

IN PERSIAN GULF LITTORAL, COOPERATIVE SECURITY IS KEY

India's interests would be best served if stability in the region is ensured this way

The United Nations defines this body of water as the Persian Gulf. The lands around it are shared by eight countries (Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), all members of the UN. There is a commonality of interest among them in being major producers of crude oil and natural gas, and thereby contributing critically to the global economy and to their own prosperity. This has added to their geopolitical significance. At the same time, turbulence has often characterised their *inter se* political relations.

A framework :

For eight decades prior to 1970, this body of water was a closely guarded British lake, administered in good measure by imperial civil servants from India. When that era ended, regional players sought to assert themselves. Imperatives of rivalry and cooperation became evident and, as a United States State Department report put it in 1973, 'The upshot of all these cross currents is that the logic of Saudi-Iranian cooperation is being undercut by psychological, nationalistic, and prestige factors, which are likely to persist for a long time.' The Nixon and the Carter Doctrines were the logical outcome to ensure American hegemony. An early effort for collective security, attempted in a conference in Muscat in 1975, was thwarted by Baathist Iraq. The Iranian Revolution put an end to the Twin Pillar approach and disturbed the strategic balance. The Iraq-Iran War enhanced U.S. interests and role. Many moons and much bloodshed later, it was left to the Security Council through Resolution 598 (1987) to explore 'measures to enhance the security and stability in the region'.

Any framework for stability and security thus needs to answer a set of questions: security for whom, by whom, against whom, for what purpose? Is the requirement in local, regional or global terms? Does it require an extra-regional agency? Given the historical context, one recalls a Saudi scholar's remark in the 1990s that 'Gulf regional security was an external issue long before it was an issue among the Gulf States themselves.'

The essential ingredients of such a framework would thus be to ensure: conditions of peace and stability in individual littoral states; freedom to all states of the Gulf littoral to exploit their hydrocarbon and other natural resources and export them; freedom of commercial shipping in international waters of the Persian Gulf; freedom of access to, and outlet from, Gulf waters through the Strait of Hormuz; prevention of conflict that may impinge on the freedom of trade and shipping and: prevention of emergence of conditions that may impinge on any of these considerations. Could such a framework be self-sustaining or require external guarantees for its operational success? If the latter, what should its parameters be?

The GCC and the U.S. link :

The past two decades have revalidated William Fulbright's observation that statesmen often confuse great power with total power and great responsibility with total responsibility. The war in Iraq and its aftermath testify to it. The U.S. effort to 'contain' the Iranian revolutionary forces, supplemented by the effort of the Arab states of the littoral (except Iraq) through the instrumentality of the Gulf Cooperation Council, or GCC (May 1981), to coordinate, cooperate and integrate to 'serve the sublime objectives of the Arab Nation' initially met with success in some functional fields and a lack of it in its wider objectives.

In the meantime, geopolitical factors and conflicts elsewhere in the West Asian region — Yemen, Syria, Libya — aggravated global and regional relationships and hampered a *modus vivendi* in

U.S.-Iran relations that was to be premised on the multilateral agreement on Iran's nuclear programme agreed to by western powers and the Obama Administration but disowned by U.S. President Donald Trump whose strident policies have taken the region to the brink of an armed conflict.

Perceptions of declining U.S. commitment to sub-regional security have been articulated in recent months amid hints of changing priorities. This is reported to have caused disquiet in some, perhaps all, members of the GCC, the hub of whose security concern remains pivoted on an Iranian threat (political and ideological rather than territorial) and an American insurance to deter it based on a convergence of interests in which oil, trade, arms purchases, etc have a role along with wider U.S. regional and global determinants.

An evolving transformation :

It is evident that a common GCC threat perception has not evolved over time and has been hampered by the emergence of conflicting tactical and strategic interests and subjective considerations. The current divisions within the organisation are therefore here to stay. These have been aggravated by the global economic crisis, the immediate and longer term impact of COVID-19 on regional economies, the problems in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), and the decline in oil prices.

One credible assessment done recently suggests that in the emerging shape of the region, 'Saudi Arabia is a fading power, UAE, Qatar and Iran are emerging as the new regional leaders and Oman and Iraq will have to struggle to retain their sovereign identities. The GCC is effectively ended, and OPEC is becoming irrelevant as oil policy moves to a tripartite global condominium. None of this will necessarily happen overnight and external intervention could interfere in unexpected ways ... But it is fair to say that the Persian Gulf as we have known for at least three generations is in the midst of a fundamental transformation.'

