

The Rapprochement of Saudi Iran and Its Impact on Pakistan

Abstract: The dynamic relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran has significant implications for both the region and the global community. While the two individuals may not see eye to eye on every issue, their shared religious beliefs play a significant role in their connection. Factors such as multiethnicity, Arab vs Persian influence, and the diverse interests of individuals within and outside the region are significant considerations. The two prominent countries in the area have influenced their bordering nations to establish various types of alliances. Pakistan is impacted in terms of its economy, security, and tensions among religious and ethnic groups. Fortunately, the current political climate is facilitating the process of rebuilding relationships. Pakistan attempted to reconcile with the opposing party but was unable to do so. Consequently, Iraq is now seeking to resolve the conflict through arbitration. This paper examines the impact of the Saudi Arabia-Iran conflict on Pakistan and analyses the present reconciliation efforts. The predominant methodology employed was qualitative, revealing that achieving peace is a complex endeavor due to the intricate nature of relationships. Pakistan believes that escalation should be kept at a level below where a dispute requiring distinct positions arises but above the level of complete peace to address Pakistan's security concerns. Diplomatic efforts should focus on pacifying disagreements rather than resolving them.

Key Words: Iran, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan, Rapprochement, Conflict, Peace Talks

Introduction

Over the course of the past few years, the strained relationship that exists between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as their divergent objectives in the Middle East, have significantly increased in significance from a military perspective (Saleem et al., 2022). There have been significant repercussions for Iraq, Lebanon, Bahrain, Syria, Yemen, and Qatar as a result of the conflict between these two nations. Altering each other's stances in international politics and initiating proxy conflicts are also aspects of this issue that have been brought up. There are a number of people who are opposed to Iran's nuclear program, yet Iran views Saudi Arabia as an ally of the United States that may assist it in achieving its objectives in the region (Crises Group, 2022). On account of the fact that both nations have interests in the Gulf region, there is no need for conflict between them in that region. Both Saudi Arabia and Iran are exerting pressure on other nations in the region to establish a variety of different types of relationships. Pakistan is having a difficult time maintaining peace because of the strained relationship that exists between Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is for this reason that Pakistan places such a high priority on the alliance that exists between these two significant Islamic nations (Weinbaum et al., 2014). It has been difficult for Pakistan to maintain its neutrality despite the fact that the situation between Saudi Arabia and Iran is deteriorating. Pakistan has reiterated that it is impartial. As far back as anyone can remember, Pakistan has consistently expressed its desire to play a significant role in facilitating communication between the two states (Baqai et al., 2021). A deal with Iran was not feasible, according to Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia, who made this statement four years ago. The recent efforts made by both parties to reconcile their differences show that their conflict might be resolved through dialogue. By traveling to Iran and Saudi Arabia in 2019, the leaders of Pakistan demonstrated that they were serious about their diplomatic efforts. Recent meetings between Saudi Arabian and Iranian officials have been taking place with the assistance of Iraq in an effort to strengthen their ties. If

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Citation:

Asifa. (2022). The Rapprochement of Saudi Iran and Its Impact on Pakistan. *Regional Lens*, 1(1), 1-8. <https://doi.org/10.62997/rl.2022a.11904>

these discussions are successful, they may be able to bring an end to a number of disagreements that have been going on in the Middle East. It is believed that if Saudi Arabia and Iran are able to improve their relationship with one another, Pakistan will not have to be concerned about maintaining a consistent level of international relations in the region (Shah et al., 2013).

This research investigates the ways in which Pakistan is impacted by the difficult relationship that exists between Saudi Arabia and Iran, as well as the ways in which efforts have been made to improve relations between the two nations since the year 2015. The majority of the time, qualitative research methodologies were utilized, which demonstrated that peaceful coexistence is difficult to achieve due to the complexity of interpersonal connections. Pakistan is of the opinion that tensions should remain below the threshold where it is necessary to take explicit stances on issues but above the point where there is perfect calm so that it may safeguard its own security against any potential threats. Instead of attempting to find solutions to issues, diplomats should focus on bridging the gap between opposing viewpoints.

