

India's Engagement with GCC Countries: Post-Independence Era

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Abstract: India has been formulating an independent foreign policy during the post-independent era. Soon, the country achieved a key position at regional as well as at international political affairs because of its foreign policy principles. GCC country's collective entity has tremendous significance not only for India but also for countries of the world because of the huge amount of energy resources. The emergence of former PM Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru's leadership over the globe through the Non-Aligned Movement also affected India's foreign relations at large in the post-independent era. So, both India and GCC countries have been seeing each other to realize their foreign policy goals. On one side, India has a tremendous position to contribute to the development of GCC countries through her expatriate population, and on another side, India has been receiving crude oil and LPG gas from GCC countries. Thus, both India as well GCC countries have been seeing opportunities through engagement with each other. But, India's engagement with GCC countries resulted not only opportunities but also challenges. Therefore, this research paper will analyze what are the area of challenges and opportunities before India making bilateral relations with GCC countries in the post-independent era? And how and why cooperation between India and GCC countries will be benefited mutually in the future?

Key Words: GCC Countries, Energy, Expatriate, Bilateral, Relations.

1. INTRODUCTION:

When India got independence, the contours of international politics had much clear when the world was divided into two blocks. During the cold war era, every nation wanted to fulfill its national interest initially. Similarly, India under the auspicious leadership of its first Prime Minister, Pundit Jawaharlal Nehru formulated foreign policy in such a manner where the country would achieve its foreign policy goals in the international arena, without compromising India's sovereignty. The principles of India's foreign policy was affected and determined by the country's freedom struggle values like openly opposed military occupation, emphasis on resolving conflict through peaceful means, against neo-colonialism, and support of non-alignment movement. These foreign policy principles created a clean & good image of the country at the international level and were successful to keep away itself from cold war politics. Consequently, India preserved her independence to formulate the above principles in her foreign policy and achieved foreign policy goals for the nation-building of the country (Rahman, 2020). India's interaction with the region of the Gulf traces back over four millennia and their relations were very rich and dominated by trade and cultural ones. The British government made protectorates over several crucial Gulf States during the colonial period in India. India adopted an ideological approach towards West Asian nations in which it criticized colonialism of Western nations and supported national struggle and independence of regional countries of West Asia. Thus, it had emerged and played an instrumental role in the Non-Aligned Movement throughout the world. West Asia as the region has economic significance for India due to its geo-strategic location. India had historical links with the region and share people-to-people contact since ancient civilization. Both, India and the region had similar colonial experiences and struggles of independence. India had played an instrumental role in the Non-Alignment Movement, which shape the cold war policies of the region and enabled the region to face challenges posed due to the cold rivalry of two superpowers. India's Muslim population and Kashmir issue also set foreign policy approach towards regional countries because Pakistan highlighted Kashmir issue as an Islamic issue at various Islamic forums of West Asia. India supported Palestine's cause in the Israel-Palestine conflict due to its anti-colonial obligations. The major crude oil resources make the region pivotal for India's energy security and economic development of the country. In this regard, the country has been dependent on Gulf's energy supply and became the third-largest customer of energy come from the region. Therefore, stability in the region is necessary for a constant supply of energy from the Gulf. India's import of energy became a key factor in the foreign policy nation towards the region (PN, 2020).