With the Arab League entombed and the GCC on life-support system, the Arab states of this sub-region are left to individual devices to explore working arrangements with Iraq and Iran. The imperatives for these are different but movement on both is discernible. With Iran in particular and notwithstanding the animosities of the past, pragmatic approaches of recent months seem to bear fruit. Oman has always kept its lines of communication with Iran open; Kuwait and Qatar had done likewise but in a quieter vein, and now the UAE has initiated pragmatic arrangements. These could set the stage for a wider dialogue. Both Iran and the GCC states would benefit from a formal commitment to an arrangement incorporating the six points listed above; so would every outside nation that has trading and economic interests in the Gulf. This could be sanctified by a global convention.

Record shows that the alternative of exclusive security arrangements promotes armament drives, enhances insecurity and aggravates regional tensions. It unavoidably opens the door for Great Power interference.

India's ties :

How does India perceive these developments and how do they impact our strategic interests and concerns? Locating the Persian Gulf littoral with reference to India is an exercise in geography and history. The distance from Mumbai to Basra is 1,526 nautical miles and Bander Abbas and Dubai are in a radius of 1,000 nautical miles. The bilateral relationship, economic and political, with the GCC has blossomed in recent years. The governments are India-friendly and Indian-friendly and appreciate the benefits of a wide-ranging relationship. This is well reflected in the bilateral trade of around \$121 billion and remittances of \$49 billion from a workforce of over nine million. GCC

suppliers account for around 34% of our crude imports and national oil companies in Saudi Arabia and Abu Dhabi are partners in a \$44 billion investment in the giant Ratnagiri oil refinery. In addition, Saudi Aramco is reported to take a 20% stake in Reliance oil-to-chemicals business. The current adverse impact of the pandemic on our economic relations with the GCC countries has now become a matter of concern.

The relationship with Iran, complex at all times and more so recently on account of overt American pressure, has economic potential and geopolitical relevance on account of its actual or alleged role in Pakistan and Afghanistan. Iran also neighbours Turkey and some countries of Central Asia, the Caucasus and the Caspian Sea region. Its size, politico-technological potential and economic resources, cannot be wished away, regionally and globally, but can be harnessed for wider good.

India has eschewed involvement in local or regional disputes. Indian interests do not entail power projection; they necessitate in their totality, peace and regional stability, freedom of navigation and access to the region's markets in terms of trade, technology and manpower resources. Indian interests would be best served if this stability is ensured through cooperative security since the alternative — of competitive security options — cannot ensure durable peace.

Meanings of Difficult Words :

- ❖ **Persian Gulf** (noun) – Persian Gulf is also known as Arabian Gulf. It is one of the most critical bodies of water, located in the heart of the Middle East between Iran and the Arabian Peninsula. It is a mediterranean sea in Western Asia. It is considered to be an extension of the Indian Ocean. It connects with the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea through the Strait of Hormuz, which is 30 to 60 miles (48 to 96 kilometers) wide. The lands around it are shared by eight countries (Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates), all members of the UN.
- ❖ **littoral** (noun) – seashore, seaside, coastal region.
- ❖ **(be) best-served** (adjective) – (be) more successful.
- ❖ **commonality** (noun) – commonness, resemblance, similarity, similitude, similar nature.
- ❖ **thereby** (adverb) – as a result of that.
- ❖ **prosperity** (noun) – wealth, good fortune, welfare.
- ❖ **geopolitical** (adjective) – relating to the study of the geographical factors (a country's position on the earth, size, climate, and natural resources & etc..) in world politics and inter-state relations.
- ❖ **add to** (verb) – increase, magnify, intensify, amplify.
- ❖ **turbulence** (noun) – instability, troubles, disturbance, confusion.
- ❖ **characterise** (verb) – depict, represent, describe, outline.
- ❖ **inter se** (adverb) – (Latin phrase) between themselves; among themselves.
- ❖ **administer** (verb) – manage, control, regulate.
- ❖ **measure** (noun) – step, course of action, plan, procedure. (“for good measures” phrase means “in addition to other things”).
- ❖ **imperial** (noun) – monarchical, authoritative, high-handed/domineering.
- ❖ **seek** (verb) – try, attempt, work towards, strive.
- ❖ **assert oneself** (verb) – behave confidently, be assertive, put oneself forward, exert one's influence.
- ❖ **imperative** (noun) – necessary condition, essential requirement, necessity.
- ❖ **rivalry** (noun) – opposition, antagonism, friction, enmity.
- ❖ **upshot** (noun) – result, consequence, outcome/effect.
- ❖ **cross current** (noun) – conflicting tendency; conflicting process.
- ❖ **undercut** (verb) – undermine, weaken, impair, damage.

