

Security Dimensions of India-GCC Countries Relations: Assessing the Challenges and Strategic Opportunities

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Abstract: *India's relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries have grown from a mainly economic relationship into a multidimensional strategic partnership with substantial security implications. This paper examines India-GCC countries relations of the security dimensions by investigating the maritime security, security of energy, counterterrorism, and stability of the region. It assesses the emerging challenges such as rivalries of geopolitics, conflicts of regional influence, and the growing interference of external powers like Europeans, the American and Isreal. It also identifies opportunities for deeper strategic cooperation between India and GCC countries engagements. The strengthening of India-GCC countries security collaboration is essential for ensuring stability. This study also highlights the importance of peace in the Middle East region and preservation of common interests.*

Keywords: Security, Maritime, India and GCC, Strategic Opportunities, Geopolitics of GCC.

1. Introduction

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) is a regional intergovernmental organization. The Arab states which are bordering the Persian Gul- Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Bahrain, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates (excluding Iran and Iraq), are member states. The organization was formed in 1981. The objectives of the council are to promote cooperation in security, and unities of political and economic areas and to promote region's stability and peace. After the 1979 Iranian Revolution, the Gulf countries had formed it in check and balance of power against the emergence of possible regional conflict due to regional interest and theological conflict-Sunni and Shia rivalries. The threat of Islamic revolution in Iran had shaped political insecurity and security concerns among the Arab countries in the region, late 20th century. The charter of the council highlighted on unity which would be based on common political values cultural heritage. The long-term objectives to achieve more integration between member states. The economic cooperation is chief aim of the GCC countries. A customs union (established & operated by 2015), common market, (launched 2008) and aims toward final monetary union (agreement exists but not materialised), of the council were formed. These initiatives enable mobility of trade and labour, collaboration of security, joint defence agreements and coordinated foreign policy positions. As collective military framework, the GCC's Peninsula Shield Force formed to meet the threats from outside and preserve internal stability too. The objective of political consultations emphasis on regional conflicts, maritime security and counterterrorism.

The strategic importance of the Gulf region for India embraces immensely due to its closeness on mutual interests like large Indian diaspora's presence and energy security. The council has appeared as a key partner in Indian foreign policy. From traditionally, focused on trade and energy imports, relationships of India-GCC countries are now growing into the security domain. Growing geopolitical uncertainties,

maritime coercions, and regional skirmishes have needed closer collaboration in defence and security frameworks.

2. Literature Review

Scholarly discourse recent studies have begun highlighting the security and strategic dimensions of this relationship of India-GCC countries. The economic interdependence, predominantly labour migration, energy trade had been focused point. *Talmiz Ahmad (2014)* highlighted the changing nature of India-Gulf ties which are transactional to strategic in cold war era. Ahmad says that "India's "Look West Policy" (now part of its broader foreign policy framework) has elevated the Gulf region's importance beyond energy security to include political and defence cooperation". *Rajiv Sikri (2017)* discovers India's ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council, focused on the necessity for a coherent regional strategy. He argues that though the economic cooperations are booming, but security dimension in the relationships remained underdeveloped and requires institutional consolidation. *Christian Koch (2019)* observes from a security perspective, the developing geopolitical landscape of the Gulf and its consequences for external powers such as India USA, and Isreal. Koch highlights "the increasing militarization of the region and the role of external powers, arguing that India must carefully navigate competing interests, particularly between Iran and GCC states". *Harsh V. Pant and Kabir Taneja (2020)* examine deepening strategic partnerships of India with key Gulf countries such as Saudi Arabia and UAE. "They emphasize counterterrorism cooperation, intelligence sharing, and maritime security as emerging pillars of the relationship". *David Brewster (2018)* underlines the strategic importance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and the Gulf seen as interconnected spaces on maritime security. He observes that in securing sea lanes and ensuring regional stability, India's naval strength and collaboration with Gulf states are crucial. Scholar *Meena Singh Roy (2021)*, arguments to the divergence of India-GCC relations such as cybersecurity, defence production, and infrastructure development. Roy proposes that "the

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developing nature of intimidations- ranging from cyberattacks to non-state actors- necessitates a broader and more integrated security framework”.

