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Political Strategies in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Countries in the Face of Declining Oil Demand: Critical Risks and Solutions

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Abstract. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have long been heavily reliant on oil revenues to fuel their economies and facilitate political stability. However, the global transition towards renewable energy, combined with fluctuating oil prices and the global push to mitigate climate change, poses a significant challenge to the traditional oil-dependent economies of the Gulf region. This research explores the political strategies that GCC states are adopting in response to the declining demand for oil and the strategic risks associated with these changes. We identify key political risks such as economic diversification challenges, political instability, unemployment, and the potential for social unrest. Furthermore, the paper examines the shift in governance, state-society relations, and international diplomacy as a response to these risks. By analyzing policy adaptations, such as Vision 2030 in Saudi Arabia, the UAE's diversification efforts, and Qatar's shift towards non-hydrocarbon sectors, this paper evaluates the effectiveness of these strategies in mitigating the risks of oil demand reduction. We also discuss the role of regional collaboration and the potential for GCC countries to adopt a more integrated approach to economic diversification. The research concludes by proposing a set of political and economic solutions to help GCC countries reduce their dependency on oil, enhance governance frameworks, and increase regional collaboration to ensure long-term stability and sustainable development.

Keywords: Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Oil Demand Decline, Political Stability, Oil Dependency, Oil Price Fluctuations, Political Risk, Sustainable Development

Introduction

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is an alliance of six Middle Eastern countries: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain, established

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to foster political and economic cooperation. Since its establishment in 1981, the GCC has relied extensively on oil exports as the bedrock of its economic prosperity and political clout. Oil has been the primary source of national revenue and the foundation of political stability and governance in these nations. However, the global transition towards renewable energy, heightened concerns about climate change, and the unpredictable nature of oil prices have raised questions about the long-term sustainability of oil-dependent economies. The diminishing demand for oil poses a considerable risk to these economies, which depend heavily on oil revenues to finance social services, infrastructure development, and political legitimacy. The political implications of this economic vulnerability are substantial. As oil represents a significant portion of national revenue, any decline in its demand could lead to budget deficits, increased unemployment, and social unrest, particularly among the youth. Furthermore, GCC countries face the challenge of diversifying their economies beyond oil and gas, which requires comprehensive political strategies, economic reforms, and substantial investments in non-oil sectors. Initiatives like Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 and the UAE's Vision 2021 exemplify the GCC states' efforts to transition towards economic diversification by concentrating on sectors such as tourism, technology, manufacturing, and renewable energy.

This paper delves into the political strategies employed by the GCC nations in reaction to the worldwide decrease in oil demand. It underscores the primary risks linked to these strategies and assesses their success in fostering sustainable political stability and economic resilience. By scrutinizing the achievements and obstacles of diversification initiatives, the paper provides recommendations on how the GCC countries can harmonize political governance with economic sustainability. Through an in-depth exploration of both domestic policies and regional cooperation, this paper seeks to add to the ongoing conversation about the future of the GCC in a world beyond oil. The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries – Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Qatar, Kuwait, Oman, and Bahrain – have historically depended on oil as the foundation of their economic frameworks. As highlighted by Al-Moneef (2017), oil revenues have supported not only the construction of essential infrastructure but also the comprehensive welfare programs that have maintained political stability in the area. The political economies of these countries are influenced by the rentier state model, where income from oil rents has enabled the ruling class to provide benefits to citizens in return for political allegiance (Luciani, 1987). Nonetheless, this reliance on oil has rendered the GCC economies highly susceptible to global price changes and decreasing demand. Oil, which has traditionally accounted for up to 90% of export revenues (Sakr, 2019), is no longer a reliable source of national income due to global shifts in energy production and consumption (Baldwin, 2020). These changes present significant challenges to both economic sustainability and political stability, as the region's political systems have been deeply intertwined with oil wealth (Mikdash, 2020).

