

Saudi-Indian Relations: Past Difficulties, Present Opportunities and Future Prospects⁽ⁱ⁾

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(Received 11.10.1429H., and Accepted 25.04.1430H.)

Abstract. This article analyzes Saudi-Indian ties from a strategic point of view. It follows a realist interpretation of international politics; that is state-centric, focusing mainly on security, power and foreign policy issues, but other factors will be invoked as necessary. It argues that any insightful examination of Saudi-Indo relations has to take into account two pressing points. The first one relates to the nature of global politics during the Cold War and thereafter and how it has impacted ties between the two countries. The second point revolves around the economic and strategic importance of Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region for emerging global powers. By doing so, one can objectively explain what went wrong in the past, fully understand recent improvement, and account for future prospects.

It concludes that Saudi-Indian ties had been tenuous at best due mainly to Cold War imperatives and regional political and military developments. But as the face of world politics started to change in the past two decades, structural constraints on this relationship have been removed, paving the way for greater cooperation on various issues of mutual concern. Certain strategic challenges do exist that require concerted efforts by both countries. Several policy recommendations are accordingly introduced which are believed to further strengthen bilateral ties.

(i) This article is based on a paper presented at a workshop on "Saudi -Indian Relationships" organized by the Institute of Diplomatic Studies, Riyadh, 1-2 April, 2008.

Introduction

The relationship between Saudi Arabia and India is a timely issue which deserves greater consideration. It is becoming very dynamic and growing significantly in importance, especially as both countries assume greater roles in regional and international politics. Yet, it has not historically been so; and it was not until recently that a persisting pattern of vigorous cooperation started to blossom.

Prior to the 1990s, the prevailing pattern shaping their ties was misgivings despite the fact that they did not have concrete disputable issues. As a result, they mostly failed to cultivate the desired relationship. Instead, they had been part of antagonistic systems of alliance engendered by the politics of the Cold War. Regional developments were also at work which distanced them from each other. By virtue of its Islamic leadership, and close association with the U.S.-West axis, Saudi Arabia developed an enduring alliance with Pakistan. This came at the expense of its ties with India, which practically aligned itself with the USSR internationally and harbored a friendship treaty with revolutionary Egypt regionally. These circumstances have strained Saudi-Indian ties until the 1990s. While they were not unfriendly, they were not cooperative enough. But as the twentieth century was drawing to a close, new windows of opportunities for better relations have loomed.

India is today one of the most dynamic and fastest growing economies in the world. It has also embarked on a rigorous planned modernization of its military power which is intended to strengthen its power projection capabilities beyond its immediate neighborhood. Informed by its growing international status and its emancipation from the politics of the Cold War and its alliances, the Indian government has been pursuing a proactive foreign policy based on engagement with the rest of the world in order to advance its wide economic and strategic interests. West Asia is one area which assumes paramount importance to India, particularly the Gulf region. Saudi Arabia by virtue of its vast energy resources, financial, political and ideological weight is one of the dominant powers in the region. The Saudi leadership has recently initiated a foreign policy that is appreciative of the need to expand its international relations with other emerging powers in the eastern hemisphere. India is one of the emerging Asian powers with whom Saudi Arabia has cultivated growing ties.

This essay explores Saudi-Indian relationship from a strategic point of view, shedding some light on its past and present trends. The primary aim is to underline the obstacles which have impeded greater cooperation between the two countries over the decades, while at the same time ameliorating existing strategic challenges that must be faced and emerging opportunities that have to be seized.

Methodological Remarks

1- Significance of the Study

The importance of the present study lies in its timing and focus. The momentum for Saudi-Indo relations has just evolved. So, this research is very timely in that it is concurrent with the emergence of an interdependent relationship which needs greater forecasting and theorizing. In addition, the concentration on the strategic dimension is significantly important because of the various strategic challenges facing both countries, especially that bilateral political and strategic cooperation had historically been negligible.