The rationale of the Study

The paper aims to explore the recent signs of reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia and evaluate the potential impact of this shift in their relationship with Pakistan. It is crucial for Pakistani policymakers and experts to comprehend the consequences of the strengthening relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran, considering Pakistan's strong ties with both nations. This paper aims to analyze Pakistan's foreign policy decisions by examining the reasons behind the recent reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran and the potential impacts on Pakistan's economy, diplomacy, security, and regional stability in the context of evolving geopolitical dynamics in South Asia and the Middle East.

The objective of the Research

The study aims to examine the current trend of reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran and assess its potential implications for Pakistan. The paper aims to analyze the reasons behind the Saudi-Iranian reconciliation and evaluate its effects on Pakistan's national interests, such as security, economy, diplomacy, and regional stability. It seeks to offer a clear insight into the changing dynamics in the Middle East and how they influence Pakistan's foreign policy.

Pakistan's Ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran is intricate and impacts Pakistan's relations with both nations (Usman, 2022). Pakistan consistently seeks a compromise to alleviate tensions in the region. Pakistan encounters challenges due to the rivalry among regional powers. The competition between Saudi Arabia and Iran has divided the Middle East into Arab and non-Arab factions (Marcus, 2019). This complicates Pakistan's ability to maintain neutrality in its foreign policy between the two parties. Pakistan maintains a strong connection with Iran due to its strategic significance. Straddling criminals in the queue can create difficulties between them. Iran and Pakistan have both shown worry about the issue. Iran is displeased with individuals opposing Iran, while Pakistan is concerned about Indian intelligence agents potentially causing disturbances in Balochistan. Additionally, numerous economic and energy alternatives should be taken into account, given the significance of Pakistan's trading route with the West that traverses Iran. Pakistan did not demonstrate any improvement in its commercial relations with Iran due to the US imposing sanctions on Iran and emphasizing its own links with the country. The Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline arrangement was initiated almost 20 years ago. However, India withdrew from the project due to pressure from the US, leading to complications for Pakistan.

Pakistan relies on Saudi Arabia due to its religious, political, and historical connections (Khan et al., 2021). Key issues include the oil supply from Saudi Arabia, the significant Pakistani diaspora in the Middle East, and the financial assistance provided by the Kingdom to Pakistan. Pakistan receives financial remittances from its expatriate workers in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, with a significant portion originating from Saudi Arabia (Ahmad, 2022). This is in

addition to assistance provided by Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's foreign policy accurately mirrors the consistent support provided by Saudi Arabia during times of adversity. Pakistan boasts one of the world's largest Shia communities. The majority of individuals in that location adhere to the Sunni branch of Islam. Sectarian appeals in the conflict between Saudi Arabia and Iran diminish its severity. Sectarian violence erupted between Shia and Sunni militants in the 1980s and 1990s. External organizations exacerbated this bloodshed by backing these gangs. Fears persist that the Saudi Arabia-Iran confrontation may incite radical individuals, as religious extremist factions could exploit the situation in the Middle East to advance their radical objectives, exacerbating extremism domestically. The prolonged turmoil in Afghanistan led to a convergence of Iran and Saudi Arabia's divergent foreign policies, impacting Pakistan.