2. INDIA'S GULF POLICY DURING THE 1950S

India has established and extended diplomatic relations with the region in the post-independence era. Newly independent countries of the region adopted a policy of non-Alignment to avoid the influence of the cold-war rivalry of two superpowers. The non-Alignment movement provided an opportunity to come together through various ideologies like pan-Arabism and Arab socialism for their integrity and sovereignty in the post-colonial era. India does not refer to the region as the Middle East which is a Eurocentric term. India refers to the region as a West Asia, having three distinct categories like the Gulf, West Asia, or North Africa. (Pourzand, 2013). Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru had emphasized West Asian countries because he wanted to unite Asian countries on Asianism. According to Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, an Asian region had been exploited by a colonial power. India and West Asian countries had a similar experience of exploitation and socio-economic problems. Both India and countries of the West Asia region had similar foreign policy goals, both wanted to stop foreign interferences and achieve economic development without compromising independence in the domestic as well as international arena. Nasser was a charismatic leader and champion to overthrow colonial power from the West Asian region and that attracted Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru's attention towards Nasser's leadership. When both leaders met the first time, it was not only the meeting of two leaders but it was the meeting of two different personalities like Nehru was a philosopher, visionary leader, and idealist while Nasser was a revolutionary and practical man. Both, Nasser and Nehru wanted to remove the exploitation of European power over people of Asia which affected the international arena positively. (Heptulla, 1991). Indian government under Jawaharlal Nehru leadership was not ready to recognize the independence of the newly created state of Israel in 1948. Because Nehru had not supported the idea of the creation of Israel as a settlement of Jews people on Palestinian land since the 1930s. He considered the settlement of Jews people on Palestinian land as interference of colonial power in the internal matter of Palestine. He further said that Palestine was not empty land and was ready for the settlement of foreigners. However, India was one of the key members among 13 nations that gave a vote against the United Nations' partition plan of Palestine and India did not recognize the sovereign state of Israel in the United Nations session in 1949. Finally, India recognized Israel as a sovereign state after a two-year delay in 1950 due to the anti-colonial belief of the country. (Vardhan, 2021). The ideological orientation of India's foreign policy provides a base to understand the foreign policy of the country. India followed the policy of non-alignment during the cold war era under the leadership of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. The main aim of non-alignment was to shape international order through Afro-Asian solidarity without discussion of the USA or USSR. The principles of the non-alignment movement are sovereignty, territorial integrity, and non-interference of internal matter of any country. These values of NAM became key principles of India's foreign policy. And these principles were reflected in the Nehru-Nasser associations by which India supported regional countries against Western interference, particularly in the Palestine issue and the Suez crisis in 1956. (Wadhawan, 2019). India established diplomatic relations with the Sultanate of Oman and has been developing strong economic and cultural ties since 1953. Both, India and the Sultanate of Oman are maritime neighbors and had a mutual bond in maritime affairs since the ancient period. Muskat, the capital of the sultanate of Oman was one of the key naval and trade routes between two countries since ancient times. Sultan of Oman, Qaboos bin Said had personal affection for India because of His Highness Sultan, Qaboos bin Said had received basic education in India. (Soni, 2017).

Even during the Cold War era, however, visits of significance and importance between Saudi Arabia and India continued to take place. King Saud ibn Abdul Aziz visited India in 1955 and when Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, the Indian prime minister, paid a visit to Saudi Arabia in 1956, he famously said, "I come to Saudi Arabia as a pilgrim of peace". This visit was the first-ever visit paid by the high political authority of India to the Gulf countries (Saudi Arabia) in the post-independence era. This visit boosted bilateral relationship with the Gulf in general and with Saudi Arabia in particular (Rahman, 2020). India recognized the sovereignty and independence of Kuwait and made official relations with Kuwait after the independence. Subsequently, a Consulate Office was opened in Bombay in 1961 (Baig, 2008). After the establishment of bilateral relations with Kuwait, Yacoub Abdulaziz al-Rasheed was appointed as the "first Kuwaiti ambassador" to India in 1962. The establishment of diplomatic relations had given new directions for their bilateral relations. When India was fighting with China in 1962, Kuwait was the first country to lend India its support. Kuwaiti Crown Prince and Prime Minister Sheikh Sabah Al-Salem Al-Sabah visited India in 1964. It was the first high official visit of Kuwaiti leaders to India. In response, Indian president Dr. Zakir Hussain was the first leader to visit Kuwait in 1965. It was also the first high official visit paid by an Indian leader to Kuwait (Rahman, Ph.D. thesis, 2017). Increased oil prices resulted at the beginning of developmental activities in the Gulf countries during 1973. And this resulted in bulk migration to the Gulf countries from India. Because surrounding countries and Egypt were not capable to fulfill the labor needs of Gulf countries. There was instability in the region and India was considered a non-interference and peace-loving country. Thus, India got opportunities to send their unskilled labor to the Gulf easily. India recorded 200 percentage of growth between 1970 to 1975 in their labor migration to the Gulf. Indian expatriates wanted to migrate to the Gulf countries because of their geographical location and financial benefits. Thus, there has been continuing bulk migration to the Gulf region. (Abraham, 2012). The number of workers living and working has

been increasing in the Gulf states like Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain, Oman, and UAE rapidly since the oil boom. The southern states like Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, and Kerala had dominated in-migration from India to the Gulf. The bulk expatriate worker found their job in unskilled and low wages related work while about 30 percent of migrating workers found white-collar jobs. (Burton, 2019).