2- Study Approach

This study employs a realist interpretation of international politics. Realism is a dominant school in international relations. It views foreign policy in terms of pursuit of national interests, often defined in terms of power. Politics is, then, envisaged as a struggle for power and security (Morgenthau, 1948). It also argues that the international system is anarchic by nature due to the absence of an international regulatory authority (Waltz, 1979). In this situation, the workings of the international system, as well as the internal attributes of states shape their interaction with each other. States are largely occupied with their quest for survival because under anarchy the highest priority is security. In addition, under fierce international competition and anarchy, "considerations of security subordinate economic gain to political interests" (*Ibid.*,: 107). But this all does not mean that states are always belligerent; opportunities for cooperation and avoidance of war do exist and can be achieved through certain mechanisms, such as alliances, balance of power, diplomacy and mutual security arrangements.

The realist approach is useful in our case for at least two reasons. First, it puts great emphasis on structural factors in explaining and understanding states' behavior. Secondly, realist analysis postulates security and power as ultimate goals states aspire to achieve. And this study is based on the assumption that strategic and political factors have been the main determinants influencing Saudi-Indian ties over the decades. Political and strategic determinants here refer to both internal and external realities, such as ideology, international competition and division, international status, external alliances, security interests, etc. This would fairly explain the lack of congeniality that had historically dominated their ties, while at the same time accounting for recent improvement. Moreover, even when economics comes into play, energy security rather than appetite for ordinary trade and labor is the critical determinant and the major driving force necessitating greater cooperation between Saudi Arabia and India. Therefore, it is assumed that development of a

strong relationship entails maintaining common strategic vision and greater understanding in the political and security domains which would complement the traditional commercial and cultural linkages in elevating their ties to an unprecedented level of cooperation.

There are several hypotheses on which this study is based:

- The eruption of the Cold War and the subsequent emergence of a bipolar system of alliance had adversely affected Saudi-Indian relations.
- Global structural transformation in the post-Cold War, and the growing of India's international status have greatly contributed to the initiation of a strategic partnership between the two countries.
- Future cooperation between Saudi Arabia and India will largely be dictated by strategic and security considerations.

3- Organization of the Study

To fulfill its objectives, the paper is divided into four main sections. The first section highlights changing trends in global politics and its implications on the foreign policies of the two countries. A historical account of bilateral relations is introduced in section two. Current geo-strategic issues of mutual concern are discussed in section three. The last section presents several policy recommendations for future prospects.

I. Global Political Realities: Implications for Saudi Arabia and India

States formulation of their foreign policies is usually influenced by the prevailing international environment and the power resources at their disposal (Holst, 1992). As a result, they are not static but pragmatic and their aspirations, goals, and direction might change as circumstances surrounding them alter.

The international political system constitutes the environment in which states operate. The structure of power in the system, its rules, norms and habits affect significantly states' behavior (*Ibid.*; 82). The dominant convention in international relations postulates that the system of states is anarchic due to the absence of an overarching authority capable of regulating interactions between states. It is a self-help system which implies that states have to rely on their indigenous capabilities or forge alliances with external powers for their survival and maintenance of their interests (Waltz, 1979: 105). In this sense, the anarchic nature of the system of states is believed to influence the patterns of interaction between its constituent units, states: they are often uncertain of others' intentions and actions, very competitive, and have to be self-reliant. Moreover, systemic pressures, such as international competition, can limit or constrain

states' choices. In this situation, big powers are always the shaker and shaper of the system; they are the ones who set up the rules of the game, mostly according to their national interests (*Ibid.*; chs. 5&6). Smaller powers have lesser impact on the international system and are often vulnerable to the policies of big powers.

In addition to structural reality, individual states pursue policies of their own in order to achieve their goals and to reflect their role perceptions and positions within the international system (Hocking and Smith, 1995: 61). Such policies are influenced by their actual potentials along with their policy-making process. In the light of these two factors, states' behavior falls into two categories: conflict or cooperation (Wolfers, 1962).

After WWII, the world witnessed the emergence of two great powers, the U.S. and the USSR, with military and economic potentials that were unmatched by other powers. They also had global interests and ascribed to different, albeit opposing, set of values and beliefs. Ideological differences and fierce political, economic and military competition between the two rivals dominated international politics for most of the second half of the twentieth century. Bipolarity and the subsequent emerging system of alliance compelled other nations to take sides, whether willingly or unwillingly.