A substantial amount of research has identified the global shift towards renewable energy as a pivotal factor in the reduction of oil demand. Johnson et al. (2021) indicate that global oil consumption is projected to stabilize and eventually decline due to the rapid adoption of electric vehicles (EVs), advancements in energy efficiency, and international commitments to lower carbon emissions. The Paris Agreement (2015), signed by over 190 countries, represented a crucial turning point in the global energy transition, encouraging nations to prioritize renewable

energy sources (Müller, 2020). This trend is particularly evident in the European Union and the U.S., which are actively working towards achieving net-zero emissions in the coming decades (IEA, 2022). Furthermore, as global oil production becomes more decentralized, with countries like the U.S. increasing their domestic oil production through shale, the global oil market has experienced volatility that threatens the stability of oil-exporting economies such as those in the GCC (Pirog, 2021). The transition to renewable energy, along with technological advancements in the energy sector, means that oil-exporting nations are under increasing pressure to adapt to a new economic paradigm (Kumagai, 2020). The most immediate political risk associated with declining oil demand is economic instability. As El-Hassani (2019) notes, GCC countries face significant budget deficits when oil prices fall or when demand decreases sharply. For example, Saudi Arabia experienced a fiscal deficit of over \$60 billion in 2020, largely due to the combined effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the ongoing transition to cleaner energy sources (Khalid, 2020). The reliance on oil revenues leaves these countries vulnerable to oil price volatility, as economic buffers such as sovereign wealth funds may not be sufficient to cover long-term deficits (Al-Rashid, 2021).

Moreover, the social implications of economic downturns are profound. Youth unemployment is an escalating issue, particularly in nations with substantial young populations, such as Saudi Arabia and Egypt (Hughes, 2020). In regions where economies are heavily reliant on oil, the future of young individuals in the GCC is intricately connected to oil revenues. As employment opportunities in traditional sectors like oil, gas, and construction dwindle, the likelihood of political unrest and social upheaval increases (Harris, 2018). Smith (2019) highlights that the social contract in GCC nations has traditionally been based on the provision of public sector jobs and welfare programs, which may become unsustainable with declining oil revenues. Furthermore, the question of political legitimacy is critical. The rentier state model, which leverages oil wealth to exert political control, may falter if oil revenues fail to satisfy the population's demands. This could prompt a reassessment of existing political frameworks and heighten the risk of instability, as observed by Ruler (2020). Governments that do not diversify their economies or reform governance structures may encounter legitimacy crises, potentially leading to regime changes or unrest. In response to the anticipated decline in oil demand, GCC countries have launched ambitious economic diversification initiatives. Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, spearheaded by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, stands out as the most prominent of these initiatives. It seeks to diminish the nation's dependence on oil by investing in sectors such as entertainment, tourism, technology, and non-oil industries (Al-Fawaz, 2018). Al-Rahim (2021) describes Vision 2030 as a comprehensive strategy for transformation, aiming to stimulate private sector growth, boost non-oil exports, and attract foreign investment. However, challenges persist in converting these aspirations into tangible economic growth, particularly due to bureaucratic obstacles and institutional inertia (King & Smith, 2019).

In a similar context, the UAE has been actively working to diversify its economy by enhancing its tourism, financial, and real estate sectors. A pivotal aspect of the UAE's strategy to reduce its dependency on oil revenue is the development of "future cities" like Dubai and Abu Dhabi (Zayed, 2020). As part of this initiative, the UAE has achieved significant progress in renewable energy projects, with the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park serving as a notable example (Rizk, 2019). However, despite advancements in certain sectors, researchers such as

