



Mains Practice Question

Q. Discuss the significance of India's relations with Gulf countries in the context of its foreign policy objectives, regional stability, and economic interests. Highlight the strategies adopted by India to strengthen its engagement with the Gulf region. (250 words)

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Approach

- Start your answer with significance of Gulf Countries for India.
- Describe India's foreign policy objectives for gulf nations and steps taken to enhance relations with gulf nations.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction

India's ties with Gulf countries are strategically significant, promoting foreign policy objectives, regional stability, and economic interests. With over nine million Indians residing there, they contribute to mutual development. The Gulf region is a vital energy source, supplying about one-third of India's oil imports and significant natural gas. Additionally, the Gulf countries are crucial trading partners, accounting for nearly 15% of India's global trade and offering substantial remittances.

Body

India's foreign policy objectives in the Gulf region include:

- Enhancing its **strategic partnership** with the Gulf countries on various issues such as counter-terrorism, maritime security, cyber security, defence cooperation, and regional connectivity.
- Promoting its **soft power** and cultural diplomacy through initiatives such as the International Day of Yoga, the International Solar Alliance, and the Gandhi-Zayed Digital Museum.
- Expanding its **economic engagement** with the Gulf countries by diversifying its trade basket, attracting more investments, facilitating greater market access, and exploring new areas of cooperation such as renewable energy, food security, space technology, and health care.
- Ensuring the **welfare and security** of the Indian diaspora in the Gulf region by providing consular services, facilitating repatriation during crises, and addressing their grievances and concerns.
- Contributing to the **regional stability** and peace in the Gulf region by supporting dialogue and diplomacy, avoiding interference in internal affairs, and respecting the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries.

Some of the strategies adopted by India to strengthen its engagement with the Gulf region are:

- **Increasing the high-level visits and interactions** between the leaders and officials of India and the Gulf countries. For example, the Prime Minister has visited all 6 GCC countries since 2015. Similarly, several leaders from the Gulf countries have visited India and have participated in events such as the Vibrant Gujarat Summit and the Raisina Dialogue.
- **Establishing institutional mechanisms for regular consultations** and cooperation on various

issues of mutual interest. For example, India has set up strategic partnerships with Saudi Arabia and UAE, joint commissions with all GCC countries, a high-level task force on investments with UAE, a joint business council with Qatar, and a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) with UAE.

- **Enhancing its defence and security cooperation** with the Gulf countries by conducting joint exercises, training programmes, naval visits, intelligence sharing, counter-terrorism coordination, and defence equipment sales. For example, India has conducted naval exercises such as Naseem Al Bahr with Oman, Zayed Talwar with UAE, Al Nagah with Oman, etc.
 - India has also signed defence cooperation agreements with Saudi Arabia, UAE, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and Kuwait.
- **Boosting its people-to-people ties** with the Gulf countries by facilitating cultural exchanges, educational collaborations, tourism promotion, media interactions, parliamentary exchanges, etc. For example, India has launched e-migrate system for online registration of workers going to GCC countries, e-visa facility for GCC nationals visiting India, Pravasi Bharatiya Divas conventions for engaging with the Indian diaspora, etc.

Conclusion:

India's relations with Gulf countries are a crucial component of its foreign policy, serving its energy security, economic interests, and regional stability. Strengthening these ties through diplomatic, economic, and security cooperation has been a key priority for India, fostering mutual benefits and contributing to the overall stability and prosperity of the Gulf region.

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