As a result, most developing states entered into a client-patron relationship which was for them a means of getting political, military and economic assistance. While this client-patron formula was beneficial for purposes of survival, it sometimes drew them into proxy wars. At other times, it influenced their foreign policy orientation in a way that widened the rupture between them on no substantive ground. India became an ally of the eastern bloc while Saudi Arabia consolidated its relationship with the U.S. This situation had adversely impacted Saudi-Indian ties for a long period of time, and greatly explained the discontinuity that characterized their bilateral relations, although they had no direct conflict. Yet, the end of the Cold War heralded a new phase in international politics, where states became less influenced by ideological constraints and division, and free to pursue and expand their international relations, mainly along national interest lines⁽ⁱⁱ⁾.

In the Post-Cold War era, it is very obvious that influence and power distribution in the system of states have significantly been altered. The US came out of the Cold War victorious, therefore, becoming the sole superpower and assuming greater dominance in international affairs. But American hegemony

(ii) Both countries joined the Non-Aligned Movement which was created in 1961, although in reality they were supporting opposing systems of alliance.

will not go unchallenged (Nye, 1992; Waltz, 1993; Kegley and Raymond, 1994); other emerging powers are making advancements, such as China and India, in addition to a reborn Russia. While China has already been singled out by American officials as a serious challenger, India is not treated the same, at least for the time being. But with a rapidly growing economy, a GDP of a little over 1000 b\$, stable and confident democracy, a sizable population of around 1,2 billion (CIA World Factbook, 2007), skillful manpower, especially in information system technology, and nuclear capability, India is very well set to become an important player in international politics.

For Saudi Arabia, the end of the Cold War, political and economic globalization and the event of the 11 September and the subsequent tension in Saudi-American relations have led Riyadh to expand its connection with Asian powers. So, India's emergence as a growing international power is paralleled by a recent strategic shift in Saudi foreign policy orientation which aims at expanding the country's foreign policy scope beyond its traditional western focus; a policy that has been labeled 'look east'. This has resulted in the creation of an interdependent relationship between Riyadh and New Delhi that is reflective of the greater roles they assume in regional and international politics.

International relations theorists argue that if a country becomes an economic power, its national interests widen. This compels it to develop and increase its diplomatic and military capabilities, and to build up alliances in order to maintain its national interests (Waltz, 1993; Kegley and Raymond, 1994). One area of increasing importance to India is the Gulf region, with which it should forge a strategic partnership.

This leads us to the second point on which this analysis is based. Saudi Arabia is a leading country in the Arab and Islamic world, with considerable ideological, political and financial clout. Its possession of quarter of the proven reserves of oil in the world has also given it additional importance at the international stage. Geographically, the country is part of the Gulf region which is one of the most important but unstable areas in the world. Having under its soil about 60 percent of the world's proven oil reserves and nearly 40 percent of its gas reserves, the Gulf region assumes paramount importance for major powers. And India imports over two third of its oil needs from the Gulf. Saudi Arabia is the dominant power in the GCC and the main regional supplier of oil to India, providing quarter of India's total import (Hussain, 2006: 90; Azhar, 2008: 330). In addition to its economic value, the region is centrally located, with control over very important water gates that are indispensably vital to international trade. Therefore, energy and maritime security are major concerns for key industrial powers, including India.

II. Historical Review of Saudi-Indian Ties

Saudi Arabia and India represent two important powers in their respective regional neighborhood. They both possess certain elements of power and yield influence beyond their vicinity, in addition to common interests they share. Yet, they have encountered many obstacles over the years. Until recently, they had experienced what has been described as a “gap in communication” (Pasha, 1999: 153) that was brought about by certain regional and international circumstances endemic to the Cold War. However, bilateral bonds have improved dramatically over the past several years, and today are better than at any previous point in history.

Early contact between India and the Arabs was attributed to commercial and cultural imperatives (Pasha, 1999). Along with ordinary trade (in spices, silk, textiles, *etc.*), the Indian subcontinent hosts a huge Muslim community, thereby, pilgrims for Hajj became an annual contact between the two peoples. But as the Saudi state started to reflect its political power and role, especially after annexing the Hijaz region in 1925, its status among other Islamic countries has been improved. Its leadership started to consolidate its image as the Guardian of the two holy places which requires recognition by, and support for, various Muslim communities and states around the world. Ideological attachment, then, became a factor in foreign policy making, particularly for Saudi Arabia. In 1947, India gained independence from colonial Britain, and in 1948 diplomatic relations with Saudi Arabia were established and upgraded in 1954 (Khan, 2008).

