Kingdom⁴², but none of these countries has treated Iraq as an equal partner. He expressed his hope that Iraq and the Republic of Korea could work together to develop their countries more closely, for the benefit of both countries⁴³.

6. Hyundai, Pak, and the Competition of Japanese Companies in Baghdad:

The director of Hyundai Construction returned to Baghdad for the fifth time in 1979, after Hyundai Construction won new contracts in Iraq, to follow up on the progress of these new projects. Hyundai was able to beat Japan and win the \$720 million Musayyib thermal power plant project on a turnkey basis. Hyundai also won the \$820 million housing project to be built in Fallujah. Regarding the Musayyib thermal power plant project, Lee Myung-bak recalls that his Iraqi friends advised him to use Japanese technology to complete the project, knowing that Hyundai would be unable to complete the plant on a turnkey basis within the agreed upon timeframe. Despite this, the project was awarded to the Koreans. The reason, as Lee Myung-bak describes it, was that the Iraqis wanted to send a dual message: they wanted to tell developed countries that they were no longer the same old Iraq, and that they wanted to protect their national interests⁴⁴.

The strong friendship between Lee Myung-bak and the mayor of the capital, Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti, continued. Lee Myung-bak credits Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti with introducing him to the man responsible for formulating economic policies in Iraq, the Minister of Planning, who ran the Economic Planning Council. That evening, Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti took Lee Myung-bak to the palace of the Minister of Planning. On the way, Lee Myung-bak asked the mayor what he should say to the Minister of Planning when they met. Abdul Wahab understood the hints from the Korean director and suggested that he raise the issue of opening a consulate and establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries when meeting with the Minister of Planning. Upon their arrival, Lee Myung-bak recalled, there was media coverage, with television crews filming the meeting. The image of Lee Myung-bak shaking hands with the Minister of Planning was broadcast on the evening news in Baghdad. After the exchange of greetings, tea was served to the Korean guest. The minister told the Korean guest that it was the first time he had received a foreign construction official. He added that he had heard a lot about the Hyundai CEO from his fellow ministers. He thanked him and wished him good luck in his work and projects in Iraq. Lee Myung-bak recalled that he informed the Iraqi minister that he would do his best to serve the development movement in their country. However, he also explained the difficulty of continuing and completing the construction project in Fallujah due to the many restrictions imposed on the Korean company's work. Lee Myung-bak did not ask the Minister of Planning to take immediate action to resolve the obstacles, but he did at least ask him to consider the matter. The Minister of Planning replied that he would carefully consider the matter, but his response contained neither positive nor negative signals⁴⁵.

7. The Sixth Visit and Korean Pony Cars on the Streets of Baghdad:

Shortly before Lee Myung-bak left Baghdad in 1979, he was sitting with the mayor of the capital, Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti. Abdul Wahab asked Lee Myung-bak what Hyundai could offer in exchange for the company's necessary facilities to complete its projects in the country. It was as if he needed something to report back to the influential figures in the Iraqi government. Lee Myung-bak offered Hyundai cars to Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti. He said that, as Lee Myung-bak said, it would be good publicity for Hyundai cars to be present on the streets of Baghdad and a display of friendship between Iraq and the Republic of Korea, albeit indirectly. However, the mayor replied, "We have enough cars. What about small trucks?" Lee Myung-bak agreed to the proposal even though he knew that Hyundai did not have a production line for small trucks. Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti responded that he would see what could be achieved regarding the opening of a Korean consulate in Baghdad after the cars were delivered to the Iraqi government. Lee Myung-bak was pleased with this progress and informed Abdul Wahab Al-Mufti that Hyundai would do its best to help them rebuild Iraq.

Lee Myung-bak returned to the Korean capital, Seoul, and informed the Hyundai president's office in Seoul of his meetings with Iraqi officials. Lee Myung-bak felt apprehensive about Korean government officials' fears of establishing diplomatic relations with Iraq due to Korean relations with the United States. Lee explained that there were positive signals from the Iraqis regarding the agreement to establish diplomatic relations. Lee Myung-bak had to wait more than a week for Hyundai management approval to supply the small trucks.

Lee Myung-bak returned to Iraq on his sixth visit to follow up on the progress of projects in Musayyib and Fallujah, and to inform Iraqi officials of Hyundai's approval to supply small trucks to Baghdad. After receiving permission from the Iraqi government, the company set up a separate production line for industrial assembly at the factory that manufactures the Pony. The company was able to manufacture small trucks by working overtime. After the company completed production of the small trucks, the manufactured vehicles were shipped in special shipments to Kuwait, after which they were sent to Iraq. The manufactured vehicles were officially granted to the Iraqi government, so that anyone seeing them could assume that diplomatic relations existed between the Republic of Iraq and the Republic of Korea⁴⁶.