Despite these contributions, gaps remain in the literature. This paper addresses this gap by integrated form maritime, energy, defence, and geopolitical into a unified analytical model. While most studies treat security issues in isolation rather than as part of a comprehensive strategic framework.

3. Theoretical Framework

The security dimensions of India–GCC relations required a healthy theoretical observation. The two complementary approaches employed in the paper: Realism and the Complex Interdependence. The one explains strategic approach and other cooperative dimension.

Realism: Security and Balance of Power

Realism’s foundational believes in international system as anarchy. Survival and national interest are principal factors. It is analysing state behaviour in the foundational believe. India’s ties with the Gulf Cooperation Council being seen through realistic perspective as determined by strategic requirements like maritime dominance, geopolitical balancing and energy security. increasing defence cooperation between India-GCC countries, primely the UAE and Saudi Arabia, can be seen as broader strategy. Because it protects it’s the benefits in the region of Indian Ocean and the Gulf. The interference of global powers such as China and the United States, Russia and others, reinforces the requirement to maintain a strategic foothold for India.

Realism describes India’s careful of moves balance of power between GCC states, Iran and Isreal. India follows a pragmatic, interest-based policy comparison to positioning with one bloc exclusively. This reproduces the realist approach of balance of power. States pursue to avert supremacy by any single player. Maritime security cooperation, safeguarding sea lanes such as the Strait of Hormuz- determines that how military capabilities and strategic alliances are used to mitigate threats and ensure national security.

Complex Interdependence: Economic and Security Linkages

Complex Interdependence theory emphasises the importance of cooperation, multiple channels of interaction and economic ties between states. India–GCC countries relationships validate this model. It has deep and strong economic integration, energy trade, and Indian diaspora in the Gulf. These economic and cultural ties create interdependencies and promote mutual benefits security and stability. Security cooperation between India and GCC countries is not limited to military dimensions but extended to protection of critical infrastructure, counterterrorism and intelligence sharing, cybersecurity and maritime safety and anti-piracy operations too

The complex interdependence emphasizes non-military tools and institutional cooperation like joint working groups, bilateral agreements, and multilateral dialogues between India and GCC states. It gives preference of

institutionalization of their relationship. Investment in infrastructure and trade partnerships, these economic activities promote security cooperation by positioning as strategic interest long term. Stability in the Gulf as shared objective, promotes economic dependence.

Synthesis of Theoretical Approaches

India–GCC countries relations are divergent in nature, only realism or complex interdependence theories alone cannot fulfil all aspects of it. The analytical approach of both theories is more suitable.

- 1) Why India seeks the strategic partnerships (security, power, survival), as realistic perspective?
- 2) How the partnerships between both are continued (as economic ties, institutions, cooperation too) as application of Complex interdependence theory?

The developing of security relationship delivers a comprehensive framework. The power politics and pragmatic cooperation in India’s policy toward the GCC countries reproduces good strategy in the contemporary global politics.

4. Methodology

In the paper, as methodology the qualitative research method approach is implemented to examine ties of India–GCC countries. The source of documents is relied on secondary sources as academic literature and contents, government documents, and foreign policies’ reports. The content analysis is adopted to recognize the rising pattern of strategic cooperation between India and the countries of Gulf region.

Strategic Importance of the India–GCC as Security Relationship

Energy Security

With the Gulf Cooperation Council, energy security establishes as core of India’s strategic engagement, as the “world’s third-largest energy consumer, and its economic growth trajectory is closely tied to stable access to external energy resources” (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2023). Over 85% of its crude oil needs of India is imported, with about “50–60% sourced from GCC countries, including Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait (Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas [MoPNG], 2023)”. India’s foreign and security policy that knows the structural dependence of energy security, underlines the strategic importance of the Gulf region. (Pant & Taneja, 2020). A considerable share of India’s oil imported through the Strait of Hormuz, the most critical energy route of the world. “Roughly 20% of global petroleum liquids consumption transits by this sea route per day. (U.S. Energy Information Administration [EIA], 2023)”. Any disturbance could sternly influence energy supply to India and global price of crude oil would shock the growth. This is “whether due to geopolitical tensions, naval blockades, or non-state actors” (Brewster, 2018).