Table: 1 **India's Trade with Gulf Countries (1966-67 to 1980-81)**
(Amount in Crore)

Year	Export	Import	Balance of Trade
1966-67	34.71	43.72	-9.01
1967-68	44.64	66.77	-22.13
1968-69	73.48	61.88	+11.60
1969-70	79.52	114.83	-35.31
1970-71	83.54	142.86	-59.32
1971-72	66.29	231.32	-165.03
1972-73	79.62	239.13	-159.51
1973-74	158.03	580.21	-422.18
1974-75	438.54	1141.71	-703.17
1975-76	555.73	1164.72	-608.99
1976-77	611.60	1356.54	-745.04
1977-78	620.13	1321.60	-701.47
1978-79	606.78	1368.79	-762.01
1979-80	630.97	2372.70	-1741.73
1980-81	656.05	3405.72	-2749.67

Source: Shubhas Narula's Book on India's Gulf Exports: Features Trends and Prospects, Anupama Publication, New Delhi, 1988, Page19.

Note: Book provides trade figures on a calendar year basis during the years 1957-1960.

Table 1 provides a detailed account of India's trade with Gulf countries during the period of 1966-67 to 1980-81. India's export increased from Gulf countries since the period of 1966-67 to 1972-73 the exception year of 1971-72. Simultaneously, India's export also increased from the beginning to 1973, with the exception year of 1968-69 and 1971-72. In the year 1971-72, both export and import decreased. Since 1973-74, India's export and Import increased tremendously from Gulf countries. It was the era of the oil embargo. Therefore, Gulf countries selected India as a trade partner in a broader way as compared to other nations. Thus, India's export increased tremendously from 1973-74 to 1980-81 the exception year of 1978-79. While India's imports increased throughout the period since 1973-74. In terms of trade balance, India's trade balance was negative during the entire period except for the year 1968-69.

Consequently, apart from trade and economic ties, the Indian diaspora became one of the key factors in India-GCC country's relations. These countries had launched massive developmental programs due to massive surplus revenues earned from oil and Indian labor that fulfilled the labor demand of these countries. The process of modernization of Gulf Cooperation Council countries requires a skillful person to discharge their duties of services. Indian labor grabbed this opportunity and dominated the goods and services of these countries. (Pasha, 2010).

In 1975, UAE's founding father, the late Shaikh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan paid a visit to India and met the then Indian Prime Minister, Mrs. Indira Gandhi. Several key agreements were signed between the two countries. It was a historic visit and that was reflected during the signing of agreements. In return, then Indian President, Fakhruddin Ali Ahamad visited the United Arab Emirates in 1976. The leaders of both countries were signed several agreements related to political and economic affairs during President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad's visit. Thereafter, a series of visits had been occurred to each other countries to fortify bilateral relations. President of Emirates, Shaikh Zayed paid again a visit to India in 1983. This visit further boosts bilateral relationships to the next level. (Tesorero, 2017). On the other side, then Indian Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi paid a two-day visit to the United Arab Emirates in 1981. India's Prime Minister met with top leaders of the United Arab Emirates including His Highness Shaikh Rashid bin Saeed Al Maktoum, Vice President and Prime Minister of Emirates, His Highness Dr. Shaikh Sultan bin Mohammad Al Qasimi, Member of the Supreme Council and Ruler of Sharjah and Shaikh Zayed Bin Sultan Al Nahyan. (Staff Report, Gulf news, 2016). Relations improved in 1982 with the visit of Indian Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi to Saudi Arabia. This visit made a ground for future development through the creation of the Joint Commission for Economic, Trade, Scientific, Technical and Cultural Cooperation. But throughout the 1980s Afghan conflict remained the cause of tension. At the time of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, both Saudi Arabia and India had a different opinions. The situation was like a cold war. Saudi Arabia was supporting the mujahideen and consequently the Taliban while on the other hand, India was supporting the Northern Alliance to lessen the influence of Pakistan in Afghanistan (Kemp, 2010).

