

The Nexus of India and the Gulf Cooperation Council: The Dynamics of Partnership and Dissension

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Abstract

Strategic partnership represents one of the essential tools of inter-state engagement in International Relations, primarily from the post-Cold War period. Contrary to the erstwhile partnership agreements, the nature of alignment in this rubric demands more cooperation, interaction, flexibility and encompasses both strategic and non-military attributes at a much wide-ranging dimension, by defying the conventional understanding of alliance networks. Within this broad setting, India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) seek to redefine their partnership with a fresh orientation and nurture a reciprocal relationship through their shared political, historic and cultural linkages. As an emerging economy, India harps on the geo-strategic and geo-economic primacy of the GCC and acknowledges this regional bloc as its promising source of energy and reliable partner in pursuit of its national interest vis-à-vis China and Pakistan. Likewise, the Gulf monarchs are attracted to India's democratic political tradition and ever-growing significance in world politics and recognize New Delhi's unequivocal cooperation and support in advancing the politico-economic necessities of the region. This paper examines the efficacy of strategic, energy, maritime and economic security realms, and cultural quotients as crucial determinants behind the success of strategic partnership that these two regional powers seek to solidify in this polycentric world, drawing from the theoretical framework of alliance formation both from the Cold War and post-Cold War perspectives. This article also unravels the presence of divergences that affect their relationship and concludes by highlighting the significance of India-GCC partnership as the representation of South-South cooperation in this critical world scenario.

Keywords: India, GCC, strategic partnership, energy security, diaspora

1. Introduction

Strategic partnerships and alignments are appearing as intrinsic elements of the twenty-first century polycentric world. No longer are the states bothered by security driven commitments, instead, they choose partnerships that focus on multi-faceted and multi-dimensional attributes, where security is one of the quotients, if not the defining element. Gone are the days where partnerships were exclusively understood from the prism of national interest, and alliances were formed in response to threat (external or internal) and for fortifying national security. Over the years, the dynamics of International Relations has unleashed a new facet of engagement politics that is goal-driven and mutually compatible, irrespective of their resource, strength, and weakness and conflicting interests. Now the states prioritize negotiation over coercion in entering to such multi-lateral engagements that are innately guided by cooperation, interaction and flexibility and foster mutual trust and reliability with opportunities for long-term commitment between and among the participants and avoids crises in foreseeable future.

As one of the influential politico-economic-security organizations, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) represents a homogeneous intra-regional body by virtue of shared history, identity, and natural resources among its members and occupies a premier position for being situated at the geostrategic crossroads of the Persian Gulf. Established in May 1981 with the dynastic monarchies of Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the wake of Iranian Revolution (1979) and Iran-Iraq War (1980-84), the GCC aims at enhancing cooperation against regional and extra-regional threats and wields strong influence in world politics by leveraging its proven crude oil and natural gas reserves, considered to be the highest in the world. Being one of the fastest growing economies with trillion dollars of assets under its fold, this regional bloc therefore, inevitably invites attention from India, one of the influential emerging economies of the twenty-first century.

1.1 Objective and Approach

Keeping these ideas on the backdrop, this article seeks to explore the foundations behind partnership as well as obstacles that are faced by India and the GCC while maintaining their close association and contribute to the success of South-South cooperation as well. It begins with a brief analysis on the theoretical frameworks of alliances and partnerships drawing both from the Cold War and post-Cold War perspectives. The second segment explores the rationale behind the engagement of India and the GCC from their respective strategic vantage points. The next part of the article delves into some of the challenges and complexities that are faced by the two players while strengthening their partnerships, followed by concluding remarks.

This essay has categorically chosen the GCC and kept the other regional players, namely, the OPEC as the prominent supplier of crude oil in the international market, Turkey, Egypt, and Israel, out of its purview. However, its intension is not to belittle their significance in world politics but to restrict its focus strictly on the oil-rich

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monarchical regimes as one of the powerful trading blocs of this geographic locale, and India from South Asia that boast of a commanding position in the international platform as the prominent emerging economies, and both the players are significant contributors in the international economy, share a plethora of converging interests and advance South-South cooperation.