Pakistan's Efforts to Rapprochement and Maintain Neutrality

In 2015, the formation of the Islamic Military Counter Terrorism Coalition (IMCTC) led to Saudi Arabia requesting military assistance, sparking a significant dispute in Pakistan due to Iran's disapproval (Anwar, 2017). The coalition consisted of 41 Muslim nations tasked with combating ISIS in Iraq and Syria, as well as terrorism in Northern and Western Africa (Hummel, 2021). Rumors in the media suggest that the coalition might be broadened to involve combatting Houthi rebels. Pakistan assured Iran that the alliance is not targeting Iran and that Pakistan will not participate in any actions against Iran. Saudi Arabia's inclusion of Pakistan in the Yemen war coalition increased the complexity of the situation. Pakistan stated that it would choose its level of participation if the group reached a consensus on its objectives. It assured Saudi Arabia of complete support in case of a direct strike. Pakistan initially declined to join IMCTC but eventually reversed its decision and accepted the invitation to participate. Iran did not officially object to Pakistan's decision to join IMCTC. In 2018, Pakistan deployed combat troops to Saudi Arabia with the assurance that they would not be utilized beyond Saudi Arabia's borders (Hashim, 2018). Following the execution of prominent Shia cleric Nimr al-Nimr by Saudi Arabia in 2016, tensions escalated between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Angry mobs breached Saudi diplomatic posts in Iran and Mashhad during protests, vandalizing paperwork. Diplomatic relations between the two countries were cut off. Pakistan remained composed and tactfully addressed the situation. They did not comment on Nimr's assassination, but they expressed opposition to the burning of the Saudi embassy in Tehran. At the 2016 summit in Istanbul, the OIC criticized Hezbollah (AfricaNews, 2016). Pakistan reluctantly adhered to the prevailing trend despite its initial reluctance to take a stance. Multiple attempts have been made by individuals worldwide to assist Saudi Arabia and Iran in resolving their conflicts through peaceful means. Sultan Qaboos of Oman played a crucial role in facilitating communication between the two countries in the past. Switzerland brokered an agreement in October 2017 to represent Saudi Arabia's interests in Iran and Iran's interests in Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's efforts have been hindered by its security and political issues, resulting in little progress. Recently, these initiatives have been progressing positively.

In October 2019, Iran's parliament speaker supported initiating talks with Saudi Arabia, suggesting that an "Iranian-Saudi dialogue could address numerous security and political issues in the region" (Jazeera, 2019). Saudi Arabia and Turkey agreed to resume discussions in 2020. In 2021, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia stated in an interview that his kingdom is collaborating with allies in the region and globally to address these challenges. The Crown Prince stated to The Atlantic, "Iran and Saudi Arabia are neighbors and will always be neighbors." We should resolve our disagreements with Iran. We have engaged in dialogue with Iran on four occasions. In 2021, US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken stated to the Financial Times that the US did not provide direct assistance for the discussions between Saudi Arabia and Iran but viewed them favorably. Abdollahian, Iran's foreign minister, stated in a prior interview with Al Jazeera that bilateral relations would normalize at the discretion of Saudi Arabia. Iran is prepared for the reopening of embassies and consulates and is receptive to it. Pakistan has not shown significant distinctions from Iran or Saudi Arabia. In 2016, Pakistan's Prime Minister considered mediating between the two countries to be a significant responsibility. Historically, this type of diplomacy was effective, and

both Tehran and Jeddah approved of it. Pakistan recently attempted to mediate between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In October 2019, Pakistan's Prime Minister visited Iran and Saudi Arabia in an attempt to initiate dialogue between the two conflicting nations. Iran informed Pakistan of its willingness to collaborate with Saudi Arabia, but Pakistan's indecisive discussions did not result in a concrete plan. Pakistan's leaders frequently visiting Saudi Arabia and the UAE suggested that Pakistan's diplomatic efforts were potentially yielding positive results. Pakistan has adopted a neutral stance on the Middle East situation, refraining from aligning with any party and persisting in efforts to reconcile conflicting parties through mediation. Pakistan's primary objective is likely to prevent the escalation of conflict between Riyadh and Tehran in the area rather than acting as a mediator.

In May 2021, Pakistan's Foreign Minister visited Iraq with the aim of facilitating reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran (Al-Atrush, 2022). The warming up had a favorable influence on the reconciliation between Saudi Arabia and Iran despite no significant progress being anticipated. Iraq has been instrumental in resolving disputes in the region, particularly following meetings between officials from Iran and Saudi Arabia in Baghdad. The Iraqi administration aimed to establish a forum for resolving issues, while the Iranian President acknowledged Iraq's significance in resolving regional disputes. In April 2022, a high-level conference took place in Baghdad when both parties agreed on specific actions to enhance their relationship. This established the foundation for upcoming discussions, including one scheduled to take place in Oman. The discussions were postponed due to Saudi Arabia's lethal actions against Shiite demonstrators in March 2022. Saudi Arabia expressed concern over Iran's involvement in Yemen at the discussions in Baghdad and urged Tehran to adopt a more constructive approach. On April 1, 2022, the UN requested a ceasefire in Yemen, a call that was backed by Iran. They emphasized that the ceasefire must be the initial stage in achieving enduring peace.