Soon, the severe rivalry between India and Pakistan over the issue of Kashmir and Pakistan’s attempts to gather Islamic backing for its stance on the issue started to adversely impact Indo-Saudi relations. So, when King Saud visited Pakistan in 1953, he expressed his country’s political support to Pakistan on the Kashmir issue. Pakistan had also tried to capitalize on India’s recognition of Israel in 1950 to portray it in the eyes of Arab countries as betraying their central issue, Palestine (Pasha, 1999).

In 1955, the establishment of the Baghdad Pact which Pakistan joined along with Iraq, Turkey and Iran, did not resonate well in the Arab world. Egypt and Saudi Arabia denounced vehemently the Western military pact and urged other nations to withdraw from it. In specific, the Saudi government was astonished when Pakistan joined it as it saw that as a “stab in the heart of Arab and Muslim states”, urging Islamabad to withdraw from it (Risvi, 1981: 83). In May 1955, Crown Prince Faisal visited India for five days, discussing possible ways to strengthen bilateral relations and laying the foundations of them⁽ⁱⁱⁱ⁾. It was

(iii) Shown on the official records of both governments, but unaccounted for in the rare and sporadic writings on Saudi-Indian ties, this visit was mentioned by the former Saudi Ambassador to India, Dr. Mohammed al-Gamdi, during the aforementioned workshop on Saudi-Indo Relationships, April 2008.

followed by another visit by King Saud in late 1955 during which he expressed his satisfaction with how the Indian government was treating its Muslim community against constant Pakistani accusations. And when Nehru returned the visit in the next year he was very well received, indicating the rapprochement mood existing at that time between Riyadh and New Delhi. India further supported Egypt during the 1956 Suez crisis, a move that was in line with its presumably non-aligned foreign policy (Pasha, 1999: 149).

Yet, Saudi-Indian cordial relations did not endure long. In the late 1950s onward, some major political developments took place at the regional and international arenas with significant spillover on Saudi-Indo ties. The politics of the Cold War put India and Saudi Arabia at different ends of the political spectrum as each country sided with one superpower. At the regional level, polarization of Arab politics was on the rise leading to what had been described by Malcolm Kerr (1973) "the Arab Cold War". Arab countries became divided into conservatives and revolutionaries and India sided with Egypt who led the radical camp in the Arab world in opposing the West and its allies in the region.

Events leading to this state of political affairs in the Arab world came to the service in the late 1950s; upon returning from his visit to the U.S. in 1957, King Saud started to pursue a new foreign policy that was totally pro-American. He expressed officially his support for the Eisenhower Doctrine, thereby, Riyadh becoming closely associated with US-West strategy to contain communism (Gerger, 1994).

This move by Saudi Arabia was strongly criticized by President Gamal Abd al-Nasser, who often denounced Western attempts to penetrate the Middle East, describing American foreign policies in the region as imperialist and started lashing on its regional allies. The situation got worse as Syria broke away from Egypt in 1961 which Nasser saw as a conspiracy scheme designed by Western countries and regional collaborators. In 1962, the civil war in Yemen erupted and the superpowers were indirectly involved through their client states; Saudi Arabia and Egypt, each for its own reasons, supported opposing Yemeni sides. As Nasser's attack against Arab conservatives increased, King Faisal, who assumed office in 1964, initiated Pan-Islamism as a counter ideology to Pan-Arabism. These developments had super-regional implications in that India's foreign policy was perceived as Cairo-centric while Pakistan sided more with Saudi Arabia (Baba, 1992).

