
LITHIUM LURES SOUTH KOREA CLOSER TO KAZAKHSTAN

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Kazakhstan has arisen as a potential partner for lithium-hungry tech powerhouse South Korea. South Korea lacks the direct geographic proximity and other trappings of power that China, Russia and the West enjoy in terms of Kazakhstans multi-vector foreign policy. But Seoul has still positioned itself diplomatically and politically as a potential collaborator with Astana.

In the pursuit of deeper participation in Kazakhstans extractive industries, South Korea faces both country-level and broader geopolitical risks. The legal and regulatory environments within Kazakhstan pose complications that could deter South Korean actors from taking advantage of new opportunities related to lithium. At the same time, Russias hunger for lithium and its influence in Kazakhstan also underscore the risks South Korea faces if it does not invest in Kazakhstan.

Though South Korea has had limited success in penetrating the Central Asian critical minerals market, Kazakhstan stands out as a solid supplier of natural resources. The Kazakhstan-Korea relationship took off in earnest in 2009 when then South Korean president Lee Myung-bak and then Kazakhstan president Nursultan Nazarbayev signed a raft of documents that led to the declaration of a strategic partnership between the two countries.

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