2. Explaining partnerships

One of the central arguments in the discipline of International Relations (IR) has been the formation and justification of partnership arrangements. The Cold War alignments were largely embedded in the shields of Realist and Neo-realist understandings in which, the primary intention of states was to uphold their national interests through various bilateral and multi-lateral security, military, and defensive pacts to deal with external threats and struggle for survival and was manifested in the form of balance of power (Morgenthau, 1948; Wolfers, 1962; Waltz, 1979). Walt (1987) clarifies further that states form alliances by calculating each other's aggregate power, geographical proximity, offensive capability, and aggressive intentions and accordingly resort to either balancing the power by aligning with the countervailing coalition partners to deter the principal belligerent power, or bandwagon with the potential aggressor. Likewise, Axelrod and Keohane (1985) are of the disposition that achieving cooperation in world politics can only be materialized in situations that contain a mixture of conflicting and complementary interests. The Constructivists (Barnett and Levy, 1991; Katzenstein, 1996), in contrast, posit a different explanation by harping on ideational analysis emanating from identities, norms and standards that explain the underlying rationale behind the formation of alliances and partnerships that the realists have overlooked.

From the post-Cold War period and more conspicuous in the twenty-first century, the entire discourse of partnerships and alignments has experienced a drastic transformation due to the change in the logic of alliance behaviour and emergence of polycentric world. Now, the states no longer prioritize national security as the underlying principle behind any engagement programme. They instead magnify economic, non-political and non-traditional security issues with more cooperative understanding, high degree of flexibility and less binding commitment at a relatively low cost of entry and exit (Ciorciari, 2014; Strüver, 2016). It involves, therefore, cooperation both from strategic and non-military perspectives, affirms people-to-people contact, business and economic engagements, scientific and technological collaboration, maritime and security partnerships and aim to unfold multi-layered cooperation in multitude spheres, where conventional security engagements have failed to satisfy.

The relationship between India and the GCC portray one of such cooperative behaviours where partners ensure a symbiotic understanding for the enhancement of their respective goals and aspirations. The Gulf remains one of the most prospective destinations that have the potential to sustain the ever-increasing hydrocarbon requirements of energy-thirsty India. Likewise, the GCC looks forward to exploring

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new engagement policies with developing economies like India. Accordingly, strategic partnership has emerged as a new tool of foreign policy mechanism that combines durability and flexibility, interdependence and trust by sharing common strategic interests and ensure peace and stability.

3. The dynamics of partnership

India shares a rich historic and cultural linkage with the Gulf partners through the establishment of trade networks between the ancient Indus valley civilization and Dilmun (the kingdom of Bahrain at present) across the Indian Ocean. During the colonial period, the British India's imperial interests of the Gulf were administered from the Bombay Presidency (Roy Chaudhury, 2018). Since India's Independence in 1947 the relationship with the Gulf underwent a radical transformation following the Kashmir issue, where the GCC supported Pakistan, its natural ally because of their shared religious identity. Although New Delhi's pledge for Non-Alignment, anti-colonialism, and undaunted support for Palestine made a deep impact on its Arab associates, the pro-western anti-Communist Gulf monarchs, however, preferred to remain under the military-security umbrella of the US. On the contrary, India's secular, socialist and neutral identity and choosing Moscow as its closest ally made the relationship with the Gulf a somewhat dormant one (Pethiyagoda, 2017).

The twin jolts of globalization and economic liberalism with the end of Cold War period gave India the desired impetus to re-evaluate the primacy of its Gulf partners chiefly due to its economic and cultural priorities and enhance maritime security. Hence, the region once again resurfaced as one of the primary areas of interest and led the policy makers to reinvent India's strategic locational advantage in the Indian Ocean rim, for which it has the potential to serve as the 'net security provider in the maritime domain' (Bhatia, 2014). The Gulf region is now characterized as India's 'extended neighborhood' because of its geopolitical location, geographical proximity and ancient civilizational and cultural linkages and became one of the cynosures of New Delhi's foreign policy preferences. Accordingly, there exist several factors that provide the thrust for the India-GCC relationship that may be discussed in the following manner.