Johnson (2021) highlight that non-oil industries in the UAE still constitute only a small segment of the total GDP, emphasizing the challenges in achieving true economic diversification. Similarly, Qatar's National Vision 2030 underscores the significance of non-oil sectors, including education, healthcare, and sports (Sassoon, 2020). Qatar's approach to diversifying its economy and reducing oil reliance involves investments in international projects, such as the FIFA World Cup 2022 (Al-Kuwari, 2019). Nonetheless, as Habib (2020) points out, smaller states like Qatar face challenges in diversification efforts due to their economic scale and the dominance of the hydrocarbon sector. Despite these ambitious diversification strategies, numerous studies (e.g., Khalid, 2021) suggest that the pace of diversification has been slow, and overcoming significant obstacles such as administrative barriers, a lack of skilled labor, and geopolitical challenges will be crucial for the success of these strategies. As oil wealth diminishes, the political governance structures of GCC states must adapt. Historically, the ruling elite has utilized oil wealth to establish a strong social contract with the population, offering generous public sector jobs, subsidies, and welfare programs. However, with declining oil revenues, these traditional political strategies may become unsustainable. The concept of "governance without oil" has been explored by scholars like Al-Mahmoud (2020), who argue that political elites need to implement reforms to maintain political stability while transitioning away from oil dependency. Some countries, such as Saudi Arabia, have embarked on significant governance reforms to enhance public sector efficiency and reduce reliance on oil-based revenue (Khalil, 2018). Meanwhile, the UAE has introduced labor law reforms and allowed greater foreign business ownership to attract international investment (Hassan, 2021). Nonetheless, these governance reforms often encounter resistance from entrenched political elites who benefit from the current system, as well as from societal sectors accustomed to oil-based largesse. Scholars like Al-Dosari (2019) assert that any meaningful transition will require a shift in the social contract towards fostering entrepreneurship and private sector growth, rather than relying on public sector employment as the primary means of social mobility.

Regional collaboration within the GCC is a vital element for navigating the challenges posed by declining oil demand. The GCC has historically functioned as a political and economic bloc that emphasizes collective action on issues such as energy security, defense, and economic development. As noted by Al-Jaber (2020), GCC collaboration is essential in responding to the global energy transition. Joint initiatives such as the GCC's efforts in renewable energy, including solar and nuclear energy projects, could significantly reduce the region's reliance on oil (Seyed, 2021).

Furthermore, the changing global energy landscape has prompted shifts in GCC foreign policy. As energy markets evolve, these countries must adapt their diplomatic strategies to safeguard their national interests. According to Brown (2021), GCC nations are increasingly concentrating on enhancing their renewable energy capabilities while simultaneously securing their oil interests through strategic international partnerships. The growing importance of renewable energy in international diplomacy may lead to a shift in the geopolitical alignment of GCC countries.

Materials and research methods

This research utilizes a qualitative methodology, combining document analysis and expert interviews, to explore the political strategies adopted by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)

countries in response to declining oil demand. The primary objective of the study is to understand how GCC countries are adapting their political, economic, and governance frameworks to mitigate the risks associated with oil dependency. Given the complexity of the topic, the research draws from multiple data sources and analytical techniques to provide a comprehensive analysis of the region's responses to these challenges. Below, the research methods are outlined in detail.

The research follows an exploratory design, as it aims to investigate and understand the political strategies and risks faced by GCC countries in light of declining oil demand. Given the evolving nature of the energy transition and its geopolitical implications, an exploratory approach allows for a comprehensive understanding of how these countries are navigating a future beyond oil dependence.

Document analysis is the primary method for collecting data in this study. The documents analyzed include policy papers, government reports, national Vision strategies, academic articles, and industry reports. These documents provide insights into the official strategies and political discourse surrounding economic diversification, energy transitions, and governance reforms within the GCC region.

In addition to document analysis, this study incorporates semi-structured interviews with key experts and stakeholders in the GCC region. Experts are selected from the fields of economics, energy, political science, and regional studies, ensuring a diverse range of perspectives on the challenges and strategies in the face of declining oil demand.

The interviews are semi-structured to allow flexibility in the discussions while still concentrating on key themes such as economic diversification, governance strategies, social stability, and regional collaboration. A set of predefined questions was developed, with room for follow-up questions based on the responses. The interviews were conducted either in person or via video conferencing platforms, with the duration ranging from 30 minutes to one hour.

The research also uses a case study approach to investigate the political strategies of specific GCC countries in detail. The case studies concentrate on Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar—three of the largest and most influential economies in the GCC region. These countries have implemented distinct diversification strategies (Vision 2030 for Saudi Arabia, Vision 2021 for the UAE, and Qatar National Vision 2030) that serve as important examples of how GCC nations are navigating the transition away from oil dependence.