Saudi Arabia's alliance with Pakistan was further strengthened. In the 1965 Indo-Pak war, Saudi Arabia sided with Pakistan and accused India for being the aggressor while Egypt was backing India due to the cordial relations they have

and the similar ideological views on global politics Nasser and Nehru relatively share. In 1969, the Organization of the Islamic Conference (OIC) was established in the aftermath of the Rabat Summit which was convened mainly to condemn the Israeli burning of the Aqsa mosque. India's participation in the summit was not welcomed by Pakistan and other Arab states and it was refused a membership to the OIC. India was hoping to prevent Pakistan from utilizing the organization for its own interests, especially that Saudi Arabia, an ally of Pakistan, yielded considerable weight with the organization. When the Indo-Pak war of 1971 broke out the Saudi final position was in support of Pakistan, especially after the fall of Dacca and it also refused to recognize Bangladesh. Saudi Arabia bankrolled Pakistan, with approximately \$200 million, and provided sanctuary to Pakistan fighter planes in face of heavy Indian attack against its air fields, in addition to diplomatically supporting Pakistan within the United Nations Security Council debates (Baba, 1994: 78).

In the 1970s, Saudi Arabia's role in regional politics has considerably enhanced in line with its growing financial power that was greatly boosted after the 1973-74 oil embargo, but its foreign policy remained constrained by its military weakness. The big powers in the Gulf region (Iran, Iraq and Saudi Arabia) entered into an arms race, and military build up heightened during the years to follow, for which the means were provided by the sharp increase in oil revenues and superpowers' willingness to supply them with huge arms deliveries (Ehteshami, 1992). Closer security relations were developing between Islamabad and Riyadh as the former dispatched several hundreds of its military personnel to serve in training missions in the Saudi army, a step that was cherished by Washington (Pasha, 2007: 133).

However, the collapse of the Shah's regime in Iran and its replacement by a radical clerical one in 1979, the subsequent eruption of the Iran-Iraq war, and the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan compelled the Saudi leadership to rethink its foreign and security policies. India failed to condemn the Soviet incursion into Afghanistan while Saudi Arabia and Pakistan stood behind the Afghan mujahdeen. With regard to Iran, India performed a delicate diplomatic balancing act; it remained neutral in the Iran-Iraq War, maintained warm ties with Baghdad, and built workable political and economic relations with Tehran despite misgivings about the foreign policy objectives of the Khomeini regime. As these events unfolded, Saudi Arabia started to feel insecure and questioned the earnestness of American commitment to its security. With blessing by the U.S., closer military and political cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan developed. In return, Saudi Arabia financed Pakistan's arm deals with the U.S. which was not welcomed by India. In this regard, General Zia Ul Haq of Pakistan said "if Saudi Arabia's security was threatened and help was sought

from Pakistan he would personally lead Pakistani forces in defence of Saudi Arabia” (Pasha, 2007: 134). However, as uncertainty and instability in the region increased due to Israeli invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982 and the continuing war in the gulf, Saudi Arabia acknowledged the limitation of its military cooperation with Pakistan and that its ties with it should not impede it from developing better relations with India. In April 1982, Indian Prime Minister Indira Gandhi visited Riyadh and the two leaderships sought to explore ways for better cooperation on issues of mutual concern, such as peace in South Asia, economic cooperation^(iv), *etc.* With this in view, Pasha stated that:

“The growing challenge from Khomeini’s Iran and the Iran-Iraq War among other issues posed serious challenges to the House of Saud. These events coupled with ongoing Arab-Israeli conflict especially Israeli invasions of Lebanon in 1978 and 1982 and with Soviets fully entrenched in Afghanistan; the Saudis gradually realized that their close ties with Pakistan need not come in the way of establishing good ties with India” (2007: 134).

While the visit broke the ice between the two countries, it did not lead to complete turnout; their relationship became once again strained by the eruption of militancy in Kashmir since 1989 and India’s neutrality during the Gulf crisis 1990-91^(v), in addition to demolition of the Babri mosque in 1992 by Hindu which was viewed by Saudi Arabia and other GCC states as an irresponsible act. Saudi Arabia also supported Pakistan in the UN with regard to India’s human rights violations in Kashmir and Jammu in 1994 (Pasha, 2007: 137).