3.1 Energy and economic imperatives

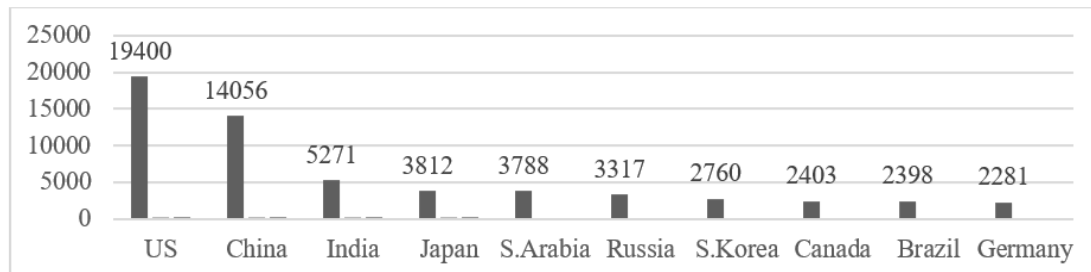
Being world's largest natural reserves of crude oil and natural gas, the GCC is one the leading suppliers of hydrocarbons both individually and as a collective entity to its South Asian partner, India. Figures 1 provides the glimpse of top ten biggest consumers of petroleum in the world where India occupies the third place.

Figure 1: Petroleum consumption in thousands of barrels per day by world's top ten countries, 2020

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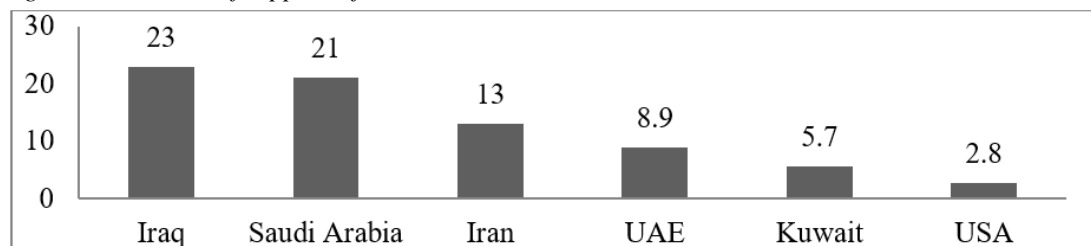
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Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy, 2020

Being one of the fastest growing economies of the world, the primary motive behind India’s alignment with the GCC is to get access to hydrocarbons for its expansion of industry and infrastructural necessities. Figure 2 depicts India’s innate dependency on the Gulf oil to augment its ever-expanding industries and engender its booming economy.

Figure 2: India’s chief supplier of crude oil in US \$ Billion, 2019



Source: World’s Top Crude Oil Exporting Countries, 2019.

Hence courting partnership with oil rich nations, thereby, became not a luxurious preference, rather an automatic choice. As a consequence, the prospective value of the Persian Gulf is further elevated to India’s priority list through the conclusion of India-GCC Free Trade Agreement. Any disruption in the supply of energy would have a serious implication both for India’s economic growth and loss of profit for the Gulf. Yet, oil is not the only tradable item between India and the GCC as the latter also imports a variety of commodities from India, that culminated in making the GCC as the largest trade partner, evident from Table 1 that highlights the value of trade India shares with the GCC in comparison to other regions.

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Table 1: India's Export-Import Data in US \$ Millions, 2017-2020

Country	Export			Import		
	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
GCC	39,390.64	41,621.97	40,466.26	64,079.19	79,715.68	80,464.64
ASEAN	34,203.70	37,473.72	31,546.58	47,133.69	59,321.32	55,369.87
EU	43,906.87	47,862.97	44,991.02	43,066.66	50,863.19	45,041.30
North America	54,167.42	59,099.25	59,564.28	35,269.81	44,641.92	43,997.00
South Asia	23,100.90	25,348.82	21,941.38	3,202.66	4,363.02	3,835.58

Source: Government of India, Department of Commerce, Export-Import Data Bank, 2020.