According to the OPEC, India’s largest crude oil supplier is Saudi Arabia, about 15–18% of India’s total imports (OPEC, 2023). But the bilateral relationship has grown into a wide-ranging strategic partnership like energy security, investment in infrastructure and collaboration of defence (Pant & Taneja,

2020). Saudi Arabia's role as a reliable supplier has reshaped its strategic importance as long-term energy strategy of India (Ahmad, 2014). Other key partner of India's energy security consortium named the UAE. "The Abu Dhabi National Oil Company (ADNOC) has invested in India's Strategic Petroleum Reserves (SPR), reflecting a shift toward deeper institutional cooperation (MoPNG, 2023)". A transitional change of relationship from a buyer-seller to a strategy energy security architecture as strategic investments for petroleum reserve in India (Observer Research Foundation [ORF], 2022). The largest supplier of LNG nearly 40-50% of India's total LNG imports came from Qatar (IEA, 2023). The contracts for supply of LNG as Long-term guarantee price constancy and permanency of supply (Koch, 2019). The partnership became very critical as India pursues to conversion toward more green energy sources to cut its carbon footprint (IEA, 2023). Ensuring uninterrupted energy supplies is a core national security concern to India. Stability the region of Gulf, deeply obstructed economic growth of India and energy resilience.

Maritime Security

Both Arabian Sea and the Strait of Hormuz have critical importance as sea route of global energy trade. Threats of sea piracy, maritime threats, and bottleneck disturbances required coordination among naval forces. "Maritime security has appeared as a critical dimension of India's strategic relationship with the Gulf Cooperation Council". The importance of geopolitics the Persian Gulf region to India and its supremacy in the global energy trade, to ensure the security of sea route have become common interests. "The Persian Gulf water route and The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) linked together. It constituted one of the most strategically significant maritime spaces in the world (Brewster, 2018)". Maritime trade of India would be sure of the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) particularly energy imports. It's strategically very important trade route the Strait of Hormuz for both India and GCC countries approximately 20% of global oil shipments transited in the Strait of Hormuz, (U.S. Energy Information Administration [EIA], 2023). India's economic stability and global energy markets prices affected by any disturbance in the gulf countries (IEA, 2023). The major portion of hydrocarbons' supply came from the GCC countries and the Strait of Hormuz routes serve as the primary passes for the trade. "Ensuring the safety of these routes is essential for uninterrupted energy supply and trade flows (Pant & Taneja, 2020)".

With GCC states, India had improved its naval force collaboration, mainly the Saudi Arabia Oman, and UAE. It had strengthened inter-operability and trust by Joint naval force exercises, high-level defence interactions, and port calls (Brewster, 2018). The conducts of naval exercises of Oman and India on regular basis, enhanced the coordination. In the Gulf of Aden and adjacent waters, India has actively operated in anti-piracy action. Including the vessels of GCC countries, The Indian Naval force has protected thousands of merchant vessels, by ensuring the safe route of piracy-prone regions (MoD India, 2023). "These efforts contribute to collective maritime security and demonstrate India's role as a net security provider in the region" (Pant & Taneja, 2020). In the port development and logistics infrastructure development India has established strategic relationship with GCC

countries. India's operational access to ports in Oman (e.g., Duqm) improves and strengthens maritime connectivity in the Gulf (Roy, 2021). China and the United States like external actor, their presence in the Indian Ocean and Gulf regions created new strategic complexities for India. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project of China increased the naval bases and the port-investments generated new challenges for India's maritime inspiration (Brewster, 2018).

