



ADVANCE SOCIAL SCIENCE ARCHIVE JOURNAL

Available Online: <https://assajournal.com>

Vol. 05 No. 01. Jan-March 2026. Page#. 6098-6107

Print ISSN: [3006-2497](#) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](#)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](#)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.22045207>

Pakistan's Foreign Policy shift from Isolation state to Engagement State (2022-2025): An analytical study

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ABSTRACT

This research article focuses on the transition of Pakistan's foreign policy from a period of diplomatic isolation towards increasing diplomatic engagement during the years 2022-2025. In particular, the study argues that Pakistan's foreign policy during these years was influenced by a combination of domestic political, economic, and security factors, as well as geopolitical trends. The year 2022 has been crucial for the country, as Pakistan has started implementing the strategy of strategic balancing in its foreign policy as it continued its relations with China, USA, European countries, Russia, and Gulf States. During 2023-2024, Islamabad paid more attention to economic diplomacy, regional connectivity, and investment-oriented foreign policy. Finally, the diplomatic events of the India-Pakistan crisis of 2025 have shown further efforts of the country in terms of attracting international diplomatic support. This research uses a qualitative and analytical approach in assessing the main factors, initiatives, and geopolitical processes promoting diplomatic movement from isolation to engagement. The research concludes that despite the efforts of Pakistan to increase its diplomatic engagement, its sustainability would depend on political, economic, and institutional stability, as well as a balanced foreign policy.

Keywords: Pakistan, Foreign Policy, Diplomatic Engagement, International Isolation, Strategic Balancing, Geopolitics, Regional Security.

INTRODUCTION

However, there is no denying that Pakistan's foreign policy has seen a notable change from 2022 through 2025. The country moved from a period that was marked by diplomatic limitations, international

criticism, economic weaknesses, and difficult relations with some of the major powers in the world to one that saw the country adopt a foreign policy of engagement. Pakistan faced the period of isolation due to Pulwama attack, placed in FATF gray list, Balakot airstrike and due to many more events like this. According to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Pakistan, the objectives of its foreign policy include peace, international cooperation, and economic diplomacy, friendly relations with major powers and neighboring states, and regional cooperation. In 2022, Pakistan found itself in a period that saw the country face economic challenges, political instability, issues related to the situation in Afghanistan, and difficult relations with the United States and other Western countries. On the other hand, Pakistan tried to deepen its strategic relationship with China and also improve its cooperation with Russia, Turkey, and Gulf states. It became even more obvious after the change of political leadership in April 2022, when the new leadership tried to improve relations with the Western states while at the same time remaining a strategic partner of China and expanding its presence in the Gulf and other regional powers. Economic considerations became more and more significant for making decisions on foreign policy, as economic vulnerabilities of Pakistan created a direct link between foreign policy and the country's economy. That is why engagement with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), the Gulf, China, and other countries became an integral part of Pakistan's foreign policy. Furthermore, Pakistan's engagement went beyond bilateral relations as the country used multilateral and regional platforms such as participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the United Nations, and other international organizations that allowed Islamabad to position itself not only as a security-focused state but also as a constructive regional power. In response to the attack on Pahalgam and subsequent military standoff, Pakistan faced a serious diplomatic challenge. Nevertheless, at the same time, Pakistan continued increasing diplomatic ties with key regional and international players and looked for international support for its stance. It became clear that modern Pakistani foreign policy was not limited to security relations with India, but was becoming more and more associated with diplomatic efforts, international storytelling, strategic partnerships, and multilateral diplomacy. Pakistan's diplomatic activity in 2025 was called a diplomatic comeback by some Pakistani policymakers, with a particular emphasis on trade, political cooperation, regional partnerships, and international presence. Hence, the period from 2022 to 2025 can be seen as an important stage of Pakistan's foreign-policy development from diplomatic isolation to wider international engagement. Such a trend did not mean a total disregard of security issues and a permanent reorientation away from current partners. On the contrary, it was an attempt to diversify diplomatic strategies, reduce strategic dependence, develop economic ties, improve international image, and become more relevant in the context of changing multipolar international politics. The core point of this study is that Pakistan's diplomatic engagement was a result of the interaction between economic imperatives, geopolitical shifts, regional challenges, and the need for more diplomatic flexibility. Thus, the paper will try to analyze how Pakistani foreign policy developed in 2022-2025, what the major forces were that caused the change, and whether an engagement strategy enhanced Pakistan's diplomatic position and offered a sound basis for its foreign policy in the future.

