

# Assessing India's Strategic Engagement with Gulf Countries in the Post Abraham Accord Era

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## ABSTRACT

This research study assesses India's strategic engagement with Gulf countries in the post-Abraham Accord era. It examines the implications of the Accord on India's relations with Gulf countries, focusing on diplomatic, economic, and security aspects. Through an analysis of India's historical ties and current engagement with Gulf nations, this study aims to identify the opportunities and challenges for India in enhancing its strategic partnerships in the Gulf region. The findings of this research will contribute to a deeper understanding of India's evolving role in the Gulf countries' geopolitical landscape.

**Keywords :** Gulf countries, Post Abraham Accord era, India's strategic engagement

## INTRODUCTION

India's strategic engagement with Gulf countries has been a significant aspect of its foreign policy, driven by a range of interests and priorities including energy security, trade and investment, counter-terrorism, security and defence cooperation, cultural ties, and regional stability. With the recent Abraham Accord signed between Israel, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Bahrain, India's engagement with the Gulf countries is poised to enter a new era<sup>1</sup>. The accord has the potential to reshape regional dynamics and impact India's strategic considerations in the Gulf region.

India's strategic engagement with Gulf countries has been based on a range of interests and priorities, including energy security, trade and investment, counter-terrorism, security and defence cooperation, cultural ties, and regional stability. The recent Abraham Accord between Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and Bahrain has added a new dimension to India's engagement with the region.

India has welcomed the Abraham Accord as a positive development that could contribute to greater

stability, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange in the region. India has maintained good relations with both

Indian Diaspora in the Gulf			
Country	Overseas Indian	Ranking	Share of overseas Indian (%)
UAE <sup>(a)</sup>	3425144	2	10.6
Saudi Arabia	2594947	4	8.1
Kuwait	1029861	10	3.2
Oman	781141	12	2.4
Qatar	746550	13	2.3
Bahrain	326658	18	1.1

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India's Energy fuel dependency on the Gulf(2017-2021)		
Country	Import Ranking	Share in India's total imports of mineral fuels (%)
Saudi Arabia	2	14.1
UAE	3	9.5
Qatar	6	5.7
Kuwait	9	4.3
Iran	10	3.6
Oman	16	1.6
Bahrain	47	0.1

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(a) United Arab Emirates

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Israel and the Arab Gulf states, and sees the accord as an opportunity to enhance its engagement with these countries<sup>4</sup>.

However, India has also expressed its concerns about the potential impact of the accord on the peace process in west Asia and the situation in Palestine. India has traditionally supported the Palestinian cause and advocated for a two-state solution based on negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

India's overall approach to the region is likely to remain a balanced and pragmatic one, taking into account its diverse interests and relationships with different countries. India will continue to seek greater economic and security ties with the Gulf countries, while also supporting regional peace and stability.

### Background:

India has a historical and enduring relationship with the Gulf countries, which has grown stronger over the years. The Gulf region is home to a large Indian diaspora, making it an important economic corridor for India. The Gulf countries are also a major source of energy for India, with significant oil and gas reserves. Moreover, India has been enhancing its defence and security cooperation with these countries to combat regional threats, including terrorism and maritime security. India's engagement with Gulf countries has a long history, rooted in cultural and economic ties. Diplomatic relations between India and the countries in the Gulf region date back centuries, with trade and cultural exchange flourishing through maritime routes.

The formation of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in 1981 marked a significant step in formalising India's engagement with the region. The GCC comprises Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE. India established formal institutionalised cooperation with the GCC in 2004, leading to the formation of the India-GCC Joint Economic Cooperation Committee<sup>5</sup>.

Over the years, the engagement has deepened, driven primarily by economic factors. The Gulf countries provide employment and economic opportunities to millions of Indian expatriates. India is one of the largest trading partners of the Gulf region, with bilateral trade reaching significant levels. Energy security has been another crucial aspect of India's engagement, as the Gulf countries are major suppliers of oil and gas to India.

### The Abraham Accord and Its Implications:

The Abraham Accord, signed in September 2020, marked a historic development in west Asia by normalising relations between Israel and two Gulf countries, the UAE and Bahrain. This breakthrough agreement holds the potential to reshape regional dynamics, including India's strategic calculations in the Gulf region.

The accord has already witnessed the establishment of diplomatic ties between the UAE, Bahrain, and Israel, leading to increased trade, investment, and technological cooperation. This could have a cascading effect, prompting more Gulf countries to establish formal relations with Israel. The accord also raised hopes for a more stable and secure west Asia, as it signalled a shift away from the conventional Arab consensus of linking relations with Israel to the resolution of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

After the signing of the Abraham Accord, India's strategic engagement with Gulf countries is expected to witness several implications that will impact India-Gulf relations.