Diaspora Security

Indian diaspora is largely concentrated in the Gulf region, India gave main concern in the foreign and security policy of their welfare, safety, and legal protection. "Over 8-9 million Indians diaspora, as of recent estimates, live in GCC states. It contributed the host economies significantly and India's remittance (Ministry of External Affairs [MEA], 2023)". The matter of national security and diplomatic priority of India, demographic contribution of Indian in the Gulf region, are very important (Rajan, 2019) due to a vital role in economic interdependence. "India receives over \$100 billion annually in remittances, with a significant portion originating from GCC countries (World Bank, 2023)". India's foreign exchange reserves are mainly contributed by remittances and promote economic growth. Thus, the safety of Indian workers is directly connected to India's economic security (Rajan, 2019). "These operations demonstrate India's growing capacity to respond to emergencies and ensure the safety of its overseas population (Pant & Taneja, 2020)". E-Migrate system, Pravasi Bharatiya Bima Yojana (insurance scheme) helped to regulate migration and provided security to overseas workers (MEA, 2023). India has concentrated on developing the skilled workforce to, securing employability, reducing vulnerability and mitigating to changing labour market demands. The Indian diaspora community acted as connection between India and GCC countries by promoting cultural and social linkages. Trade connections, Investment flows and business partnerships are the diaspora communities enable. Diaspora security is a central pillar of India-GCC relations, it showed the deep socio-economic connection between the two regions. Labour exploitation, policy changes, and regional instability persisted challenges made significant progress in promoting institutional tools and diplomatic engagement.

Security Dimensions

The joint military exercises, defence pacts, and high-level strategic dialogues are the key defence ties with key GCC states. UAE and Saudi Arabia have emerged as important defence partners with India. Both India and GCC nations faced same from extremist groups' challenges. "Intelligence sharing, anti-radicalization measures, and extradition agreements have strengthened bilateral counterterrorism frameworks". India's naval force operations in the Indian Ocean Region acknowledges the GCC states efforts to secure vital shipping routes. to the regional stability is based on the joint patrols and naval forces exercises. cybersecurity cooperation, with the fast-moving digitization process, is emerged as new space in relations of India-GCC, chiefly in protection of critical infrastructure.

Challenges in India- GCC Security Relations

One of the most significant challenges in India's security cooperation with the Gulf Cooperation Council Regional is

geopolitical tensions. The external interventions, shifting alliances, and complex rivalries (Sunni-Shia division) had changed the character of The Gulf region, which impacted the India's strategic calculus. India required a gentle balance between strategic interests and diplomatic neutrality, while maintaining relations with multiple competing actors, defuse these tensions (Moonakal, 2025). As India maintained relations with both sides, conflicts of the Iran–Saudi Arabia as rivalry complicated India's balancing strategy. One of the defining characters of regional geopolitics is longstanding rivalry between Iran and GCC states, especially Saudi Arabia. "This rivalry is rooted in ideological (Sunni–Shia division), political, and strategic differences (Pradhan, 2010)". This rivalry had redesigned the broader security environment of the Gulf. It influenced by conflicts of interest on the Sunni-Shia division, proxy wars, and regional alignments pacts. The GCC countries saw Iran and proxy of non-state actors' regional ambitions as major threats (Vakil, 2020). The present crisis of the Gulf region disrupted the supply of oil transit and energy infrastructure. It marked the weakness of global supply chains (Ron Bousso, 2026). Regional conflicts postured threat to maritime routes and diaspora safety.

The mounting interferences of global powers like the United States and China in the Gulf generated competition of strategic importance, influencing India's strategic manoeuvrability. The Gulf region has a battle field for great power politics, that included The United States, China and Russia. "China's growing economic and strategic presence, particularly in infrastructure investments and energy partnerships, created new challenges for India's influence in the region" (Kateb, 2024). Recent conflict in the Gulf (USA & Israel attack on Iran) has presented geopolitical tensions, which triggered, oil price volatility. The disruptions in supply route, reduced investors' confidence. The instability has broader impact for global markets and India's economic security (Ateeq Shariff, 2026).

Strategic Opportunities

Principally, with the UAE and Saudi Arabia, India has significantly supported defence ties with GCC countries, by joint military exercises, defence pacts, and intelligence-sharing mechanisms have improved strategic bondage (Brewster, 2018). Defence technology collaboration, arms trade co-production, and counterterrorism created opportunities of partnerships. Joint military exercises and naval force cooperation promoted interoperability and mutual trust. India conducted naval exercises with Oman on regular basis, defence ties with the UAE, that includes joint air and naval drills (Brewster, 2018). This exercise constructed capacity building and strength to meet regional security challenges: maritime threats and terrorism.