METHODOLOGY

The present article will utilize qualitative research design that employs discourse analysis as a method. In particular, primary sources of information such as political speeches, parliamentary

debates, media outlets, and reports from countries will be used to identify themes and patterns. Additionally, secondary sources such as books, journals, and reports published by various authors and organizations will be used to compliment the findings.

Research Question

How did Pakistan transition from a period of diplomatic isolation towards greater diplomatic engagement from 2022 to 2025? How significant was this transformation in improving Pakistan's standing at the regional and international levels?

Background: Realignment and Resetting Relations with the West

The Ministry of Foreign Affairs, led by Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, rolled out a of purposeful reset policy after Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's coalition government was set up.¹ The resolution of the cypher problem became a major issue for the new government; however, the increased bilateral interactions were mainly focused on health, energy, and counter-terrorism issues, so the ties developed beyond the scope of the Afghan dispute. After a period of strained diplomatic relations, the new government adopted a much more pragmatic approach, focusing on positive engagement instead of confrontation. The resumption of high-level diplomatic contacts saw Pakistan stressing its willingness to cooperate in areas such as trade and economic development, climate change, counter-terrorism, and regional stability. In addition to the financial and humanitarian assistance from Western countries and international organizations, the devastating floods of 2022 brought new opportunities for increased cooperation. Pakistan's wider goal, of regaining credibility and building economic and strategic alliances while upholding an autonomous foreign policy was supported by this gradual reset with the West, which, in return, improved Pakistan's international position and brought fresh diplomatic attention.

National Security Policy (NSP)

Pakistan issued its first public National Security Policy at the start of 2022. The idea of Pakistan's National Security Policy (2022–2026), which was officially rolled out in January 2022, sort of signaled a big, dramatic change in the nation's strategic thinking. The document legally laid out a shift from geo-strategy toward geo-economics, emphasizing commerce, regional connectedness and human security rather than old-style camp politics. Apart from defense preparedness, this policy also focused largely on the importance of regional stability, improved diplomatic relations, trade links, climate change, food and water security, cyber security, and human development as well.

COP27 Leadership

Acting as the chair of China and the Group of 77 (G77) at the UN Climate Change Conference (COP27) in Egypt, Pakistan managed to drive the diplomatic work toward the creation of the historic Loss and Damage Fund.² Many observers saw it as the country's largest, more recent multilateral diplomatic win. It leads the country towards the engagement. Pakistan managed to use its own disaster in a very visible way, because the brutal monsoons of 2022 flooded about a third of the country, and that pushed climate disparities out of the shadows, and into the open. Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif got the honor

¹Kamran Yousaf, "Shehbaz's Govt Eyes Reset in West Ties" The Express Tribune (Karachi: Express Media Group), 19 April 2022 <https://tribune.com.pk/story/2353348/shehbazs-govt-eyes-reset-in-west-ties>.

² Reuters, Dawn.com, and Agence France-Presse (AFP), "Pakistan Hails 'Pivotal Step' as Countries Adopt COP27 Deal with 'Loss and Damage' Fund" Dawn, 20 November 2022 <https://www.dawn.com/news/1722046>.

of serving as vice-chair of the summit and co-chairing those high-level roundtables with Norway and Egypt. The historic consensus choice to create the Loss and Damage Fund is COP27's crowning achievement. International observers, think tanks, and civil society groups praised the Pakistani team for shifting from a so-called victim nation into a global climate leader. Pakistan has similarly pressed beyond the polluting nations into moral responsibility by raising the status of climate metrics to that of important cabinet discussions. The leadership in the Pakistani approach to COP27 has transformed localized sorrow into a more enduring shift in world policy in a very visible way.