To fulfill this desire, the first signs of diplomatic relations between Iraq and the Republic of Korea began when the establishment of consular representation between the two countries was announced on April 15, 1981⁴⁷. The government of the Republic of Korea declared its commitment to neutrality in the Iran-Iraq War and that it would not provide any weapons to either warring party. In the middle of the same year, Hyundai CEO Lee Myung-bak invited the mayor of the Iraqi capital, Abdul Wahab Mohammed, to the Republic of Korea as part of his gratitude for the role he played in assisting the Hyundai CEO in obtaining facilities for his company in Iraq. CEO Lee Myung-bak was keen to inform the mayor of the capital, Abdul Wahab Mohammed Latif, of the Republic of Korea's progress in the fields of construction, building, and manufacturing, and the depth, authenticity, and prominence of Korean culture in Korean society. However, the sources and documents available to us do not clarify whether this invitation was at the behest of the Korean Ministry of Foreign Affairs or whether it was part of Hyundai's activities in Iraq. In any case, this visit contributed to supporting economic activity and introduced the ruling political circles in Iraq to the technical and economic capabilities of the Republic of Korea⁴⁸.

8. Baghdad - The Seventh and Final Visit

After Lee Myung-bak's efforts to establish diplomatic relations between Iraq and Korea were crowned with success, culminating in the opening of a Korean consulate in Baghdad in 1982, many Korean companies entered the Iraqi market and secured contracts for important projects in Iraq. However, priority was given to Hyundai Construction, due to the deep friendship Lee Myung-bak had established with Iraqi officials. As a result, Hyundai implemented sixteen major projects in Iraq, some of the most important economic development projects adopted by the state to develop the economy and improve the country's infrastructure. Foremost among these projects was the implementation of the second phase of the Iraqi Saudi oil pipeline project, a strategic project. The contract value for the project was \$1,459 million⁴⁹.

Lee Myung-bak last visited Baghdad in 1982 to follow up on the progress of projects being implemented by Hyundai Construction. This visit was not alone, but was accompanied by Hyundai President Chung Ju-yung, who also reviewed the projects his company had undertaken in Iraq. The two boarded a plane from Kuwait and headed to the Iraqi capital. Upon arrival, they met with Lee's Iraqi friends, who welcomed the Hyundai president and promised him that the company would not face any obstacles or suffer unduly.

Lee Myung-bak then began his tour with his boss, inspecting the construction sites of Hyundai projects in Iraq. President Chung was impressed by the progress of the projects. He behaved at the sites like a military general, eager to learn details about the work being carried out there.

The night before Lee Myung-bak and Hyundai President Chung-hee left Baghdad, Chung-hee held a farewell dinner for all the site managers working throughout Iraq. Lee Myung-bak describes the difficulty of obtaining alcohol during the ongoing war between Iraq and Iran, but the issue was resolved with the help of some local assistants working with the company. More than 40 people sat around the table drinking and eating dinner. He describes the party as noisy and filled with joy and affection among the attendees. During this party, many lambs were slaughtered. Lee Myung-bak also purchased one of the most famous Iraqi dishes known in Iraqi cuisine, masgouf fish, which he describes as a grilled fish dish from the Tigris River, famous for its delicious taste. This dish, masgouf, was purchased from a nearby restaurant, and the attendees continued to celebrate and drink until late at night. At four in the morning, Hyundai Construction Director Lee Myung-bak and his boss Chung-hee packed their bags and left Iraq by car, via the southern city of Basra, heading for Kuwait. Lee Myung-bak is in Baghdad for the last time.

9. Conclusion:

Thus, Baghdad was a platform for establishing diplomatic relations with two countries separated by oceans. Lee Myung-bak's personal adventure played a significant role in Hyundai's success in establishing political relations between Iraq and the Republic of Korea. Lee Myung-bak, who lived through the Japanese occupation of Korea and endured misery after the end of the occupation, rising from a simple Hyundai employee to the company's second-in-command, and then to the presidency of the Republic of Korea, was determined to bring Hyundai to Baghdad and Iraq. A shared determination developed between him and Baghdad to continue this path, making Baghdad Hyundai's gateway to Iraq.

