



## Persian Gulf Region

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### Why in News

The Persian Gulf region has the presence of the **major producers of crude oil and natural gas**, and thereby contributing **critically to the global economy**.

Thus, **maintaining peace in the geopolitically significant region through cooperative security** by the regional members and major world economies is one of the best solutions to stabilize the region politically and economically.

### Persian Gulf Region

- The lands around the Persian Gulf are shared by **eight** countries namely, **Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates**.
- These all **eight** countries are **members of the United Nations**.
  - United Arab Emirates (UAE), Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Oman, Qatar, Kuwait are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).
  - Out of Persian Gulf countries, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Saudi Arabia are members of OPEC.
- Being major producers of **crude oil and natural gas**, there is a **commonality of interest** among these countries.

This commonality of interest has given rise to **their own prosperity** and subsequently, **economic-political entanglements among them**.



## Background

- **British Era:**

- For eight decades prior to 1970, the Persian Gulf was **guarded as a 'British lake'**.
- After the end of the British era, regional players entered with the **intra-regional rivalries** and **forced cooperation**.

- **Aggravated Political Tensions in the Region:**

- Events like the **Muscat conference (1975)**, **Iranian Revolution (1979)** and the **Iraq-Iran War (1980)** aggravated the political tensions in the region. Subsequently, it **enhanced USA's interests and roles in the region**.

The Muscat Conference (1975) was intended to develop the unified army cooperation to enhance the security among Gulf states to guarantee free navigation in the Persian Gulf.

- Later, the **United Nations Security Council Resolution 598 (1987)** was adopted to ensure a ceasefire between Iran and Iraq **specifically** and to explore measures to enhance the security and stability in the region **generally**.

## Current Scenario

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- **Rising Conflicts in the Region:**

Recently, the geopolitical factors and conflicts in the **West Asian region** — **Yemen, Syria, Libya** — aggravated global and regional relationships.

- **Declining Role of USA:**

- The above mentioned conflicts have **hampered USA-Iran relations** that were to be premised on the multilateral agreement on **Iran's nuclear programme agreed to by western powers.**
- The **declining USA's commitment to sub-regional security** has raised more issues among the members of the **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC)** due to political and ideological disagreement with Iran.

- **Emerging Split Within GCC:**

- The recent **emergence of conflicting tactical and strategic interests** and subjective considerations has created a division among the members of the GCC.
- These divisions in the GCC are being aggravated due to following reasons:
  - **Global economic crisis**
  - **Immediate and longer-term impact of Covid-19 on regional economies**
  - Problems in the **Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC)**
  - **Decline in oil prices**

## Possible Stability Framework for the Region

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- **Regional as well as Global Security:**

- Any possible framework for stability and security in the region needs to ensure the **security not only on the regional terms but also on global terms.**
- Because the gulf regional security is not an issue among the Gulf States themselves but it is also an external issue.

- **Other Aspects:**

Additionally, the framework will also need to ensure the following conditions which include:

- **Peace and stability** in individual littoral states.
- Freedom to all states of the Gulf littoral to exploit their **hydrocarbon and other natural resources**.
- **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**.
- The **prevention of conflict** that may impinge on the freedom of trade and shipping.

## India's Relation with Persian Gulf Region

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- **India and GCC:**

- The economic and political relationship of India with the GCC has blossomed in recent years. The governments of the GCC members are **India-friendly and Indian-friendly**.
- The friendly relation has been 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 India's crude imports**.

- **India and Iran:**

India has always shared a friendly relationship with Iran. But the India-Iran relation faces one of the **most complex phases** at all times due to the **USA's pressure** which has **politico-economic impacts**.

In May 2018, the **USA abandoned the nuclear deal** and reinstated **economic sanctions against Iran**.

- **India's Overall Role in the Region:**

- India has **avoided involvement in local or regional disputes** in the region.
- Indian interests do not entail power projection but necessitate peace and regional stability.

## Way Forward

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- It has been assessed that Saudi Arabia is a fading power whereas UAE, Qatar and Iran are emerging as the new regional leaders. Oman and Iraq will have to struggle to retain their sovereign identities.

- Thus, Indian interests would be best served if the stability in the region is ensured through **cooperative security** since the alternative, of competitive security options, cannot ensure durable peace.

**Source:TH**