White-listing by FATF

It is important to highlight that the significant development regarding the international financial standing of Pakistan occurred in October 2022, when FATF officially took Pakistan off its grey list following years of consistent efforts in this direction.³ Specifically, the resolution noted that Pakistan had successfully implemented 34 action points. This was done by fortifying anti-money laundering measures, as well as counterterrorism funding controls. It increased Pakistan's chances of increasing trade, drawing in foreign direct investment (FDI), and gaining easier access to international financial markets. With more trust in the financial and legal reforms, the FATF decision also improved Pakistan's relationships with key foreign partners. The achievement raised Pakistan's international profile and complemented its assertive climate diplomacy, its regional engagement, and its participation in multilateral forums. Pakistan's transition from international isolation to higher political, economic, and diplomatic involvement was marked by its removal from the FATF Grey List in 2022.⁴ In practice, that strengthened the nation's broader efforts to regain confidence from the international community.

The Gulf Alliances and SIFC

Pakistan established the Special Investment Facilitation Council (SIFC) in June 2023. One of the more significant things in Pakistan's foreign policy, starting in 2023, was the improvement of relations with the Gulf States. It created a new working lane for foreign policy, with the intention of speeding up billions of dollars in capital because it wanted to win back investor trust inflows from Gulf allies. Pakistan boosted diplomatic links with the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, mostly because of economic strains, and it was pretty clear that both sides were looking to push cooperation further than the usual political and security stuff. It was specifically focused on industries like mining, IT, and agriculture. The high-level visits, constant bilateral meetings, and various business arrangements had been done. Pakistan's engagements with Gulf partners became more organized, more deliberate, and more tied to economics, which in turn improved regional cooperation, strengthened diplomatic bonds, and helped restore confidence worldwide in Pakistan's investment environment.

The January 2023 Geneva Climate Conference

Pakistan's diplomatic team managed to lean on global climate sympathy, and in return it helped unlock more than \$9 billion in cash pledges aimed at flood recovery and climate resilience, at the UN-

³ Tahir Sherani, "FATF Removes Pakistan from Grey List after 4 Years" *Dawn*, 21 October 2022.

⁴ Asad Ali Shah, Dr. Faiza Bashir, and Tabassum Majeed, "Pakistan & FATF: A Journey from Grey List to White List" *The Dialogue* 18, no. 1 (January–March 2023), published February 13, 2023, Qurtuba University of Science and Information Technology

hosted event that came after the devastating 2022 floods.⁵To gather help for Pakistan's recovery after the disastrous 2022 floods, leaders from government, international organizations and various development partners somehow convened at the Geneva Climate Conference in January 2023. In an effort to support long term rebuilding, better climate resilience, and steady sustainable development, Pakistan introduced the Framework for Resilient Recovery, Rehabilitation, and Rebuilding (4RF) during the event in which it secured commitments close to nearly US\$9 billion from international partners. Moreover, by highlighting global solidarity, and also restating Pakistan's role in pushing climate justice, alongside international collaboration, the conference lifted Pakistan's visibility and strengthened its participation on the world stage.

China-Pakistan ties and CPEC

The relationships between Pakistan and Beijing were strongly safeguarded and reinforced even as the nation faced political turmoil right from the very beginning. The vice premier of China visited Islamabad on the occasion of the ten-year anniversary of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). Such a visit was an important diplomatic statement, as it was evident that Beijing stood behind the initiatives of Pakistan despite threats of security against its nationals. China was instrumental in keeping Pakistan from going into default, with billions of dollars pouring in from commercial loans and deposits as the IMF deal was negotiated.

India relations and the SCO Summit

Ironically, 2023 also succeeded in organizing the rare and high-level diplomatic meeting in person amid the transactional and almost frozen nature of relations between India and Pakistan. The then foreign minister, Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, traveled to the SCO Council of Foreign Ministers meeting in Goa. Nevertheless, even without any bilateral breakthroughs, Pakistan fulfilled its commitment to multilateral regional organizations. For Pakistan, this appeared to be a true chance to prove itself as an earnest player of multilateral diplomacy and economic cooperation and regional peace. In the sessions of the SCO in 2023, Pakistan highlighted communication, mutual respect, non-interference into internal matters, and conflict resolution through dialogue. Pakistani policymakers also underlined that partnership not rivalry, improved connectivity, and political stability would be crucial for the sustainable development of the region. Despite all the strained relationship, Pakistan decided to attend this event, which could be considered an effort to continue being present at various regional platforms.