3. INDIA'S POLICY OPTIONS AND GULF CRISIS (1990-1991)

The Gulf crisis was happened due to Iraq invaded and occupied state of Kuwait on August 2, 1990. The crisis was a big challenge for India's policymakers. India had a strong relationship with Iraq. At beginning of the crisis, India's silence on the crisis seemed to support Iraq. This led to mistrust between India Kuwait and other GCC allies. But in reality, New Delhi strongly criticized, condemned the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait, and called for immediate withdrawal of Iraq from the territory of Kuwait. But India did not criticize the Iraqi invasion and occupation openly. So, Kuwait and GCC countries considered India's support and sympathy towards Iraq. The Gulf crisis affected India's foreign policy in many ways. There was instability due to minority government in India, so the government did not show eagerness to resolve the matter with GCC countries. Rather than, the minority government of V.P. Singh was busy to evacuated Indian citizens from Kuwait and Iraq. As a result, the Indian govt. evacuated 1,00,000 citizens from Iraq and 25,000 citizens from Kuwait. India faced and lost several losses due to India's silence on the Gulf crisis in the beginning. Indian worker lost their job in the Gulf countries and returned to their native country. India's crude oil supply also decreased from both Iraq as well as Kuwait and forced India to search for new alternatives options regarding the import of oil. (Pasha, 2010). On one side, India imported about 40 percent of its oil requirement annually from Iraq and Kuwait and had a strong trade relationship with Iraq. India had about 185,000 migrant workers in the areas of conflict area of Iraq and Kuwait. On the other side, Iraq was a secular state in West Asia and had been dominated by Muslim feudal kingdom and had been the traditional ally of India. Iraq also supported India's claim on the Kashmir issue. India adopted an undecided approach at the beginning of the Iraq-Kuwait conflict. India demanded immediate withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait but India did not support external interference into the matter and said that "Arab problems are best solved by Arabs themselves." (Malik, 1991). V. P. Singh's government showed unwillingness to condemn Iraq. Because, on one side, India had a strong relationship with Iraq and was a traditional ally of the country. On the other side, around 180,000 Indian workers were trapped in the conflict zone and there was a fear of their return. Later, V.P. Singh's government condemned the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and demanded the withdrawal of Iraq from Kuwait. India did not play its due key role in the peacekeeping mission through the Non-Aligned Movement because there was chaos and instability in India due to the implementation of the Mandal commission report in the country. However, I.K. Gujaral, foreign minister of India, paid a visit to the Soviet Union and the US for the expected peace process of the Gulf crisis because V. P. Singh's government was considered as pro-Saddam Hussein in India as well as abroad. (Mahanty, 1992). India's main objective, at the initial stage, was the safety and security of millions of expatriate workers, who worked in Iraq, Kuwait, and the region. So, India was successful to get permission from the UN sanction committee to give 10,000 tons of grain to the Indian expatriate worker at the Iraqi port of Basra carried by the cargo vessel. The Indian government also sent two passenger ships and an Air Force plane to vacate Indian from conflict areas. New Delhi constantly voiced against any unilateral action outside the framework of the United Nations. That means the country was against the collective military action of the US and Britain. In this regard, India's foreign minister I. K. Gujral addressed the UN General Assembly on September 28, 1990, and criticized "foreign military presence" in the region and said that "it would be to everyone's advantage if these are deducted as soon as possible." (Malik, 1991). V. P. Singh government allowed American warplanes for overflights in September 1990 while Chandra Shekhar government granted permission to them refueling facilities. Both, Congress and Janta (S) made charges against the V.P. Singh government for granting permission to the American war-planes as an air corridor but the V.P. Singh government denied the charges levied by opposition parties. It was reported that American warplanes refueled at Bombay, Madras, and Agra airports had lethal weapons and it was the duty and responsibility of the Indian authority to inspect the American warplanes. (Mahanty, 1992) India's approach on the issue marked no clear-cut direction under both governments led by V. P. Singh and Chandra Shekhar and that resulted in India's policy negatively due to its weak relationship with GCC as well as Western allies. So, in this situation, India backed United Nations Security Council Resolution 678 in November 1990. The UN resolution authorized the use of force against the state of Iraq if Iraq refused to withdraw its forces from Kuwait before 15 January 1991. But India did not become part of coalition forces against Iraqi forces. Though India was pressurized by US-led coalition allies and the country supported the US-led coalition allies through sharing military intelligence and support. In January 1991, New Delhi granted permission to American Warplanes to refuel at India's fuel port. Through this decision, India's government get criticism at domestic while the country made clear to the US as well as the world which side India stood on (Wadhawan, 2019). In India, there was a shift in government from the Janata Dal government led by V.P. Singh to the Janta-Secular led by Chandra Shekhar, between the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait and allied power's coalition use of force on Iraq to liberate Kuwait. V. P. Singh's government remained in power for more than six months from 10 November 1990 to May 1991. When Sri Chandra Shekhar assumed power of government, there were several challenges faced by India's government domestically like unity and integrity and its poor performance in the economy. The outbreak of the Gulf war deteriorated India's financial problems further. Simultaneously, India posed a serious challenge to its foreign policy and think whether it supports allied powers who seem sure winners or stand with a traditional ally