3.2 Security and strategic quotient

The strategic and geopolitical significance of the Persian Gulf across the Indian Ocean received a significant momentum under the former premiership of Dr. Manmohan Singh, who for the first time identified the Gulf as India's 'natural economic hinterland' that requires close associations, in the similar manner New Delhi maintains its relations with its South-East Asian neighbours through the prism of the "Look East Policy" (Government of India, 2005). He initiated, therefore, the historic "Look West Policy" in 2005 that promoted negotiations for an India-GCC Free Trade Agreement and a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement (CECA) with its individual member. The initiative, however, was unable to generate whole-hearted support from the Indian policy makers, until it was revived by his successor, Narendra Modi as soon as he came to power in 2014. He enhanced the scope of cooperation between the two under the twin threads of "Look West and Link West" to boost India's energy and strategic security (Raja Mohan, 2014).

Over the years, India has embarked on a series of strategic and security cooperative arrangements with both the GCC as a regional organization, as well as its individual members. Being bilateral in nature, these partnership programmes are flexible arrangements harping on mutual interests and collaborative efforts for dealing with both tangible and intangible issues ranging from vital areas of national interest such as the supply of defence equipment and technology, joint military and naval exercises and nuclear energy, to cooperation in the fields of diplomacy, trade and investments, science and technology, education, agriculture, banking, water and food security. (Ahmad, 2021).

3.3 Indian Ocean as the geopolitical pivot

Alfred Mahan (1890), the doyen of strategic studies, was the pioneer in identifying the expansion of naval and sea power as effective foreign policy mechanism in the consolidation of national power. The Indian Ocean is situated at the geostrategic crucible of internationally prominent waterways and shipping lanes of Persian Gulf, Suez Canal, Bab-el-Mandeb, Straits of Hormuz, Malacca, Sunda, and the Mozambique Channel encircling Asia, Australasia and Africa. Besides, the Ocean

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acts as the gateway from Asia to Europe and subsequently the Americas, thereby, provoking immense attraction from the global players, and in which, India is very keen to participate. The Ocean is responsible for transporting not only more than eighty percent of world's sea-borne trade, but also hosts more than half of the world's military conflicts in its surroundings. This necessarily amplifies the primacy of this Ocean that shares name with India and is located at India's backyard.

Consequently, the Indian Maritime Doctrine of 2009 (Government of India, 2009) has identified Persian Gulf, Arabian Sea and littoral states as vital to India's strategic interests to counterbalance China's encirclement policy. Accordingly, India has unleashed several multilateral approaches to upgrade and modernize its armaments with combat-ready outlook but with a benign intension of maintaining peace and stability by responding to security challenges, providing humanitarian aid and strengthening economic ties with the littoral states of the region on the one hand, and contain Chinese influence in the region on the other. The GCC monarchs, likewise, are active members of India-led Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS)¹ and display their reliance on New Delhi's intelligence sharing and surveillance, combating piracy, trafficking, maritime and narco-terrorism and maintain maritime patrolling across the Ocean frontiers, keeping in mind the growing presence of Iran, religious extremist groups and African pirates. Through their periodic joint naval exercises, training and cooperation, the partners strive to build "bridges of friendship" along the Indian Ocean (Government of India, 2018).

3.4 Shifting geopolitical calculations and 'Look East' policy

The declining influence of the US in the Middle East, notably since the Arab Spring of 2011, was overwhelmingly perceived by its regional allies. This might be glaringly discernible from Washington's non-intervention in Syria, Yemen and gradual retrenchment of its troops from Iraq. This sudden change in the US foreign policy decision might be explained from the theoretical formulation of 'offshore balance', pioneered by Mearsheimer and Walt (2016), who epitomize it as the 'realist grand strategy'. In their vision, the US should encourage the regional powers to solve their predicaments while Washington would extend military, economic and diplomatic support instead and intervene in extreme situations. By the same token, given the imposition of stringent tariff laws and restrictions by the European Union (EU) on the GCC regarding the issues of human rights, migration, trade and environmental protectionism, the materialization of the GCC-EU Free Trade Agreement (FTA) appeared as a distant dream, as the Gulf monarchs dubbed EU's attempts as surreptitious interference in their domestic affairs.

