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Q) How do you see the increasing reapproachment between Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran? Also analyse its socio-political implications in the Middle East and Pakistan. What measures would you recommend for Islamabad to follow?

1) Introduction:

Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and Iran have long had tense ties. Their relation can be characterised with persistent hostilities and policies to undermine the other. The world, however, was taken aback when the news of reapproachment between the two arch-rivals, with China being the arbitrator, was disseminated.

2) Cursorry glance at the past relationship between Iran and Saudi Arabia (KSA):

As aforementioned, the relationship between Iran and KSA can be characterised by a long history of tensions, conflicts disputes. Both the countries are home to significant religious sites for Shia and Sunni fractions. Both the

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countries have been involved in proxy conflicts, competition for acquiring larger market shares within Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). However, the execution of Nimr-al-Nimr, a prominent cleric, by KSA and the subsequent assault on Saudi embassy in Iran was the final nail in the coffin, for it led to the complete departure of diplomatic ties between the two countries.

3) Reapproachment between KSA and Iran:

The discussions between Tehran and Riyadh commenced back in 2021 with support from their Iraqi President, Mustafa Al-Kadhimi. Officials from both sides held 5 meetings in Baghdad and other regional capitals. The warming of diplomatic ties between the two arch-rivals was only possible due to these ties.

4) Why is KSA and Iran interested in restoring diplomatic ties:

4.1) Why is Iran interested:

United States is actively pursuing to isolate

Iran both economically and diplomatically in the region, as seen through its withdrawal from JCPOA. Furthermore, Israel has taken a strong stance against Iran, ultimately resulting in ~~the~~ normalisation of relations between Arab countries and Israel through Abraham Accords, further isolating Iran in the region. Therefore, Iran was in desperate need of breaking free from these economic sanctions and integrating back in the region.

4.2) Why is Saudi Interested:

KSA has been driven by the desire to stabilise its economy, which has been plagued by its rivalry with Iran. KSA has suffered tremendous economic losses due to attacks on its critical oil infrastructure, and by the ongoing proxy wars in Yemen and involvement in Lebanon. Furthermore, KSA, in a bid to bolster its defense, has signed expensive weapon and defense deals with USA, which is further depleting its reserves. This is why KSA is interested in thawing its relationship with Iran.

5) Implications of KSA - Iran rapprochement on the Middle East:

5.1) Peace and stability in the Region:

With the restoration of cordial ties between KSA and Iran, the region is likely to experience peace and stability. This means that the proxies in Yemen and Lebanon will slowly dwindle away as its key patrons withdraw their support. This, will in turn, lead to a more prosperous and stable Middle East.

5.2) Economic Integrations:

With Iran's newly befriended ties with KSA, it will be easy for Tehran to integrate itself back into region and resume activities. This will provide an impetus to countries within and out of the region to sign of new trade agreements with Tehran. With a giant economic hub like Iran integrating in the region's economy, Middle East is likely to witness economic stability.

5.3) Oil-Producing Capacity of Middle East increased,

With its integration in the region, there is a high probability of Iran's return to OPEC platform. This can inflate the oil-producing capacity of the region, which not only ensures fulfilment of global oil demand but also engages the region in economic activity with other regions.

5.4) Proliferation of Tourism in the Region:

Peace and stability in the region will proliferate tourism. Some countries, such as UAE, already enjoys tourism. Other unfortunate countries such as Yemen and Syria, which have been exposed to severe violence and civil unrests, are bereft of such activities. Diminishing violence and prevalent peace can embellish such areas and stimulate tourist sectors.

5.5) Enhanced Religious Diplomacy:

Saudi Arabia and Iran are influential players in the muslim world. Improved relations between them could foster joint efforts on issues that affect muslim community such as secularism.

Example:

Since KSA and Iran are key muslim hubs supporting different Islamic branches, former supporting sunni and the latter shia, any conflicts between the country can breed and give fuel to sectarian tendencies.

6) Implications of KSA-Iran Reapproachment on Pakistan:

6.1) Enhanced Regional Integration:

Stable relations and cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arab benefit Pakistan's efforts to promote regional integration and increase domestic economic development. Improved ties between KSA and Iran can increase Pakistan's commercial and economic engagement potential with Middle East and Central Asia.

6.2) Diminished Sectarianism:

Pakistan is amongst the countries that has to bear the brunt of ~~set~~ sectarian tendencies. As aforementioned,

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Iran and Ksa support different branches, shia and sunni, so any strife between the countries causes a massive stir up. Since Pakistan comprises of large shia and sunni populations, it is severely affected. Good cordial ties between KSA and Iran can deter and diminish sectarian conflicts in Pakistan.

6.3) Thaw India - Pakistan relations:

Normalization in Saudi-Iran ties can help attenuate regional tensions and create a more conducive environment for peace and stability. Iran and Saudi Arabia enjoy cordial relations with both India and Pakistan and could use their influence to ease tensions between the two countries.

6.4) Opportunity for Financial Investment:

Pakistan values its close ties with Iran and Saudi Arabia. Iran is an important neighbor, and KSA employs almost three million overseas Pakistanis and provides financial support in times

of need. Pakistan can use this opportunity to seek crucial investments from both countries to ensure the China-Pakistan-Economic-Corridor's success.

7) Recommendations for Islamabad:

As aforementioned KSA-Iran rapprochement can be fruitful for Pakistan, for it not only brings stability in the region but can also boost Pakistan's socio-economic growth. In order to fully leverage this peace deal Pakistan has to implement certain policies:

7-1) Induce Political Stability in the Country:

In order to benefit from Saudi-Iran rapprochement, Pakistan needs to put its own house in order. Pakistan is witnessing severe political instability since 2022, this has in turn crippled the economy and provided an impetus to terrorist tendencies. With such a precarious condition of the country, little heed can be given to global developments. Therefore, it is essential that the country's political and economic landscape is normalised, in order to benefit from the peace deal.

7.2) Improving bilateral relations with Iran:

Albeit Pakistan enjoys close ties with both KSA and Iran, it has a more tilted policy towards KSA due to its financial support. Hence, there is a dire need to review relations with both countries and adopting a more neutral policy wherein it avoids taking any sides in conflicts and disputes.

7.3) Maintain cordial ties with China:

There remains no ambivalence that China is an emerging global power and a genuine contender for global hegemony. China's role in brokering a successful peace deal between two arch-rivals is testimony to its growing influence. Fortunately Pakistan already enjoys healthy ties with China and is a strategic partner. Pakistan should preserve its relations with China and avoid supporting any anti-China policies established by the US.

8) Critical Analysis:

In the wake of Saudi-Iran peace deal,

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Pakistan's foreign Policy course of action will depend on a number of factors, including the nature and extent of reapproachment, China's role in the process and the actions of other regional and global powers. In order to circumvent the complex geopolitical landscape, Pakistan will need to adopt a balanced and approach that takes into account its own strategic interests

9) Conclusion:

In a nutshell, the reapproachment between KSA and Iran is a remarkable feat, one that has positive implications not only for the middle east but also for Pakistan. Pakistan should, however, revisit and revamp its foreign Policy in a way that helps to preserve close ties with these countries while also securing its own strategic interests