Keeping Russia and the US in balance

For the year 2023, Pakistan maintained friendly ties with both Russia and America in what can be termed as pragmatic foreign policy. In essence, Pakistan's engagement with one of the two should not cause problems in its relation with the other party. Despite appearances to the contrary, Pakistan continued its consistent schedule of strategic neutrality in an intensely polarized world, almost by design. First Russian Crude Shipment (June 2023), having set up its foundations late in 2022, Pakistan took its first delivery of discounted Russian crude, in payment in Chinese Yuan. No Western penalties followed, but instead, this proved to be an important step towards diversification in energy diplomacy. While doing so, Pakistan also managed its relations with Washington, ensuring that the United States did not object

⁵ Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, *"International Conference on Climate Resilient Pakistan, Geneva, 9 January 2023"* Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Government of Pakistan, 9 January 2023, accessed July 20, 2026

to its economic engagement with Russia, while continuing to use American diplomatic support for completion of the IMF agreement. In essence, Pakistan chose a policy based on national interests, strategic independence, and balanced diplomacy rather than alignment with one or the other faction.

Organizing the 23rd SCO Summit in October 2024

Hosting the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's (SCO) Council of Heads of Government Summit in Islamabad on October 15–16 was, none of Pakistan's most visible diplomatic wins of the year.⁶ Leaders from everywhere attended the important bilateral dynamics section, including Chinese Premier Li Qing and Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Misusing. Also noteworthy was the presence of S. Jaishankar, the Indian Minister of External Affairs. Even with the bilateral relations being tense, formal international etiquette was observed during the first visit by an Indian foreign minister to Pakistan after more than a decade.

Pahalgam Attack

The Pahalgam incident, sometimes referred to as the 2025 Pahalgam massacre, happened on April 22, 2025.⁷ In Jammu and Kashmir, which is administered by India, it is widely viewed as the most ruthless assault on unarmed civilians. Among the dead were 25 visitors. India promptly accused Pakistan of backing cross-border terrorism, and it pointed to the attack's alleged masterminds, The Resistance Front TRF, saying they are basically a front for the Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is a well-known terrorist organization, and it's based in Pakistan. The Indus Waters Agreement got suspended, but it was framed as one of India's fast economic and diplomatic measures. Specifically, Pakistan said India's move was "an act of war" without much softer wording. Then in response, India dismissed Pakistani officials, stopped trade, and sort of locked down the Attari land border crossing, like fully blocked it off in practice. Also, visas for Pakistanis living in India were revoked after admission was refused under the SAARC Visa Exemption Scheme.

Operation Sindoor

In essence, Operation Sindoor is a military reaction. India and Pakistan engaged in a highly publicized, brief, and intense conflict between May 7 and May 10, 2025. The entire operation was initiated by India in direct response to a significant terrorist attack. Their aim was to isolate Pakistan they make false news and run propaganda against Pakistan.⁸ India carried out coordinated airstrikes, and missile strikes on nine specific spots in Pakistan's Punjab region and Azad Kashmir. The strikes led to an instant kind of escalation, Pakistan condemned the attack and Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called the National Security Council together giving the military (under Army Chief Asim Munir) the permission to respond. India said that the terrorist support system was destroyed and that a number of militants had been killed, Pakistan on the other hand disputed that there were terrorist camps at those exact targeted locations and it also insisted that civilians were the ones who lost their lives.

⁶ Rehan Khan, "Pakistan Strengthens Regional Connectivity, Trade, Security Ties at 23rd SCO Summit" *Associated Press of Pakistan (APP)*, October 22, 2024.

⁷ Dawn Editorial Board, "Pahalgam Attack," *Dawn* (Karachi), 24 April 2025.

<https://www.dawn.com/news/1906230/pahalgam-attack>.