¹ Established in 2008, IONS is a thirty-six-nation club of littoral states of South, South East and West Asia, East Africa and Australasia with an aim of increasing maritime cooperation among the members. It seeks to provide security-humanitarian cooperation along the Indian Ocean under the steering leadership of India.

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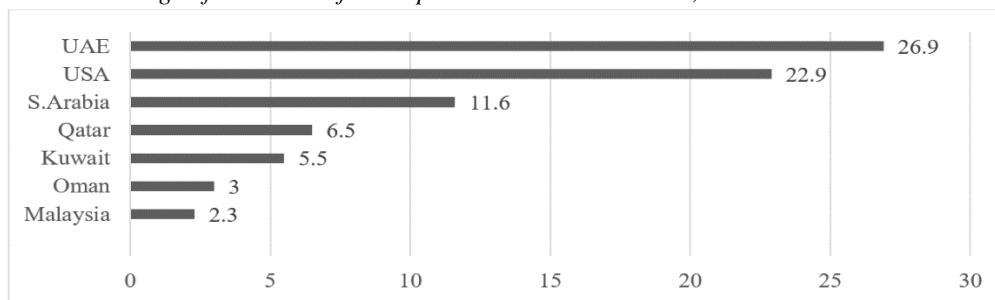
All these might provide the desired impetus for the Gulf to diversify its nature of partnership and shift its geopolitical calculations and alignment trajectories by looking eastward. This has become more apparent with the pre-eminence of India in the global market that resulted in the conclusion of the series of strategic partnerships with them. Accordingly, the Mumbai Declaration 2004, Delhi Declaration 2006, Riyadh Declaration 2010, and Manama Declaration 2017 have sealed strong partnership between the GCC and India, along with fostering defense and naval ties, and joint military exercises. Besides, given the rapid depletion of hydrocarbons and frequent fluctuation of oil price at the international market, the GCC has embarked on diversification of its economy that acts a positive endeavour in its trade relations with India. Hence it now seeks to promote its non-oil-based products such as aluminum, cement, fertilizers, and renewable energy where India is one of their profitable consumers (Government of India, 2020).

3.5 Remittance from the Indian diaspora

Today, the Indian diaspora constitutes a valuable asset for India’s booming economy due to their constant inflow of remittances and thereby, becomes an integral part of New Delhi’s partnership with the GCC and boosts India’s forex reserve. With the spurt in the oil based industrial job offers, the Gulf has emerged as one of the most attractable destinations with better employment opportunities, working conditions and quality of life for the Indians, for which, India is the highest recipient of remittances from the Indian diaspora with a staggering amount of USD \$78.61 billion (World Bank Migration and Development Brief 31, 2019). As an outcome, it has become a moral responsibility of the Government of India to protect the interest and ensure the safety and security of the Indian residents working in these areas, so as to augment the steady flow of foreign currency. New Delhi, simultaneously, plays a crucial role in engendering the GCC’s society through its experienced doctors, nurses, engineers, architects, technical professionals and a host of semi and unskilled workers.

Figure 3 uncovers that the GCC countries have a profound contribution to India’s foreign currency accumulation in the form of remittances.

Figure 3: Percentage of remittance from top seven countries to India, 2018



Source: Reserve Bank of India, 2018.

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3.6 ‘Soft Power’ diplomacy

Joseph Nye Jr. (1990) is credited for exploring the implications of intangible elements, such as, culture, ideology, education, technology, economic growth, ecology and other related factors in posing as essential instruments of power and security in world politics. He labels them as ‘soft’ or ‘co-optive power’ and depicts that a state evolves as an extraordinary one and its culture, ideology and identity would appear to be more credible and appealing towards the others, who would be willing to follow and accordingly, power is transformed into less coercive and less tangible element. India’s rich cultural heritage and identity as a pluralistic, tolerant, non-violent, and peace-loving nation, with profound admiration towards neutrality and non-interference in West Asia’s regional affairs have stipulated New Delhi’s soft power diplomacy with its Gulf neighbours. The Arab Spring, Saudi-Yemeni imbroglio, Saudi-Iran confrontation and intra-GCC schism centering Qatar once again attest India’s image as a neutral, moderate, dependable and viable partner without any willingness to embroil in the regional political turbulence. Further, it also hosts world’s largest concentration of the Muslim population, residing outside the Muslim majority countries that have culminated a close bonding between the two regions.