Geopolitical and Geostrategic Landscape of the Middle East

Previously, the situation escalated in the Middle East after a US drone launched a missile at Baghdad airport, resulting in the death of Quds Commander General Qassem Soleimani (Crowley et al., 2020). Due to the death of a US worker, an attack occurred, leading to enraged protestors breaching the US embassy in Baghdad. The United States and Iran were on the brink of war because of this incident. Iran retaliated to provocation with missile strikes on Iraqi bases housing US soldiers but refrained from directly targeting US personnel. Iran held moral superiority until the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps acknowledged shooting down a Ukrainian airliner in Tehran. The situation has currently de-escalated since the US decided against employing military action. Iran's missile strike on US targets and Iraq's parliament's vote to expel US forces appeared to be victories for Iran. President Trump's assassination of General Soleimani was a significant military success during a crucial election year, despite not provoking any retaliation from Iran. After securing their victories, both parties saw an improvement in their self-perception. Analysts believed that the US attempted to form an Arab coalition to exert pressure on Iran. This prevented the situation from escalating into a military conflict.

Subsequent occurrences in the area, such as invitations for dialogue with Iran, suggested that the opposition towards Iran should be moderated. Saudi Arabia is concerned about the US's commitment to becoming a security provider. The US's "Pivot to Asia" strategy, reduced dependence on Saudi oil, and potential resuscitation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) have led to a more assertive Saudi foreign policy. The US report on Jamal Khashoggi's murder and the withdrawal of support for the Yemen war by other nations impacted Saudi Arabia. The US withdrawal from the region exposed Saudi Arabia to several threats, prompting it to seek new friends. The withdrawal of soldiers from Afghanistan, cessation of military assistance to Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Kuwait, and Iraq, and increased attention to Russia and China indicate the US is disengaging from the region (Magid et al., 2021). The change in US policy is justified due to the negative history of US participation in the region, but it also carries hazards. Saudi Arabia has engaged in regional diplomacy to enhance its relationship with Iran and promote stability in the region. Saudi Arabia improved its approach by removing the ban on Qatar

and releasing prisoners. The Houthis, acting as Iran's representatives in Yemen, have taken significant moves towards power-sharing. The latest truce in Yemen reportedly resulted from negotiations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. Israel's strategy to contemplate military actions against Iran is being contradicted by this. China is strengthening its relationships with Turkey, Iran, and the Gulf states by providing them with advanced defense and communication equipment that was formerly exclusive to the US. The current situation in the Middle East appears to be more challenging than in previous times.

Iran's Nuclear Problem

A statement made by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman in April 2018 indicated that Saudi Arabia would proceed with the development of its nuclear weapon in the event that Iran continued with its nuclear weapon agenda (DAWN, 2022). On the other hand, an examination of Iran's history, regional ambitions, domestic politics, real and perceived threats, and other compulsions reveals that Iran asserts that it is compelling in its acts. However, this information is only revealed to a select few. On the national level, the Iranian nuclear project and technological advancement have become a symbol of the nation's resolve despite odds and a significant issue in Iran's domestic politics. This is because the nuclear program and technological advancement emanate from Iran. Additionally, despite the pressure from the international community, Iran's long-term goals of developing a ballistic missile program have not been disrupted. In the context of the geopolitical and economic compass, it was observed during the administration of Donald Trump that Saudi Arabia's objectives in the area would align with those of Israel, which would introduce additional challenges for Iran. Apparently, the administration of the United States is running out of options. The United States has practically exhausted every part of Iran's economy that it is able to sanction; as a consequence, Iran's regional belligerence and violations of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) have risen.