### Economic Opportunities:

The Abraham Accord, by fostering greater stability and cooperation in the region, can create new economic opportunities for India. Improved trade relations between Israel and the Gulf countries may lead to increased investment and commercial engagement, benefiting India as a trading partner. India, being one of the major trading partners of the Gulf region, stands to benefit from enhanced economic ties.

Gulf Countries	Exports from India(2019-20) (USD million)	Share of India's exports (%)
UAE	28853.6	9.2
Saudi Arabia	6236.9	2
Oman	2261.8	0.7
Iraq	1878.2	0.6
Kuwait	1286.6	0.4
Qatar	1268.4	0.4
Jordan	960.7	0.3
Bahrain	559.1	0.2

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### Energy Security:

The Gulf countries are vital suppliers of oil and gas to India. The Abraham Accord could potentially improve the energy scenario in the region and ensure a more stable

supply of resources, positively influencing India's energy security.

### ***Counter-terrorism Cooperation:***

Gulf countries and India have a shared interest in countering terrorism. The accord could facilitate increased intelligence sharing, collaboration, and joint efforts to combat extremist threats in the region, thereby strengthening India-Gulf cooperation in counterterrorism.

### ***Regional Stability:***

The accord has the potential to bring about greater stability in west Asia. India, as a responsible stakeholder, has consistently supported peace and stability in the region. The resulting regional stability from the Abraham Accord could benefit India's strategic interests and its efforts towards maintaining regional peace.

### ***Influence in West Asia:***

India has long sought to enhance its engagement with west Asia and establish itself as a significant player in the region. The Abraham Accord provides an opportunity for India to strengthen its relations with both Israel and the Gulf countries, which in turn can elevate India's standing and influence in west Asia geopolitics<sup>7</sup>.

It is important to note that while the Abraham Accord presents various potential implications, its long-term impact on India-Gulf relations will be shaped by several factors including the progress of the Israeli-Palestinian peace process, the dynamics within the Gulf region, and India's ability to balance its relationships with different actors while pursuing its own national interests.

### ***Recent developments:***

India's strategic engagement with Gulf countries in the post-Abraham Accord era has witnessed significant developments. India has been actively strengthening its relationships with Gulf nations both in terms of diplomacy and trade.

One significant development is the increase in trade between India and Gulf states. According to data, Gulf states were among India's top 25 trading partners in 2019-20. This highlights the growing economic ties between the two regions.

Furthermore, high-level visits between India and Gulf countries have also played a crucial role in strengthening strategic partnerships. Since 2003, there have been several high-level visits, indicating the importance placed

on fostering diplomatic relations. These visits have provided opportunities for discussions on bilateral cooperation in various areas, including security and economic cooperation.

In the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, India's supply of vaccines to Gulf countries has further reinforced its strategic engagement. India has been a major supplier of vaccines to the Gulf region, helping in the fight against the pandemic<sup>8</sup>.

In addition to these developments, the Abraham Accord between Israel and several Arab states, including the United Arab Emirates (UAE), has had an indirect impact on India's strategic engagement with the Gulf. The Accord has created new regional dynamics and alliances, including the emergence of an Indo-Abrahamic alliance. India has welcomed the establishment of diplomatic relations between the UAE and Israel, considering both countries as its strategic partners<sup>9</sup>.

These recent developments underpin India's growing engagement with Gulf countries in the post-Abraham Accord era. They highlight the multifaceted nature of India's strategic relationships, encompassing trade, diplomacy, security, and socio-economic cooperation.

### ***India's Approach:***

India has cautiously welcomed the Abraham Accord, recognizing the potential benefits it could bring to the region such as greater stability, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange. India has historically maintained good relations with both Israel and the Arab Gulf states, and the accord offers an opportunity for India to strengthen its engagement with all parties involved<sup>10</sup>.

However, India has also voiced its concerns about the potential implications of the accord on the peace process in west Asia and the situation in Palestine. India has consistently supported the Palestinian cause and advocated for a two-state solution based on negotiations between Israel and Palestine. As such, India has emphasised the need to resume dialogue between the parties involved to ensure a just and lasting resolution.

In assessing India's strategic engagement with Gulf countries in the post Abraham accord era, it is important to recognize that India's approach is likely to be a balanced and pragmatic one. India will seek to maintain its diversified interests and relationships with different countries while continuing to support regional peace, stability, and the well-being of the people in the Gulf region.

India's approach towards its strategic engagement with Gulf countries in the post Abraham accord era is likely to be a balanced and pragmatic one. India recognizes the potential benefits that the accord brings in terms of stability, economic cooperation, and cultural exchange in the region. However, it also raises concerns about the implications on the peace process in west Asia and the situation in Palestine.

India has historically maintained good relations with both Israel and the Arab Gulf states. India formally established diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 and has since developed robust economic, defence, and technological cooperation. At the same time, India has a longstanding commitment to the Palestinian cause and supports a two-state solution based on negotiations between Israel and Palestine. India's position on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict aligns with its support for the Arab Peace Initiative, which calls for the establishment of a Palestinian state based on the principles of the United Nations resolutions and the Arab League framework<sup>11</sup>.