⁸ Raja Kashif Janjua, "Operation Sindoor: Indian media black propaganda and make believe news tactics, and how it affected everyday public reactions and international perceptions during the 2025 India–Pakistan conflict" *Pakistan social sciences review* 9, no. 3 (July 21 2025): 261–270

Operation Banyan UN marsoos

Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos was a major military action put in motion by the Pakistan Armed Forces on May 10, 2025.⁹ On the other side Pakistan then carried out focused strikes against a number of important Indian military locations. As mentioned in some military reports, over thirty sites belonging to the opposing side have been targeted. All these sites are commonly referenced in these tales because they included, among others, Unhamper Air Base, Adampur Air Base, Pathankot Air Base, and Bhuj Air Base. Pakistan employed the GMLRS weapon system of its making, the Fatah-1 Guided Multiple Launch Rocket System, during the operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos. The use of Fatah-1 gave Pakistan an extremely accurate non-contact weapon system capable of bypassing air defenses and striking deep behind enemy lines without risking pilots and aircraft. The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) boasted that it had downed five to seven Indian aircraft at this particular point in time. As per various Pakistani governmental officials and spokespersons of the military, those planes were mostly Rafales, Su-30MKIs, MiG-29s, and a few drones. It was further stated by them that due to the incorporation of China-produced J-10C fighter jets, especially because of their PL-15 long-range air-to-air missiles, a significant edge had been gained tactically. Nevertheless, independent sources within the field of defense and subsequent statements made it quite clear that at least three Indian planes had definitely been lost, which included even the well-known first combat loss of the Indian Rafale. Ultimately, Pakistan came out as an extremely competent, stable, and responsible nuclear state, and one that was concerned about preventing further escalation of disputes.¹⁰ The international standing of Pakistan received yet another boost in December 2025 through a report from the United Nations that indicated aggression on the part of India due to the incident in April. To avoid sliding into nuclear escalation, both sides agree to a quick and total ceasefire on May 10, 2025 under intense outside pressure, especially involving US President Donald Trump.

Diplomatic Visits and Engagement with Major Powers

Soon after the conflict, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif visits to Tajikistan, Iran, Turkey, and Azerbaijan.¹¹ During his visits, he thanked the nations for their support in promoting de-escalation and discussed regional security, attempted to develop economic ties, and generally sought to strengthen Pakistan's position regarding regional peace. This was a gesture to demonstrate that Pakistan is a responsible state and that the whole region could become calm with cooperation from other states. Pakistan kept its strong diplomatic ties with the US, China, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and other Gulf partners.¹² Islamabad projected itself as being in favor of diplomacy rather than aggression; therefore, it was ready to accept international mediation and continued to emphasize how necessary it is for external players to come to terms. Developing Strategic Alliances, Pakistan built its military, trade, and economic links with China, Turkey, Azerbaijan, and Gulf countries.

⁹ Associated Press of Pakistan (APP), "Operation Bunyan Al Marsoos Launched Following Quranic Inspiration" *Associated Press of Pakistan (APP)*, 10 May 2025

¹⁰ Wajid Ali, Adeela Bibi, and Ayesha Alam, "Operation Bunyan-un-Marsoos: A Defining Strategic Lesson for India" *Journal of Social Sciences Research & Policy* 3, no. 3 (July–September 2025): 41–57.

¹¹ Dawn.com, "How Many Foreign Trips Has PM Shehbaz Been on Since the Pakistan-India Military Engagement?" *Dawn*, 6 October 2025, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1947030>.

¹² News Desk, "PM Shehbaz Lands in Qatar on 2-Day Official Visit to Explore New Avenues of Cooperation" *Dawn*, 23 February 2026, <https://www.dawn.com/news/1975190>.