Lately, both states have taken steps to improve their ties. Several factors have contributed to closer Saudi-Indian cooperation and understanding. The end

(iv) It is not our intention in this paper to rule out the importance of economics in Saudi-Indian relations. Instead, we tend to show that other geo-strategic imperatives assume paramount significance in concretizing the agenda for such relations. In addition, economic ties with India were always ahead of political ones; total bilateral trade amounted to Rs 548 crores in 1979-80; in 1992-93, it stood at roughly \$1.7 billion (Pasha, 2007: 135). The amount increased from \$2,285 million in 1995 to \$8,782 million in 2004 (Azhar, 2008: 324). In 2007, total bilateral trade slightly exceeded \$16 billion (**Business Standard**, 2008: 1). Saudi Arabia also hosts a large number of Indian expatriates, estimated at 1.7 million in 2007, former Saudi Ambassador to India said. Remittances by Indian workers are estimated to be over \$3 billion a year (**Khan**, 2008: 2).

(v) India’s official position on the Gulf crisis was neutrality; denouncing both the annexation of Kuwait and the American-led military build-up against Iraq. But after a minority government came to office in November 1990 and hoping to court the U.S., it voted for the UN Security Council Resolution allowing the use of force. It also granted logistics to American aircrafts during war operations, a decision that became contentious among Indian policymakers (**Ganguly**, 2004: 44).

of the Cold War freed India from its traditional reliance on the USSR which was disintegrated in 1991. And India is no longer posing itself as leader of the poor and dispossessed in the world as it once used to call for fair distribution of world wealth. It is now occupied with its drive for domestic economic development and its ambition for greater status in the international system. It is also developing closer relations with the U.S. and other Western powers (Ganguly, 2004: 42). India is also feeling more secure after its nuclear tests in 1998, and its leadership understands the strategic edge it enjoys over Pakistan in terms of military and economic power. Finally, India has become more reliant on imported oil due to its growing economy. Only 30 percent of its oil consumption is produced domestically, the rest is imported. About 70 percent of India's imported oil comes from the Gulf, with Saudi Arabia providing approximately a quarter of India's total import (Azhar, 2008: 330).

In the Saudi case, the first decade of the twenty-first century witnessed clear deterioration in Saudi-American relations, mainly due to the 9/11 attacks and Washington's pressure on Riyadh to undertake serious measures in reforming its educational system, controlling extremists within the country and supporting international efforts to fight terrorism. More importantly, Saudi Arabia did not feel comfortable about the invasion of Iraq in 2003, which left the eastern flank of the Arab world exposed to increasing Iranian ambition for regional hegemony. Tehran is also determined to continue with its suspicious nuclear programs. These issues together, along with the Saudi drive to reform and diversify its economy, have been the main factors leading Saudi Arabia to expand its connection with emerging Asian powers.

As a result, Saudi Arabia has supported India's petition for observer status in the OIC and was in favor of reducing tension between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir issue. It also tried to rethink its ties with India beyond its traditional approach which takes into consideration its alliance with Pakistan (Pant, 2006). Thus, ideological and material links with Pakistan have been reduced significantly as a factor influencing the Saudi judgment of its relations with India. Furthermore, King Abdullah's visit to India in January 2006 boosted their bilateral relations. It was the first visit to India by a Saudi monarch since King Saud visited India in 1955, and King Abdullah was the guest of honor at Indian's national Republic Day celebration which reflects the importance the Indian government attached to such visit. The visit was described by monitors on both sides as signaling a major strategic shift in ties as it included the signing of four pacts in various fields, such as, investment, double taxation avoidance, combating crime and terrorism and cooperation in the field of youth and sport (India Review, 2006: 2).

III. Issues of Mutual Concern

In the preceding discussion, it was emphasized that political and strategic considerations emanating from regional and international developments during the Cold War have been the main factors influencing Saudi-Indo ties. But as these circumstances changed, their relationships took on a new path of vigorous cooperation. This section continues the assertion on the centrality of the strategic dimension and that it constitutes the cornerstone of their ties, as it is laden with grave security issues, such as, energy security, maritime security and internal security concerns. This means that there are certain outstanding strategic challenges which have to be faced and great opportunities that must be nurtured.