It is also clear that the beginning of Iraq's economic, then diplomatic, and political relations with the Republic of Korea began with an economic adventure by a man who rose

through his professional career from a simple employee to a Hyundai leader, and finally the tenth president of the Republic of Korea. This experience demonstrates to Lee the importance of the economic aspect in building balanced economic relations. Hyundai and Kia, two merged companies that roam the streets of Baghdad, represent the most reliable means of transportation, outperforming Japanese and Chinese companies in the automotive sector, offering a middle ground between the superior quality of Japanese manufacturing and the inferior quality of Chinese manufacturing. In all of this, Lee Myung-bak represents an interesting case study and comparison between two cultures that he was able to bring together, despite the geographical and cultural distance between the two environments with limited interaction.

The difficult life in Japan and Korea taught Lee to be principled and not to submit to difficult circumstances. His student life at university taught him how to be a leader and not succumb to material temptations. He became a student leader, which qualified him to practice leadership in his later life, regardless of his modest means. This qualified him to be the founder of Hyundai's economic relations with Iraq. He never forgot his family's life of poverty, and his concern became to spread prosperity throughout the world. This may explain his rise to the top ranks at Hyundai and his subsequent rise to the position of the tenth president of the Republic of Korea.

In the 1980s and 1990s, Iraq became one of the economic centers of gravity for the Republic of Korea and its companies in the Middle East, which irritated its other half, the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), which felt that Iraq was within its revolutionary and socialist sphere of influence due to the similarity of the two economies. Nevertheless, the liberal republic was able to confidently forge its way forward and build strong relations with its new friend.

Footnotes:

1. The tenth President of the Republic of Korea (1941-present/2008-2013) , Lee Myung-bak was born in Osaka, Japan, to a poor Korean family. He returned with his family to Korea after the declaration of independence in 1945 and settled in the city of Pohang, where he attended elementary school during the Korean War (1950-1953). He moved with his family to the capital, Seoul, after completing his high school education in 1959. He joined the College of Commerce at Seoul University in 1960 and worked as a garbage collector during his university studies. He participated in student movements opposing the rule of Korean President Syngman Rhee and the policy of normalization with Japan and was imprisoned for four months. He worked for Hyundai for twenty-seven years (1965-1992) and rose through the ranks of the company until he became its CEO at the age of thirty-five. Lee Myung-bak began his political career in 1992 when he became a member of the National Assembly. His decision to enter politics came from his desire to serve his country in the political field after serving it in the economic field and out of his faith. Believing that managing a country is essentially no different from managing a business, and that this would benefit his country, he was elected Mayor of Seoul in 2002 and served until 2008, when he was elected President of the Republic of Korea. He served in this position for five years, during which he worked to develop Korea's foreign

relations and confront the 2008 global economic crisis and its repercussions on the Korean economy. See: Lee Myung-bak, *The Rough Road*, pp. 11-36.

٢. One of Korea's largest companies, it was founded in 1946 as a small auto repair shop by Chung Ju-yung (1915-2001). With his passion for business, Chung Ju-yung expanded the company's operations to include the construction sector. The company gained notoriety for being the first Korean company to establish investment projects outside the Republic of Korea. Hyundai also incorporated an automobile manufacturing company in 1967, and Hyundai Heavy Industries (the world's largest shipbuilding company) in 1974, which produced its first ship, the Atlantic Baron.

For details, see: Lee Myung-bak, *The Rough Road: A Biography of Lee Myung-bak, President of the Republic of Korea and CEO of Hyundai*, First Edition, Abu Dhabi, Emirates Center for Strategic Studies and Research, 2012, p. 316.

3. Ibid, pp. 38-39.

4. Muhammad Hussein al-Zubaidi, *The Revolution of July 14, 1958, in Iraq (its causes, preludes, course, and the Free Officers' organizations)*, Baghdad, Dar al-Hurriyah for Printing, 1983, p. 452.

5. Naglaa Al-Rifai Al-Bayoumi, *The Korean-Korean Dialogue on the Unification Issue*, Center for Asian Studies, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, 1999, p. 7.

6. Musa Makhoul, *Encyclopedia of Wars and Regional Crises in the Twentieth Century - Asia*, Second Edition, Beirut, Bissan Publishing, Distribution and Media, 2006, p. 118.

7. Mahmoud Al-Qaysi, *Iraqi Perception of the Economic, social and Political Transitions in Korea during the 2nd Half of the 20th Century according to Newspapers and official Records*, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies & President Hotel, 2015, P 350.

8. Abdul Salam Nower, *Determinants of the Party System in South Korea*, *The Party System and Development Issues in South Korea*, edited by Hoda Metkes and Khadija Arafa Muhammad, Cairo, Center for Asian Studies, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, 2005, p. 39.