- ❖ **nationalistic** (adjective) – pro/supporting/ favouring one’s country.
- ❖ **prestige** (adjective) – status, reputation, image, prominence.
- ❖ **persist** (verb) – continue, carry on, go on, get going (despite opposition/difficulty).
- ❖ **doctrine** (noun) – principle, belief, rule.
- ❖ **hegemony** (noun) – leadership, dominance, authority.
- ❖ **collective** (adjective) – combined, united/joint, cooperative (by all people as a group).
- ❖ **thwart** (verb) – prevent, hamper/hinder, obstruct/block.
- ❖ **Baathist** (adjective) – Relating to the Baath Party. (Ba’ath party-Iraq was a political party established in 1951 by Fuad al-Rikabi. Ba’ath (in Arabic) meaning “renaissance” or “resurrection”). Saddam Hussein who, had become the president of the Baath party in 1979, continued to lead this party till 2003).
- ❖ **put an end to** (phrase) – stop, terminate, abolish.
- ❖ **Iranian Revolution** (noun) – It is a popular uprising/ revolt of the society against the state in 1978–79. The impact of the revolution that saw the ouster of Iran’s Pahlavi dynasty king, Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi (who was supported by the United States), and the installment of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini as the supreme leader of the Islamic Republic (supported by various Islamist and leftist organizations and student movements).
- ❖ **Twin Pillar policy/approach** (noun) – U.S. policy to promote Iran and Saudi Arabia as local guardians of U.S. interests in the Persian Gulf region. The policy collapsed suddenly in 1979, when the shah (king) of Iran was overthrown in a revolution that brought to power a republican regime opposed to U.S. influence in the region.
- ❖ **strategic balance** (noun) – it refers to the relative capabilities (economic, military, nuclear, technological) of the two sides to achieve their respective strategic objectives in relation to the other. It is another term for the traditional concept of ‘balance of power’.
- ❖ **interest** (noun) – benefit, advantage.
- ❖ **many moons (ago)** (phrase) – a very long time.
- ❖ **bloodshed** (noun) – killing, carnage, massacre.
- ❖ **context** (noun) – circumstance, condition, situation.
- ❖ **scholar** (noun) – academic, intellectual, learned person.
- ❖ **ingredient** (noun) – element, part, component.
- ❖ **exploit** (verb) – take advantage of, make use of, utilize.
- ❖ **hydrocarbon** (noun) – it is an organic compound consisting entirely of hydrogen and carbon which are the main components of petroleum and natural gas.
- ❖ **outlet** (noun) – means of release.
- ❖ **strait** (noun) – a narrow sea passage (connecting two seas); channel, stretch of water.
- ❖ **impinge on** (verb) – influence, have an effect on, encroach on.
- ❖ **consideration** (noun) – a factor, point, concern, matter (taken into account while judging something).
- ❖ **self-sustaining** (adjective) – self-sufficient, self-reliant, self-standing.
- ❖ **statesman** (noun) – senior politician, respected political figure, political leader.
- ❖ **aftermath** (noun) – consequences, effects, results, repercussions.
- ❖ **testify** (verb) – give evidence, be a witness, be proof of; confirm, evidence, prove.
- ❖ **supplement** (verb) – augment, increase, add to, boost.
- ❖ **instrumentality** (noun) – mode of expression, means, method.
- ❖ **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** (noun) – a regional intergovernmental political and economic union consisting of all Arab states of the Persian Gulf except Iraq, namely: Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates.
- ❖ **sublime** (adjective) – supreme, total/ complete, extreme.
- ❖ **objective** (noun) – aim, intention, purpose.