Israel is publicly opposed to the Iran nuclear deal despite the fact that the United States aims to resuscitate the pact (Robinson, 2021). During a recent trip to Israel, Vice President Biden and the Prime Minister of Israel presented a unified front against Tehran. In addition, they advocated for normalization between Israel and Arab countries, with Saudi Arabia being the primary focus of their efforts. A "new nuclear deal will not survive without a broader rapprochement," despite the fact that there have been significant diplomatic attempts to resurrect the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) over the past few months and that there has been tangible movement at both ends. The Iranian government has made it abundantly apparent that it is not possible to pursue both the pressure strategy of implementing sanctions and the pressure strategy of pressuring Iran on the nuclear issue simultaneously. According to the United States National Security Strategy, China is the most significant rival of the United States in both Asia and the rest of the world. However, China and Iran are strategic partners in the area, and the United States policy towards Iran is, in some way or another, assisting China. As a result, Washington may need to put its Iran policy into context in order to better understand the situation. According to analysts, Iran's links with China and Russia allow it to withstand some of the pressure that is being applied to it. Iran was able to find some relief as a result of Russian assistance on a variety of fronts, including Syria and economic issues. In spite of the sanctions imposed by the United States, Russia made a bid to supply Iran with the S-400 Air Defence missile system. China's oil imports also demonstrated that Iran required backing.

A Visit of the US and Russian Presidents to the Middle East

Both the US President and the Russian President visited the area to further their regional geopolitical objectives. President Biden and several regional leaders attended the Jeddah summit to discuss the future security and economic integration of the area. President Joe Biden reiterated previous commitments to friends and advocated for increased peace efforts between Israel and the Palestinians. He also reiterated the United States' commitment to Israel's security. President Biden and his senior officials stated that the visit to the Middle East was not primarily focused on oil, although some analysts argue that the

energy crisis influenced the decision of the US President to make the trip. Saudi Arabia did not mention any plans to increase oil output at the conclusion of President Biden's visit to the Middle East. Crown Prince Mohammad Bin Salman of Saudi Arabia raised concerns about human rights, highlighting the US's silence about the death of Palestinian American journalist Shireen Abu Akleh at the hands of Israeli soldiers in the West Bank. At the Arab summit, the US president not only failed to regain the support of former allies but was also accused of fueling animosity towards Iran. Donald Trump convened with Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan while visiting Israel and Saudi Arabia. Russian President Vladimir Putin visited Iran a few days later. During the discussions, Iran's leaders advocated for enduring collaboration between the two countries and cautioned Russia and Iran to be cautious of Western strategies. Russia was reportedly interested in Iranian drones. The purpose of this trip was to demonstrate Russia's significant influence in the region and to challenge the notion that the US is the sole dominant power in that area.

Detail Analysis and Discussion

The Arabian and Persian regions in the Middle East are in conflict due to their distinct historical backgrounds and cultural practices. There is significant conflict, with religious divisions playing a major role. The concept of Arab dominance versus Persian domination has long existed. Zero-sum regulations are necessary due to conflicting goals among individuals. Previous peace efforts were unsuccessful due to conflicting objectives among many international stakeholders, leading to a disruption in the regional power dynamics. The US wants improved relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran to reduce the likelihood of conflict and radical actions, allowing the US leadership to concentrate on China and Russia. The US has announced its intention to terminate the conflict in Yemen by restricting the Kingdom's supply of weapons (Terrill, 2011). Saudi Arabia requires Iran's cooperation to bring an end to the prolonged war. Iran seeks to enhance its connections with Arab nations. Two parties can find common ground on shared aspects, such as the cost and volume of oil. The Saudi administration has recognized that the politics of regional power, influenced by events like the Arab Spring, have hindered their country's economic and social progress without improving the situation in the area. Iran holds a significant position in the Middle East. It is more beneficial to engage in negotiations, establish a relationship, and collaborate with Iran rather than isolate them. For a nuclear agreement, negotiation is the only effective approach, not coercion. Iran should demonstrate flexibility in its actions and carefully consider its strategy to avoid disrupting the regional equilibrium. The Saudi Arabia-Iran dispute in the region has complicated Pakistan's foreign policy. Pakistan's capacity to contribute positively to the Gulf region has been compromised. Pakistan has been endeavoring to act as an intermediary between the two parties for an extended period, presenting a perfect opportunity to bolster its position. Many factors to consider while choosing between Saudi Arabia and Iran would involve reducing strictness. Pakistan has never been involved in an intra-Arab conflict, such as the wars in Iraq, Syria, or Yemen. Pakistan has never been in a situation where it had to choose a side in a meeting like the IMCTC or the OIC. Iran's increasing economic and military connections with Saudi Arabia are making it challenging for Iran to maintain a neutral stance. These linkages hinder Iran's ability to establish cultural and intellectual contacts with other nations.