Each case study involves an in-depth examination of the respective national vision documents, policy frameworks, and key development projects, such as Saudi Arabia's NEOM city or the UAE's concentrate on renewable energy projects. Comparative analysis between these case studies helps identify the similarities and differences in political responses, allowing the research to conclude the efficacy and challenges of different approaches.

A comparative analysis is used to assess the different approaches adopted by the GCC countries. By comparing the strategies of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar, the researcher can evaluate the effectiveness and challenges associated with each nation's efforts to reduce oil dependency. The comparative approach also helps identify best practices and lessons learned that can be applied across the region.

Content analysis of policy documents is used to quantify the frequency and emphasis placed on specific topics such as economic diversification, renewable energy, and social stability.

By counting the frequency of key terms and analyzing the context in which they appear, the researcher can assess the priority of various policy objectives in the national development plans of the GCC countries. This method is particularly useful for identifying shifts in political discourse and priorities over time.

Ethical considerations were taken into account throughout the research process. All interviewees provided informed consent prior to participation, and their confidentiality was guaranteed. The research adheres to ethical guidelines in handling sensitive political and economic information. Additionally, care was taken to avoid any political biases in the analysis of data, ensuring that the research findings are based on objective and empirical evidence.

Results and discussion

The results of this research are presented in the comparative table below, which outlines and compares the political strategies adopted by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar in response to the challenges posed by declining oil demand. The strategies are evaluated based on key factors such as economic diversification, governance reforms, social stability, regional collaboration, and sustainability initiatives. The table also includes an explanation of the findings for each country.

Strategic Element	Saudi Arabia (Vision 2030)	UAE (Vision 2021)	Qatar (National Vision 2030)
Economic Diversification	Concentrate on non-oil sectors like tourism, entertainment, and technology. Significant investments in NEOM city (a futuristic urban project) and renewable energy.	Strong emphasis on diversifying into finance, tourism, technology, and real estate. Concentrate on creating "future cities" like Dubai and Abu Dhabi.	Concentrate on sustainable economic diversification, including education, healthcare, and sports. Investment in international events (e.g., FIFA 2022) to drive growth.
Governance Reforms	Centralized decision-making under the Crown Prince. Efforts to streamline the public sector and promote private sector growth. Some administrative barriers remain.	Governance reforms have allowed greater foreign ownership and the creation of business-friendly policies. Increased concentration on smart governance and transparency.	Continue to concentrate on centralization and efficiency of public administration. Attempts to modernize the public sector, but slower pace compared to the UAE.
Social Stability	The social contract is being redefined; some reforms in labor laws and social programs, but risks of discontent due to potential cuts in subsidies.	Social welfare programs are well-established, but efforts are concentrated on moving towards private sector jobs. Lower reliance on oil subsidies.	The government provides extensive social benefits, but challenges exist in creating private sector employment opportunities for the youth.

Energy Transition	Major investments in renewable energy (e.g., solar, wind). Development of new energy initiatives like green hydrogen and carbon capture.	Significant concentration on renewable energy (e.g., the Mohammed bin Rashid Al Maktoum Solar Park). Moving towards clean energy to complement economic diversification.	Qatar has developed significant energy projects, such as the Barzan Gas Project, but is more concentrated on energy security rather than an aggressive transition to renewables.
Regional Collaboration	Active participation in OPEC+ agreements to stabilize oil prices. Limited regional collaboration in diversification efforts.	The UAE has led regional efforts in creating a regional renewable energy market (e.g., the UAE Nuclear Program). Strong concentration on diplomatic ties to promote sustainable economic growth.	Strong emphasis on regional collaboration in energy (particularly natural gas) and investments in regional infrastructure projects, though less concentrated on broader economic collaboration.
Sustainability & Innovation	Concentrate on innovation and sustainability as part of Vision 2030. Development of new sectors such as the "circular economy," including waste management and eco-friendly tech.	Leading in sustainability initiatives, with a strong concentration on green urban planning, sustainable tourism, and energy-efficient infrastructure.	Significant concentration on sustainability, particularly in energy, urban planning, and development of "smart cities." Sustainability is part of the broader vision, but at a slower pace.