**India's approach in the post Abraham accord era will be guided by its key interests and priorities, including:**

***Economic Engagement:***

India views the Gulf countries as crucial economic partners. The Gulf region is an important trade and investment destination for India. The accord's potential to enhance economic cooperation between Israel and the Gulf countries can open up new opportunities for India, particularly in sectors such as technology, innovation, and infrastructure development. India will seek to leverage these opportunities to further strengthen its economic ties with the Gulf countries.

***Energy Security:***

Energy security is a vital aspect of India's engagement with the Gulf region. The Gulf countries are major suppliers of oil and gas to India. The accord's potential to contribute to stability in the region can positively impact India's energy security by ensuring a more secure and reliable supply of resources. India will

continue to pursue and diversify its energy partnerships with the Gulf countries and explore new opportunities for collaboration, including in renewable energy.

***Counterterrorism and Security Cooperation:***

India's cooperation with Gulf countries in the field of counterterrorism and security has seen significant progress in recent years. The accord's potential to foster greater cooperation in addressing regional security challenges, including extremism and terrorism, aligns with India's interests. India will continue to work closely with the Gulf countries to strengthen intelligence-sharing, capacity-building, and joint counterterrorism efforts.

***Regional Stability:***

India has consistently supported peace, stability, and the resolution of conflicts in west Asia. The accord's potential to bring about greater stability in the region is in line with India's strategic objectives. India will continue to advocate for peaceful dialogue and negotiations between all parties involved in regional conflicts, including the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

***Outreach and Diplomacy:***

India will actively engage with all parties involved in the Abraham Accord to leverage the opportunities it presents. India's diplomatic efforts will focus on maintaining its balanced relationships with Israel and the Arab Gulf states while promoting peace, stability, and the well-being of the people in the region. India's historical and cultural ties with the Gulf countries, as well as its strategic relationships with Israel and other regional players, position it as a key interlocutor in the post-accord era.

It is important to note that India's approach in the post Abraham accord era will be informed by a comprehensive understanding of its national interests, the evolving regional dynamics, and the need to maintain a delicate balance between its relationships with different countries. India's commitment to peace, stability, and development in the Gulf region will continue to guide its strategic engagement in the post-accord era.

***Conclusion:***

India's strategic engagement with the Gulf countries has been a significant aspect of its foreign policy for decades, driven by shared interests in security, trade, energy, and diaspora relations. The signing of the

India's Top 3 Exports to the Gulf	
Items	In total exports (%)
Refined petroleum	14%
Jewellery	8%
Rice	7%

Abraham Accords in September 2020 between Israel and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain brought a paradigm shift in the geopolitics of west Asia, impacting India's strategic calculus in the region.

### **Enhanced Diplomatic Outreach:**

In the post-Abraham Accord era, India has intensified its diplomatic engagements with Gulf countries to maintain a delicate balance between its traditional ties with Arab nations and its growing partnership with Israel. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's outreach to Gulf leaders and his visits to countries like Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain have underscored India's commitment to deepening bilateral relations.

### **Economic Opportunities:**

The Gulf countries serve as crucial economic partners for India, with trade, investment, and remittances playing a vital role in the Indian economy. The Abraham Accords have led to increased trade and investment opportunities between Gulf nations and Israel, presenting India with new avenues for economic cooperation in the region. India has been leveraging its strong economic ties with the Gulf countries to explore synergies and diversify its trade relations amidst evolving geopolitical dynamics.

### **Security Cooperation:**

Given the volatile security environment in west Asia, India's strategic engagement with Gulf countries has also focused on enhancing security cooperation to address common security challenges, including terrorism, maritime security, and stability in the region. The Abraham Accords and the evolving security dynamics in west Asia have necessitated closer coordination between India and Gulf nations to ensure regional peace and stability.

### **Energy Security:**

The Gulf countries are major suppliers of oil and gas to India, and ensuring energy security remains a key priority for India's foreign policy. The Abraham Accords have the potential to impact global energy markets and influence oil prices, thereby necessitating a recalibration of India's energy security strategy. India has been engaging with Gulf countries to diversify its energy sources and reduce dependence on any single supplier, ensuring

a stable and sustainable energy supply chain.

In conclusion, India's strategic engagement with Gulf countries in the post-Abraham Accord era is characterised by a nuanced approach that balances its traditional alliances with emerging geopolitical realities. As India navigates through the evolving dynamics in west Asia, it is imperative for the country to maintain a delicate equilibrium in its relations with Gulf nations, Israel, and other key stakeholders in the region. By leveraging its economic, diplomatic, security, and energy ties with Gulf countries, India can further strengthen its strategic footprint in west Asia and advance its national interests effectively.

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