Additionally, the Indian Centre for Cultural Relations (ICCR) and the entertainment industry of Bollywood endeavour to disseminate the dynamism of Indian culture across the globe by promoting Indian festivities, art and culture, cinema, and foster cultural exchange programmes with other nations, thereby, strengthens its external relations through cultural diplomacy. This, according to the former Prime Minister, Dr. Singh, is a novel way of using the ‘soft power diplomacy’ for influencing the world about the growing importance of India. (Sterling, 2008).

4. Major challenges of partnership

In spite of having converging interests, there exist a number of constraints that determine GCC’s relation with India in augmenting their respective national, security strategic and economic interests.

4.1 The Sino-Pak factor in complicating GCC-India affinity

Though regional neighbours, both India and China are staunch contenders in the global market and are always on the competitive disposition when it comes to acquiring strategic and economic assets. As energy-craving nations, they compete with each other for getting access to hydrocarbons specially from the world’s proven reserves, for which, the GCC has emerged as their most promising partner. Through its dexterity in the economic, defense, technological and political realms China has not only managed to encircle India by establishing strategic ports along the Indian Ocean and inundating the littoral states with myriad defense and economic pacts and but poses a grave threat to India’s national security. By leveraging its permanent position at the UN Security Council, it has spoiled India’s entry to Nuclear Supplier Group in 2019 and blocks all India backed resolutions at the global platform.

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Likewise, Pakistan, another next-door neighbour, has always remained a permanent area of friction between India's partnership with the GCC. As a member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Islamabad enjoys special rapport with its Gulf counterparts by virtue of their shared religious identity and has successfully managed to prevent New Delhi's entry to this prestigious association, though India has the highest concentration of Muslim population outside the Islamic countries. Besides, the Kashmir issue has remained one of the major areas of discordant between India and Pakistan, who is backed by GCC in international forums. At the same time, the overarching China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as an extension of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) project has significant strategic repercussions on India's foreign policy that runs through the Kashmir valley (Rana, 2017). India therefore strives to weave a close-knit partnership with the GCC to respond to such threats and constraints it faces from its neighbours since 1947.

4.2 GCC's tilt towards China

The Sino-Gulf partnership has reached a new height, where China aims at lessening GCC's overarching dependence on Washington in terms of economic, military and political assistance and has already replaced the US as GCC's biggest trading partner. It has involved in the infrastructural development of the region primarily through the trillion-dollar project of Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and Maritime Silk Road Initiative (MSRI), that has bolstered strategic, economic, scientific cooperation between the two. The construction of the Duqm port at the Gulf of Oman seeks to take away most of the loads off the Persian Gulf and aspires to become one of the major logistic hubs of Middle East at the behest of China. Beijing has also established its first overseas military base in Djibouti to administer the UN humanitarian and anti-piracy mission in the Gulf of Aden, apart from maintaining the string of pearls in South Asian part of the Indian Ocean. As an obvious fact, India is a staunch critique of the BRI project and has displayed its consternation in international forums against this ambitious initiative of China.

Side by side, Middle-East constitutes one of the lucrative markets for arms-trade that rose to 87 percent from 2009-10 to 2014-18 (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2019). Although the US remains the principal exporter of ammunitions to the Gulf, China is also emerging as one of the major contenders by exporting its low-cost indigenous, sophisticated and futuristic weaponry to its Arab partners and account for 52 percent of the total arms export to the Arabs from 2014-18 (Ibid). India, in this context, is severely lagging behind.