Pakistan has historically played a significant role in mediating diplomatic disputes between nations, notably facilitating improved relations between China and the United States (Shoab et al., 2021). It has also proposed to mediate the dispute between Saudi Arabia and Iran. Pakistan volunteered to mediate again following the recent killing of General Soleimani. Turkey and Pakistan contribute positively to peace negotiations outside the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Iran and Saudi Arabia are concerned about the large number of people suffering due to the lack of safety in the region. Contemporary technology advancements and sophisticated approaches to problem-solving could serve as a foundation for initiating new peace initiatives promptly. Pakistan should engage in comprehensive and positive communication by treating all stakeholders impartially and maintaining strong ties with them. Pakistan may seek to establish amicable relations with other nations in a mutually agreeable manner to maintain tensions at a favorable level. Pakistan aims to keep escalation levels

below the threshold when a disagreement arises, and it needs to clarify its stance. Pakistan will remain crucial for the region's security as long as the escalation levels exceed a certain threshold necessary for maintaining long-term peace.

Diplomatic efforts should prioritize soothing disputes rather than mediating them. Pakistan can effectively communicate its message using this method. Pakistan, together with neighboring nations like Iraq, Qatar, Oman, and Kuwait, might accelerate diplomatic initiatives to facilitate prompt and beneficial resolution of discussions between Saudi Arabia and Iran. The best course of action for the Pakistani government at present is to continue acting as a mediator and maintaining a neutral stance while engaging in assertive diplomacy. Pakistan's particular interests in both countries should be thoroughly and impartially examined. Saudi Arabia is interested in Pakistan establishing an amicable relationship and providing assistance in defense matters. Pakistan must ensure that Saudi Arabia's security assistance and commitments align with its own strategic objectives. Saudi Arabia openly supports Pakistan's economy and stance on Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu and Kashmir (IIOJK). Saudi Arabia holds significant influence over other Gulf countries and the OIC, which Pakistan should leverage to further its political and economic objectives. Iran aims to ensure the safety of Pakistan and support the revival of its economy. We should maximize the potential of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) by leveraging the Chabahar Port to enhance connectivity with other regions. Expanding railway infrastructure and extending energy to border regions are crucial measures to support Iran's objectives. Additional regional troops can be requested to assist in maintaining peace and stability and fostering unity, benefiting all parties participating in the global energy corridor. If Pakistan desires an autonomous foreign policy, it should focus on establishing economic connections with other nations rather than solely relying on security-oriented relationships. Pakistan should revise its economic strategy to reduce its reliance on assistance and aid from foreign nations. Pakistan's policy options are limited until it addresses its economic issues.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia and Iran will not easily overcome their enduring animosity. However, the involvement of other states in the region indicates a readiness to collaborate in order to reduce tensions. Pakistan should leverage this opportunity to maintain the peace process for its security. Saudi Arabia and Iran may collaborate to improve the economic and humanitarian situation, thereby projecting a more positive image globally. Tehran and Jeddah should set aside their disagreements and collaborate to establish peace and stability in the area. Historically, such increases have led to escalating issues, but this time, they will be more subdued. Pakistan should show respect to both countries, prioritize multilateralism in its approach, and recognize the significant demands of each country without compromising the legitimate needs of the other. Pakistan should establish an autonomous foreign policy that is grounded in an impartial evaluation of the present geostrategic and evolving geo-economic landscape. Pakistan's capacity to achieve its objectives relies on its robust economy and tranquil domestic environment.

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