9. Jung Hae Gu, Kim Ho Ki, *Development of Democratization Movement in South Korea*, Division of Social Sciences, Sung Kong University, Korea, p. 14.

10. Naseer Mahmoud Shukr Al-Jabouri, *Foreign Policy of the Republic of Iraq 1958-1963*, Baghdad, First Edition, Dar Dhifaf for Printing, Publishing and Distribution, 2012, p. 150.

11. Iraq had a legation in the Japanese capital, Tokyo, which opened in 1955.

See: Motohiro Ono, "Japanese-Iraqi Diplomatic Relations," in the book: *Iraq and Japan in Modern History (Tradition and Modernity)*, edited and introduced by Keiko Sakai and Mahmoud Abdel Wahid Mahmoud Al-Qaisi, Baghdad, Egypt, Murtada for Iraqi Books, 2010, p. 290.

12. Nazir Jabbar Hussein, *Iraqi-Japanese Relations 1921-1958*, in the book: *Iraq and Japan in Modern History*, previous source, pp. 282-283.

13. The Holstein Doctrine is named after Walter Hallstein (1901–1982), the first President of the European Commission (1958–1967). He worked for the success of the European

Common Market and European Unity. In 1950, Hallstein became head of the Foreign Office at the German Federal Chancellery. At the end of the occupation, he became a senior official in the Foreign Ministry, but Chancellor Konrad Adenauer (1876–1967/1949–1963) directed the foreign policy of the Federal Republic of Germany. In the mid-1950s, Hallstein issued the doctrine that became known by his name, which framed Germany's foreign policy. It stated that the Federal Republic of Germany would not maintain diplomatic relations with any country that recognized the German Democratic Republic (GDR). Thus, the Federal Republic of Germany considered any third party that had relations with the GDR to be unfriendly, except for the Soviet Union, which was one of the four major powers responsible for Germany. Important aspects of this principle were abandoned after 1970 when it became difficult to implement, particularly after the Federal Republic of Germany changed its policy toward the East German Democratic Republic. See:

Corrado Malandrino, Walter Hallstein: The USA, the Atlantic Partnership and the European Community, past working paper. No. 1, November 2012, pp. 1-12.

14. Mohamed El-Sayed Selim, Medhat Ayoub, Korea and the Middle East, Center for Asian Studies, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, 1999, p. 45.

15. Early economic relations between Iraq and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea began in 1959 with a trade agreement known as the Trade and Payments Agreement between the Republic of Iraq and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, which was signed between the Iraqi and Korean delegations in Baghdad on July 23, 1959. For details, see:

Ration of the Trade and Payments Agreement between Iraq and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, Al-Waqa'i' Al-Iraqiya, Issue 210, August 16, 1959, p. 9.

16. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Protocol Department, Document No. M/849/404/200, dated 1/25/1968, p. 1.

17. Budget Directorate/Secret Services File Document (1966-1971) No. 137/421102, dated October 11, 1966, pp. 1-2.

18. Document of the General Accounts Cash Directorate, No. 39255, dated 10/27/1966, pp. 1-2.

19. Ghiadaq Abdul-Moneim Muhammad, Iraq's Economic Relations with the Republic of Korea 1975-1991, unpublished MA thesis, College of Arts, University of Baghdad, 2014, p. 114.

20. Department of Economic Research and Studies, Meeting of the Korean President with Saudi Businessmen, 2012, pp. 4-5.

21. Muhammad al-Sayyid Salim, Madhat Ayyoub, previous source, p. 280.

22. Fakhri Qaddouri, "Thus I Knew Al-Bakr and Saddam," "A 35-Year Journey in the Ba'ath Party," second edition, London, Dar Al-Hikma, 2014, pp. 113-118.

23. Fakhri Qaddouri, op. cit., pp. 206-209.

24. One of the most prominent problems facing Hyundai was the false accusations leveled against two Korean workers at the company's branch in Saudi Arabia, who were imprisoned. See:

Lee Myung-bak, *The Rough Road*, p. 310.

25. Talal Ismail Ibrahim, "Hyundai and Its Economic and Social Role in the Republic of Korea and Its Impact on Development in Arab Countries 1947-2007," unpublished doctoral dissertation, College of Arts, University of Baghdad, 2021, pp. 345-346.

26. Lee Myung-bak, *The Rough Road*, p. 174.

27. Inaam M. A. AlSalman, *Iraq from LEE Mynung Bak's Approach: Beginnings of Economic and Political Relations between Iraq and Korea (1975 – 1991)*, Asian and middle Eastern Countries since the End of World War II, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies & President Hotel, 2015, P 254.