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4.3 Indian diaspora and socio-economic insecurity

Table 2: Estimates of GCC's Foreign Residents from top five countries, 2015-2018

Nationality	Bahrain	Kuwait	Oman	Qatar	S. Arabia	UAE
India	316,784	1,012,104	766,735	650,000	154,000	2,600,000
Bangladesh	133,375	281,131	718,856	280,000	83,000	700,000
Pakistan	58,877	109,427	268,868	125,000	106,000	1,200,000
Philippines	36,796	213,989	45,213	260,000	71,000	525,530
Egypt	24,569	670,524	46,970	200,000	106,000	400,000

Source: *Gulf Labour Market and Migration, 2019 and Global Media Insight, 2021*

As revealed from the table above, the Gulf is one of the attractive destinations for Indian workers, who have outnumbered the rest of foreign residents in the region and remain as the backbone of the Gulf's booming development and industrial expansion, even by risking their lives. However, there appear frequent reports on their exploitation for being forced to work in hazardous conditions. This reiterates what Weiner (1986) once termed them as 'incipient diaspora' for being ethnically distinct from the host population, entitled only to work and not to receive citizenship, denied adequate salary, wage benefits and other social assistances, and felt perennially discriminated in their host countries. In recent years, this has resulted in the rise in suicide rates among these migrant workers with Saudi Arabia recording the highest rate followed by UAE (Mitra and Kasliwal, 2020). They face further hardships following the outbreak of global pandemic in 2019 and are denied required medical facilities and sanitation by their host companies.

As an outcome, there exist several negotiations between the Governments of India and the Gulf nations that seek to protect the rights of the Indian workers as they continue to sustain their living and contribute to the development of the Gulf's economy and strengthen India's ties, overcoming the difficulties they face in their daily lives.

4.4 Terrorism, Islamic financing and religious prejudices

Entrenchment of terrorism and religious extremism in India has unleashed inextricable linkage with the Gulf states, especially with UAE and Saudi Arabia that are often used as safe haven by the most-wanted perpetrators of India (Indian Express, 2016). These figures were the masterminds behind some of the most dreadful terrorist attacks in India and even alleged recruiters of transnational religious extremist groups that have jeopardized India's national security and stability. Besides, the spurt in the Saudi funded Islamic financing in the form of building Mosques and religious schools for the propagation of Wahhabism in South Asia, particularly in Pakistan, Bangladesh and the Kashmir valley of India have triggered in the proliferation of religious radicalism and militancy in the secular Indian political atmosphere. By the same token, the escalation of anti-Muslim sentiments and prejudicial treatments against religious minorities that have commenced with the ascendance of Modi government in 2014, have flared diplomatic upheavals within the Gulf partners as well.

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In response, India-GCC counterterrorist activities and intelligence sharing ventures have proved to be dexterous in dislodging subversive plots and dismantling terrorist bases in both the regions and have contributed to solidifying the GCC-India partnership. Besides, the extradition treaties have facilitated in bringing back Indian terrorists, who have transformed the Gulf as their preferred sanctuaries. Similarly, the Modi government is painstakingly resorting diplomatic measures to reinforce India's secular distinctiveness and pacify the GCC's anxiety regarding the safety and security of Indian Muslims (Ganguly and Blarel, 2020).

5. Conclusion

The nexus between GCC and India has been transformed into one of the solid foundations in the arena of international cooperation where the partners acknowledge each other's historic-cultural linkages, geo-strategic and geo-economic magnitude and diasporic implications for which they share a symbiotic relationship in the regional political fabric and has elevated South-South cooperation to a grand success. They seek to explore avenues for unleashing collaboration in a plethora of issues ranging not only from the conventional security realm but also in non-traditional security and socio-cultural spheres with an intension of maintaining stable and long-lasting partnerships without disturbing their national and external priorities. For them climate change, sustainable development, water conservation, agriculture, food security, renewable energy and digitization share similar space of importance with maritime and strategic security frontiers.

Though the GCC-India trade relations were adversely affected amidst the global pandemic, the Indian expatriates were laid off and remained stranded due to lockdown, the partners are working relentlessly to restore their economies through increased virtual diplomatic and political meetings and regular telephonic conversations and briefings. Together, they even provide healthcare, pharmaceutical and logistic supplies to each other to continue with their partnership goals through 'vaccine diplomacy'. As an outcome, the coveted South-South cooperation has once again gained primacy in this specific geostrategic setting where India and the GCC venture in a promising journey of enduring peace, stability and harmony to guarantee a lasting relationship reflected through their longstanding friendship that acts as the harbinger of regional growth and development.

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