- ❖ **lack of** (noun) – absence, deficiency, unavailability, fall short of.
- ❖ **aggravate** (verb) – worsen, compound, exacerbate, increase, intensify.
- ❖ **hamper** (verb) – hinder, obstruct, impede.
- ❖ **modus vivendi/modi vivendi** (noun) – agreement, deal, understanding, settlement (between two conflicting parties); Modus vivendi is a Latin phrase that literally means “mode of living” or “way of life”.
- ❖ **premise on** (verb) – base on (something).
- ❖ **multilateral** (adjective) – involving many different countries (in which all WTO member countries are party to the agreement).
- ❖ **disown** (verb) – reject, deny, abandon, renounce.
- ❖ **strident** (adjective) – in an excessively forceful way; high-pitched, loud & harsh.
- ❖ **brink** (noun) – edge/verge/end (of something).
- ❖ **perception** (noun) – understanding, discernment, recognition/realization; interpretation.
- ❖ **articulate** (verb) – express, point out, mention.
- ❖ **amid** (preposition) – in the middle of, surrounded by; during.
- ❖ **disquiet** (noun) – distress, unease, worry/concern.
- ❖ **perhaps** (adverb) – maybe, possibly.
- ❖ **hub** (noun) – centre, centre of activity, focal point.
- ❖ **pivot on** (verb) – rely, depend, centre, hinge.
- ❖ **ideological** (adjective) – relating to a system of ideas.
- ❖ **territorial** (adjective) – geographical; relating to a specific territory (area/region).
- ❖ **insurance** (noun) – protection, defence, shelter.
- ❖ **deter** (verb) – prevent, stop, put off/discourage.
- ❖ **convergence** (noun) – coming together, intersection, confluence (a process of merging).
- ❖ **determinant** (noun) – factor, issue, concern.
- ❖ **evolve** (verb) – develop, progress, advance.
- ❖ **subjective** (adjective) – personal, individual, internal/emotional.
- ❖ **here to stay** (phrase) – be widely accepted, possibly be permanent, likely be present for a long time.
- ❖ **credible** (adjective) – believable, acceptable, reasonable, convincing.
- ❖ **fading** (adjective) – declining, deteriorating, waning, disappearing.
- ❖ **sovereign** (adjective) – independent, self-governing; having independent authority and the right to govern itself.
- ❖ **irrelevant** (adjective) – immaterial, unrelated, not germane, unimportant/insignificant.
- ❖ **tripartite** (adjective) – involving three parties.
- ❖ **condominium** (noun) – In international law, “condominium” refers to territory that is governed/controlled by multiple sovereign powers/countries/states.
- ❖ **necessarily** (adverb) – inevitably, certainly, surely, undoubtedly.
- ❖ **overnight** (noun) – immediately, very quickly, instantly.
- ❖ **in the midst of** (phrase) – in the middle of.
- ❖ **Arab League** (noun) – The Arab League or the League of Arab States is a regional organization in the Arab world, which is located in Africa and Western Asia. The Arab League was formed in Cairo on 22 March 1945 initially with six members: Egypt, Iraq, Transjordan, Lebanon, Saudi Arabia, and Syria and now it has 22 member states.
- ❖ **entomb** (verb) – bury, put away (put something in the designated place).
- ❖ **discernible** (adjective) – visible, detectable, noticeable, identifiable.
- ❖ **notwithstanding** (adverb) – nevertheless, nonetheless, anyway, at any rate.
- ❖ **animosity** (noun) – hostility, antagonism, enmity/aversion.
- ❖ **pragmatic** (adjective) – empirical, realistic/ actual, practical.
- ❖ **bear fruit** (phrase) – yield/get results, succeed, be effective.
- ❖ **vein** (noun) – mood, temper, disposition, frame of mind.

- ❖ **sanctify** (verb) – approve, sanction, vindicate, endorse, justify.
- ❖ **convention** (noun) – treaty, agreement, protocol, pact.
- ❖ **armament** (noun) – weapons, arms, guns.
- ❖ **drive** (noun) – campaign, movement, push; competition, contest.
- ❖ **open the door** (phrase) – create opportunities.
- ❖ **tie** (noun) – bond, association, relationship.
- ❖ **perceive** (verb) – view, regard, consider.
- ❖ **with reference to** (phrase) – with regard to, as regards, with respect to.
- ❖ **nautical** (adjective) – naval, marine, maritime.
- ❖ **bilateral** (adjective) – involving two groups or countries.
- ❖ **blossom** (verb) – develop, progress, evolve.
- ❖ **reflect** (verb) – indicate, show, reveal, exhibit.
- ❖ **remittance** (noun) – payment, allowance, (money) settlement.
- ❖ **foreign exchange remittance** (noun) – money transfers (called remittance) from a foreign worker employed outside the country to family, friends or relatives residing in home countries. In many countries, remittance accounts for a significant portion of a nation's gross domestic product or GDP.
- ❖ **workforce** (noun) – workers, employees.
- ❖ **account for** (phrasal verb) – constitute, make up, comprise, form.
- ❖ **stake** (noun) – share; financial involvement, equity.
- ❖ **adverse** (adjective) – unfavourable, disadvantageous, bad.
- ❖ **pandemic** (noun) – the worldwide spread of a new disease; The illness spreads around the world and typically affects a large number of people across a wide area.
- ❖ **matter of concern** (phrase) – something which causes worry.
- ❖ **overt** (adjective) – clear, visible, noticeable.
- ❖ **relevance** (noun) – significance, importance, appropriateness.
- ❖ **politico-technical** (adjective) – relating to the technology that impacts the political landscape.
- ❖ **wish away** (phrasal verb) – try to stop/eliminate something (problem) just by wishing that it did not exist.
- ❖ **harness** (verb) – put to use, utilize/exploit, make use of.
- ❖ **eschew** (verb) – abstain from, refrain from, give up, forgo.
- ❖ **entail** (verb) – necessitate, make necessary, require.
- ❖ **necessitate** (verb) – require, need, demand.
- ❖ **durable** (adjective) – long-lasting, enduring, persisting.