Pakistan once again underscored the strategic ties it enjoyed with Turkey; Azerbaijan emphasized business relationships while also underscoring its political support. Iran added emphasis to regional stability and security cooperation. Saudi Arabia maintained close political and economic ties. In doing so, Pakistan was portrayed in the outreach efforts as a stable and reliable state that is always inclined towards peace rather than a state that tends to adopt an aggressive approach. The political goodwill gained by these outreach visits helped enhance Pakistan's position at various regional economic summits, Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the United Nations, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). Thus, Pakistan could get more diplomatic support for diplomacy and communication.¹³

Shifted the country from crisis management to engagement

The Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif and the deputy prime minister and foreign minister Ishaq Dar frequently traveling abroad showcased a foreign policy inclined towards diplomacy rather than isolation.¹⁴ Pakistan attempted to maintain its connections with the region's friends and allies' right after the conflict, more or less. From the perspective of these diplomatic visits, there definitely appears to be a shift from addressing the immediate situation to reconnecting these international relations once more. The change from an isolationist to an engaged approach in Pakistan's foreign policy, which remains at the core of its diplomacy strategy for 2019 to 2025, benefited greatly from this diplomatic outreach emphasizing multilateral diplomacy, economic cooperation, and regional connectivity. Some of these include talks about trade and connectivity with Central Asian countries, continued investments in Azerbaijan, cooperation in infrastructure and energy with Gulf countries, as well as further development of regional transport and connectivity initiatives.

Projecting a Responsible International Image

The Pakistani government made sure to emphasize its readiness for the ceasefire and, well, it's prudence throughout the entire situation. However, compared to an extended and drawn-out military fight, the government officials sought to present Pakistan as a nation that, of course, values stability in the region, promotes dialogue, and looks for discreet ways to solve disputes instead of aggravating them. Public diplomacy was also involved. The Pakistan government continually expanded its diplomatic outreach by using its embassies, issuing statements, and discussing matters with foreign media outlets. Though the repeated repetition of the same ideas would be inevitable, the purpose would be to boost Pakistan's diplomatic image post-conflict and influence world public opinion.

CONCLUSION

The years 2022-2025 can be seen as representing a dramatic shift in Pakistan's foreign policy as it moved from isolationism to increasing international engagement. Throughout the years 2022-2025, Pakistan showed increasing diversification of its foreign relations. It maintains strong ties with China, the CPEC project and other projects on economic and strategic cooperation, but at the same time, it tries to

¹³ Khalid Taimur Akram, "Pakistan's Diplomatic Comeback: How 2025 Changed Global Narrative" *Associated Press of Pakistan (APP)*, 31 December 2025 <https://www.app.com.pk/national/pakistans-diplomatic-comeback-how-2025-changed-global-narrative/>

¹⁴ Syeda Amnah Batool, "A New Era of Diplomacy: How Shehbaz Sharif Is Steering Pakistan's Foreign Policy" *The Express Tribune*, October 3, 2025.

develop its relationships with the US, Saudi Arabia, UAE, Turkiye, Russia, Central Asia, and other regional countries. The research on Pakistan's foreign policy also mentions that participation in the SCO gives the country another platform to increase its engagement in the region. Considerations related to the economy became one of the most powerful factors in this transition. Thus, the diplomatic activities of Pakistan began to concentrate on attracting investments, increasing trade, receiving financial aid, advancing CPEC, and building relations with the Gulf and Asian countries. Nevertheless, it would be wrong to interpret this process as a complete shift from isolation to complete diplomatic success. First of all, Pakistan still faced various structural limitations, such as economic dependency, internal political instabilities, security problems, tensions with India and Afghanistan, and the need to balance relations with China and the US. Thus, this country's diplomatic activities were largely pragmatic and aimed at promoting national interests rather than pursuing any ideologically-motivated objectives. The events that occurred in 2025 also showed an increase in diplomatic engagement after it conflicted with India and international engagement. Nevertheless, the change in Pakistan's foreign policy cannot be seen as a completely new situation that is free from previous challenges. The limitations that exist due to the economic problems of the country, the presence of regional tension, and reliance on outside assistance continue to hinder the strategic independence of Pakistan. In conclusion, the research shows that 2022–2025 was a crucial period in the process of transition of Pakistan's foreign policy from a constrained one to a diversified and proactive foreign policy. Pakistan started replacing diplomatic isolation with strategic partnerships, economic diplomacy, regional cooperation, and multilateralism. However, this transition process is far from being completed and will take more time for successful accomplishment. The long-term success of Pakistan's transition to an active foreign policy will depend on the country's efforts to provide political stability, develop its economy, institutionalize the process of foreign policy-making, establish better relationships with neighboring countries, and translate diplomatic engagements into practical economic and strategic benefits.

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