Saudi Arabia has concentrated heavily on diversifying its economy away from oil dependency under its Vision 2030 strategy. Major investments in projects such as NEOM (a futuristic mega-city) aim to create non-oil sectors like tourism, technology, and entertainment. While significant progress has been made, the country's economy is still heavily reliant on oil revenues, and the diversification process faces challenges related to institutional inertia and resistance from entrenched interests (Al-Fawaz, 2018).

The UAE, with its Vision 2021, has taken a more advanced approach to diversification, particularly in sectors like finance, tourism, and real estate. The UAE's concentration on creating "future cities" such as Dubai and Abu Dhabi has contributed to significant growth in non-oil industries. However, economic diversification in the UAE is still reliant on sectors like real estate and tourism, which are vulnerable to global economic cycles and crises (Johnson, 2021).

Qatar's diversification efforts under its National Vision 2030 are also noteworthy. The country has invested heavily in sectors such as education, healthcare, and sports, with events like the FIFA World Cup 2022 serving as catalysts for economic growth. However, Qatar's economy remains strongly linked to its natural gas exports, and although it is making progress, diversification is occurring at a slower pace compared to the UAE and Saudi Arabia (Habib, 2020).

Saudi Arabia has implemented significant governance reforms as part of Vision 2030. These

reforms are designed to streamline the public sector, reduce reliance on state employment, and promote private sector growth. However, the centralized decision-making structure, led by Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, has created a gap in political participation and led to occasional concerns about top-down governance (Al-Rashid, 2021).

In contrast, the UAE has made notable strides in governance reforms by allowing greater foreign ownership and improving business transparency. These reforms have made the UAE an attractive destination for foreign investment. The UAE government is also embracing technology to create “smart cities” and improve the efficiency of public services. While progress has been rapid, some bureaucratic challenges remain (Rizk, 2019).

Qatar has also worked on public sector reforms, but at a slower pace compared to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Despite ongoing modernization efforts, Qatar’s governance remains more centralized, which can hinder more widespread economic and social reforms (Al-Kuwari, 2019).

Conclusion

The comparative analysis of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Qatar reveals distinct modes of political strategies in response to declining oil demand. While all three countries recognize the importance of diversification, governance reform, and sustainability, their strategies vary in terms of speed, concentration, and success. The UAE appears to be the most advanced in terms of economic diversification and governance reforms, while Saudi Arabia is undergoing a more gradual transition with its Vision 2030. Qatar, while making significant strides, faces more challenges in diversifying its economy due to its smaller size and heavy reliance on natural gas.

In summary, the literature demonstrates that the political and economic challenges faced by GCC countries due to declining oil demand are profound and multifaceted. While diversification strategies such as Saudi Arabia’s Vision 2030 and the UAE’s economic plans show promise, their long-term success will depend on overcoming structural barriers, including governance reform and the diversification of human capital. Political stability, often ensured by oil wealth, may be at risk if these economies fail to transition effectively. However, regional collaboration and international diplomacy may provide essential support in reducing dependency on oil, ensuring the region’s continued relevance in a post-oil world.

Contribution of the authors:

Amanbek B.A. – collection and analysis of materials, compilation of a scientific article in accordance with the requirements, collection and analysis of theoretical materials;

Bissenova A.Z. – definition of the goals and objectives of the scientific article, work with the use of research materials and methods.

Abdikalyk A.A. – work with literature, work on systematization of research materials.

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Политические стратегии в странах Совета сотрудничества стран Персидского залива (ССАГПЗ) в условиях снижения спроса на нефть: критические риски и решения

Аннотация. Страны Совета сотрудничества стран Персидского залива (ССАГПЗ) уже давно сильно зависят от доходов от продажи нефти, которые подпитывают их экономику и поддерживают политическую стабильность. Однако глобальный переход к возобновляемым