like Iraq. The Gulf war was the first serious diplomatic challenge to its foreign policy in the post-cold war era. (Mahanty, 1992). After the outbreak of war, the Indian government led by Janata Dal wanted an immediate truce between parties. A settlement was negotiated between Iraq and Kuwait under UN support and ultimately Iraqi troops withdrew from Kuwait. But both Congress and Janata Dal criticized for economic sanctions and criticized for not giving enough time to Iraq for work. Both parties also claimed that sanctions did not match with the objectives of the UN. Because the UN's objective was to liberate Kuwait while the US wanted to destroy Iraq. But there was one key difference between Congress and Janata Dal, Congress criticized the UN openly while Janata Dal was not in a position to criticize the UN. (Mahanty, 1992) Janata Dal led by V.P. Singh in power had a soft corner for Saddam Hussein of Iraq. With time, the US showed its military strength in the Gulf and counterattack on Iraq then Janata Dal led by V.P. Singh lost the power. The new government in New Delhi, led by Chandra Shekhar adopted a pro-US and anti-Iraq policy. In beginning, both Congress and Janata Dal adopted the pro-Iraqi approach while Janata Dal (S) led by Chandra Shekhar changed his government's approach towards the Gulf crisis. The spoke person in the external affairs ministry of India said that the UN's Security Council 678 did not authorize the US to fight or initiate war under UN auspicious on the fourth day of war against Iraq. The Bhartiya Janata Party was the only party other than Chandra Shekhar's Janata Dal (S) who backed the Chandra Shekhar government on refueling the decision of US warplanes in India. The BJP said that "as India had supported all the U.N. resolutions on the Gulf conflict including the one recommending "use of force" against Iraq, it was duty-bound, under the U. N. Charter, to extend all help to the allied forces." The BJP leaders further supported his party decision and said that if the UN authorize the US war against Iraq so what is wrong with providing refueling facilities to American warplanes. (Mahanty, 1992) India's relations got strained with Kuwait during the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. India's action appeared less sympathetic towards Kuwait and silent acceptance of Iraqi action towards Kuwait. India also quickly closed its embassy in Kuwait. These actions were looked at by Kuwaiti leadership as the pro-Iraqi posture of the Indian government. After the liberation of Kuwait, the Indian government had engaged itself with full capacity for the revival of bilateral relations with Kuwait. India has used several strategies for the improvement of political and diplomatic relations. In this connection, India's External Affairs Minister Madhav Singh Solanki visited Kuwait in February 1992. It was the first ministerial visit since the Iraqi occupation of Kuwait. The foremost objective of the visit was to rebuild bilateral relations with Kuwait from a larger perspective. L.L. Malhotra secretary in the Ministry of External Affairs who accompanied the minister claimed that the visit was a "diplomatic triumph" (Rahman PhD. Thesis, 2017). India's relations with the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had never been hostile, at the same time Both India and Saudi Arabia had not strong relations. India's strong relationship with other regional players like Egypt, Iraq, and Iran and treaty with the former USSR also developed distrust in the mind of the Saudi Arabian monarchy. Thus, no Saudi ruler had paid a visit to India for the last five decades while the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia had maintained strong relations with the state of Pakistan in the 1990s. (Pasha, 2010).

4. CONCLUSION:

After the independence, India had been engaged with all corners of the world to achieve its foreign policy goals under the leadership of Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru. Soon, India emerged as one of the leaders of NAM. Since the beginning, the Gulf region is significant for India because of its strategic location and massive crude oil reserves. India established diplomatic relations with Gulf countries as well as other regional countries in the post-Independence era. Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru and Nasser of Egypt had strong relations and that reflected positively while India made a relationship with the Gulf countries. India supported Palestinians in the Israel-Palestine conflict even in the post-independence era. Thus, India had a good with the Gulf countries relationship during the 1960s. India's export increased from Gulf countries since the period of 1966-67 to 1972-73. Since 1973-74, India's export and Import increased tremendously from Gulf countries. It was the era of the oil embargo. Gulf countries selected India as a trade partner in a broader way as compared to other nations. The chunk of labor was migrated to the Gulf countries from India because these Gulf countries earned massive surplus money from the oil embargo. The migrant workers played an instrumental role in the development of Gulf countries. India also earned currency in terms of remittances from Gulf countries. But India faced challenges due to the Gulf crisis of 1990. The Gulf countries as well as Kuwait considered India's salient approach towards crisis as an acceptance and more sympathetically towards Iraq. Consequently, India's relations deteriorated with Gulf countries during the Gulf crisis. India faced challenges in many ways like the Indian diaspora faced problems in conflict and also returned to India. India's supply of oil also decreased from Iraq as well as Kuwait. India's leaders visited Kuwait as well as other Gulf countries to rebuild their bilateral relationship after the end of the crisis. Soon, India was successful to make their bilateral relations in a better way with Gulf countries. In nutshell, India faced several challenges while making bilateral relations with the Gulf countries and resolved successfully. Presently, India has been growing their relationship with the Gulf countries at the multi-dimensional level.

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