Defence collaboration has lingering into defence technology exchange and arms trade. India explored the possibility of defence exports to GCC states, mitigating objective of becoming a global defence manufacturing hub (Ministry of Defence [MoD], India, 2023). "GCC countries, in turn, are seeking to diversify their defence partnerships beyond traditional Western suppliers, creating space for India's entry into the regional defence market" (Koch, 2019). Counterterrorism collaboration is other area of cooperation. India and GCC countries have improved intelligence-sharing

instruments and synchronized their energies to combat extremist networks. Extradition treaty and joint mechanism is developed to curb terrorist financing (Pant & Taneja, 2020). The defence ties are increasingly connected to strategic infrastructure and logistics support. India got access the Duqm port facilities in Oman that promotes its operational activities the western Indian Ocean and the Gulf region. It strengthens security provider role (Roy, 2021).

The growth of defence engagements over all, between India and GCC countries reflected converging strategic interests. It helped regional stability, nonviolent maritime routes, and addressed non-traditional security concerns. These ties enhanced India's strategic presence in the Gulf and contributed balanced and multipolar regional security system (Brewster, 2018; Pant & Taneja, 2020).

5. Discussion

Security dimension, and strategic importance of India and GCC countries are very critical standing for both sides. India's energy security, supply of oil, LPG, are the main objectives. This is needed to peace and stability in the West Asia. India cannot see the GCC countries as only suppliers oil, LPG, fertilizer, but also India sees as a big market to GCC countries. India exports to the GCC countries in various things like food processing items, engineering goods, synthetic fibres and yarns, pharmaceuticals, chemicals products, textiles jewellery etc. the trade between both sides have reached nearly \$ 162 billion last year 2024 as per the record of the Government of India. (India-GCC Export 2024). Cultural exchanges between both sides are too important place these have. More than 8 to 9 million Indians are living the GCC countries, from construction, daily wages to high skill work forces professionals like doctors' engineers. India receives over \$100 billion annually in remittances, with a significant portion originating from GCC countries (World Bank, 2023). India sees the GCC as a geopolitical importance in its West Asia policy. India seeks opportunity to become global defence manufacturing hubs. Defence exports to the GCC countries can fulfil this objective. Both sides have increased cooperation in intelligence sharing, and countering financial supports of radicalization and terrorism.

6. Policy Recommendations

These are few recommendations for policy makers as following; There urgent need to expand naval exercise and cooperation and joint maritime exercises. To combat terrorism, it's very critical important to enhance intelligence-sharing frameworks. To do diversify relationships from energy into technology and cybersecurity and cultural sharing. To maintain strategic neutrality in regional conflicts while promoting diplomacy.

7. Conclusion

India-GCC relations are undergoing a strategic transformation, with security emerging as a central pillar. While challenges such as geopolitical rivalries and regional instability persist. Their partnership offers significant opportunities for mutual growth and regional stability. A proactive and balanced approach by India can ensure that this

partnership evolves into a comprehensive security alliance in the coming decades. India's policy is needed to the west Asia as broader perspective as importance of geopolitics, great power rivalries, balancing of interest between GCC countries and Isreal and Iran too. India has made formation of I2U2 (India, UAE, USA and Israel) to reshape power politics of Middle East. India has to strength its strategic ties between India and GCC Countries. India hosted first strategic meeting with GCC counties in New Delhi on 9th September 2024. Where Dr Jaishankar, spoken, that, "Our meeting today is not just an occasion to reflect on our achievements, but an opportunity to chart an ambitious. and far-reaching course for the future." And offered the framework of the 3 Ps: People, Prosperity and Progress. (Anil Trigunayat, 2024). Maritime security of Indian ocean trade route is connected to the GCC countries. This route is strategically very importance for global powers countries; USA, China, India, Japan and European Countries. Securing sea lane communication, and protection of trade vessels, counter anti-piracy mechanism created need to take very strategical position for India. India is adopting the balancing of interest between GCC and Isreal and Iran too. The current USA and Isreal attack on the Iran has changed the scenario of GCC and its geopolitical standing. India's relations to USA, Isreal, GCC countries, Iran due to the conflict, converted in a very complexed nature. While our neighbour Pakistan are gaining very importance position in the middle east countries due its mediation process to solve the conflict of USA-Iran.

Declaration Statement:

"I certify that the research work is my own and it is not previously published elsewhere."

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