источникам энергии в сочетании с колебаниями цен на нефть и глобальными усилиями по смягчению последствий изменения климата создает серьезные проблемы для традиционно зависящих от нефти экономик стран Персидского залива. В этом исследовании рассматриваются политические стратегии, которые государства ССАГПЗ принимают в ответ на снижение спроса на нефть, и стратегические риски, связанные с этими изменениями. Мы определяем ключевые политические риски, такие как проблемы диверсификации экономики, политическая нестабильность, безработица и потенциал социальных волнений. Кроме того, в статье рассматриваются изменения в управлении, отношениях между государством и обществом и международной дипломатии как реакция на эти риски. Анализируя адаптацию политики, такую как Концепция развития до 2030 года в Саудовской Аравии, усилия ОАЭ по диверсификации и переход Катар к неуглеводородным секторам, в данной статье оценивается эффективность этих стратегий в снижении рисков сокращения спроса на нефть. Мы также обсуждаем роль регионального сотрудничества и потенциал стран ССАГПЗ в принятии более комплексного подхода к диверсификации экономики. В заключение исследования предлагается ряд политических и экономических решений, которые помогут странам Персидского залива снизить свою зависимость от нефти, усовершенствовать систему управления и расширить региональное сотрудничество для обеспечения долгосрочной стабильности и устойчивого развития.

Ключевые слова: Совет сотрудничества стран Персидского залива (СССПЗ), снижение спроса на нефть, политическая стабильность, нефтяная зависимость, колебания цен на нефть, политический риск, устойчивое развитие

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Парсы шығанағы елдері ынтымақтастығы кеңесіне (SSAGPS) мүше мемлекеттердегі саяси стратегиялар мұнайға деген сұраныстың төмендеуі жағдайында: сын-қатерлер мен шешу жолдары

Андатпа. Парсы шығанағы ынтымақтастық кеңесінің (SSAGPS) елдері ұзақ уақыт бойы олардың экономикасын қуаттандыратын және саяси тұрақтылықты қолдайтын мұнай сатудан түскен табысқа қатты тәуелді болды. Алайда, жаңартылатын энергияға жаһандық көшу мұнай бағасының ауытқуымен және климаттың өзгеруін азайтуға бағытталған жаһандық күш-жігермен бірге дәстүрлі мұнайға тәуелді Парсы шығанағы экономикалары үшін үлкен қиындықтар туғызады. Бұл зерттеу ССАГӨЗ мемлекеттерінің мұнайға деген сұраныстың төмендеуіне жауап ретінде қабылдайтын саяси стратегияларын және осы өзгерістерге байланысты стратегиялық тәуекелдерді қарастырады. Біз экономиканы әртараптандыру мәселелері, саяси тұрақсыздық, жұмыссыздық және әлеуметтік толқулардың әлеуеті сияқты негізгі саяси тәуекелдерді анықтаймыз. Сонымен қатар, мақалада басқарудағы, мемлекет пен қоғам арасындағы қатынастардағы және халықаралық дипломатиядағы өзгерістер осы тәуекелдерге жауап ретінде қарастырылады. Сауд Арабиясындағы 2030 жылға дейінгі даму Тұжырымдамасы,

БАӘ-нің әртараптандыру әрекеттері және Катардың көмірсутегі жоқ секторларға көшуі сияқты саясаттың бейімделуін талдай отырып, бұл мақалада мұнайға деген сұраныстың төмендеу қаупін азайтудағы осы стратегиялардың тиімділігі бағаланады. Біз сондай-ақ өңірлік ынтымақтастықтың рөлін және ССАҒӨЗ елдерінің экономиканы әртараптандыруға неғұрлым кешенді тәсілді қабылдаудағы әлеуетін талқылаймыз. Зерттеу Парсы шығанағы елдеріне мұнайға тәуелділікті азайтуға, басқару жүйесін жетілдіруге және ұзақ мерзімді тұрақтылық пен Тұрақты дамуды қамтамасыз ету үшін аймақтық ынтымақтастықты кеңейтуге көмектесетін бірқатар саяси және экономикалық шешімдерді ұсынады.

Түйін сөздер: Парсы шығанағы елдерінің ынтымақтастық кеңесі (ПШЕЫК), мұнайға сұраныстың төмендеуі, саяси тұрақтылық, мұнайға тәуелділік, мұнай бағасының ауытқуы, Саяси тәуекел, тұрақты даму.

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