28. Lee Myung-bak, *The Rough Road*, p. 175.

29. Ibid.

30. It is an upscale nightclub and cabaret named after the famous French cabaret Moulin Rouge. It is in the Al-Masbah area of Baghdad. For details, see:

Ali Abdul Amir Ajam, *Baghdad 1978-1979: The Beautiful Loss*, online article:

http://www.aliabdulameer.com/inp/view_printer.asp?ID=182&AUTHOR=%F6%DA%E1%E D%20%DA%C8%CF%20%C7%E1%C7%E3%ED%D1

31. I was unable to find his date of birth. Abdul Wahab Muhammad Latif al-Mufti, a close associate of former Iraqi President Saddam Hussein, and the two men had a close relationship. Abdul Wahab was studying at the College of Law in Baghdad at the time the Ba'athists were planning a coup in Iraq. After the coup, he served as head of the General Organization for Roads and Bridges. He became the general supervisor of the construction of earth dams at the start of the Iran-Iraq War in 1980 along the southern and central fronts. He served as mayor of the capital from 1984 to 1986, and on January 15, 1986, he was awarded the Second-Class Civil Order of the Two Rivers. He was also awarded a medal of courage for his role in clearing reeds in the marshes. Six months later, a presidential decree was issued dismissing him from his position and accusing him of betraying his position and embezzling public funds. He was executed in 1986. See:

Al-Waqa'i' al-Iraqiya, Issue 3105, July 7, 1986.

32. Muhammad Amin Shalqami, "Understanding the Korean Experience and Ways to Benefit from It: A Scientific Guide," *Asian Papers*, Issue 36, Cairo, Center for Asian Studies, Faculty of Economics and Political Science, Cairo University, 2001, p. 24.

33. The stages of Korean development can be divided into three: the first, a command economy and direct state intervention (1963-1981); the second, a transitional stage that combined direct state intervention with economic liberalization (1981-1992); and the third, liberalization and indirect state intervention (1992-present). Of these stages, the one that concerns us is the first, which extended during the period during which the Republic of Korea entered Iraq economically.

See: Saeed Rashid Abdul Nabi, "The South Korean Experience in Development," *Journal of International Studies*, College of Political Science, University of Baghdad, Issue 38, 2008, pp.4-5.

34. Lee Myung-bak, "That's My Testimony," Episode 9, Saudi Cultural Channel, November 24, 2023. See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CFJwi9hae0U&t=157s>

35. A social, recreational, and sports club located in the Karkh district of the Mansour neighborhood. The club was founded in the 1920s as a bird hunting club. It became a social and recreational club visited by the social elite, including Iraqi politicians and economists, as well as Iraqi families on special occasions. Although hunting is not practiced at the club, the club retains this name to this day. See: The official website of the Baghdad Hunting Club.
36. Lee Myung-bak, "The Rough Road," p. 179.
37. Lee Myung-bak, "That's My Testimony," op. cit.
38. Ghiadaq Abdul-Moneim Muhammad, op. cit., p. 120.
39. Lee Myung-bak, "The Rough Road," pp. 182-183.
40. Inaam M. A. AlSalman, Op,cit, p .255.
41. Jang Byung-ok, Arab-Islamic and Middle Eastern Studies in Korea, translated and introduced by Mahmoud Abdul-Wahid Mahmoud, Al-Zaman Newspaper, Baghdad, Issue 4629, October 2013, p. 9.
42. Iraq's 1967 trade agreement with France, which stipulated the supply of two nuclear reactors for peaceful purposes, and France's support for Iraq after its nationalization of oil in 1972, had a significant impact on the development of economic relations between the two countries and France's preference for trade cooperation with Iraq. See: Sondas Ismail Al-Samarrai, French Foreign Policy Towards Iraq 1967-1988, unpublished MA thesis, College of Political Science, University of Baghdad, 1988, pp. 135-136.
43. Lee Myung-bak, The Rugged Road, pp. 182-183.
44. Inaam M. A. AlSalman, Op,cit,p .255.
45. Ghiadaq Abdul-Moneim Muhammad, previous source, p. 127.
46. Ibid, p. 128.
47. Embassy of the Republic of Iraq, 2012 Annual Report, Seoul, Republic of Korea, p. 57.
48. Lee Myung-bak, The Rough Road, p. 187.
49. Lee Myung-bak, That's My Degree Program, previous source.

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