1- Energy Security

Energy security is to a large extent the driving force in Saudi-Indian relations, especially for India. The fast pace on which Indian economy has been growing associates with increased demand on energy. India is now ranked the sixth largest consumer of energy in the world and expected to become the fourth-largest consumer by the year 2010. As mentioned elsewhere, about 70 percent of India's imported oil comes from the Gulf. Saudi Arabia is the chief supplier of oil to India's booming economy, and India is now the fourth largest recipient of Saudi Oil after China, the United States, and Japan. India's crude oil imports from Saudi Arabia will likely double in the next two decades^(vi). Moreover, the region is expected to supply 32 percent of the world's oil by 2025, compared to 26 percent today (Parsi, 2008). With this in view, the Delhi declaration signed during King Abdullah's visit emphasized that both countries will develop a strategic energy partnership based on complementary and interdependent ties. The fundamentals of this partnership would include, *inter alia*, reliable, stable and increased crude oil supplies, through 'evergreen' long-term contracts.

Therefore, it is reasonable to say that Riyadh is vehemently committed to providing stable oil supplies at reasonable prices to various consumers in the world, including energy hungry India. However, one has to bear in mind that the Gulf is a conflict-ridden region with greater political risks which could

(vi) Iraq, a traditional ally of India and possible supplier of energy undergoes currently serious difficulties with its energy industry. Iran is an alternate which India has tried to discover, but certain obstacles still impede greater cooperation in this regard. The viability of the gas pipeline from Iran to India via Pakistan is questionable due to volatile Indo-Pak relations. Hostile American-Iranian relations also limit cooperation between India and Iran, especially that India sides with the West at the International Atomic Energy Agency over Iran's controversial nuclear program. This increases India's reliance on Saudi oil.

disturb favorable supplies of energy. Due to its strategic and economic value which makes it indispensably vital for international economic stability, Gulf security is greatly linked to international security. Challenges to Gulf security become direct threats to international security and stability (Kraig, 2004: 84).

In 1971, the U.S replaced Britain as the chief guardian of the Gulf and it continues to do so until this moment. It also undertakes naval activities in support of its war on terrorism which entails strong military presence in the Gulf and central Asia. However, Gulf security has always been a complicated issue. And respective U.S. policies in the region have never proved effective in securing a lasting regional order. The Twin-Pillar policy of the Nixon Administration in the 1970s, playing Iraq against Iran in the 1980s, and dual containment of them in the 1990s, and invasion of Iraq in 2003 have all proven short enduring (*Ibid.*: 85). As a result there has been increasing discomfort among GCC countries about the U.S. role and the unilateral approach it has been pursuing lately.

The dilemma of Gulf security is that no regional security structure is agreed upon by local states. Indigenous scenarios are not envisaged while American unilateralism has recently precipitated insecurity rather than otherwise. There are two different schools of thought about how to deal with Gulf security: one seeing regional security as something to be based on regional initiative and that it is solely the responsibility of regional states, a view strongly advocated by Iran. The other view, echoed by GCC states, favors confidence-building measures and internationalization of regional security (Janardhan, 2007). According to this view, the GCC countries are willing to consider intense political, economic and security cooperation with other countries as a counterweight to total dependence on American protection. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Saud al-Faisal told the Gulf Dialogue meeting in Bahrain in December 2004 that the best guarantee for Gulf security is not unilateralism but “the collective will of the international community” (Janardhan, 2007: 28). This means that Asian and European powers can play a constructive role in this regard; they all rely on Gulf energy, wary of transnational security challenges, and more importantly their possible engagement is not driven by eagerness to dominance and control^(vii).

India, as an emerging power with great stakes in the Gulf could contribute positively to Gulf security. Such contribution should include sharing its experience in fighting terrorism, maritime security and joint military training. More specifically, India needs to develop sufficient military capabilities on the

(vii) In fact, some GCC states have already discussed security arrangements with NATO through the Istanbul Initiative that was launched in 2004.

one hand, and coordinate its efforts with the United States, as the chief guardian of the Gulf, on the other. A strong Saudi connection with the U.S. and India alike can contribute positively to greater military cooperation between the two powers as far as Gulf security is concerned.

Yet, Saudi Arabia is concerned about increasing cooperation between India and Iran, especially that they concluded a defense cooperation agreement in 2003 (Blank, 2004). Tehran's nuclear ambition, Iranian interference in neighboring Iraq, and Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's aggressive rhetoric further raises Saudi anxiety of a resurgent Iran (Pant, 2006: 47). Having said that, the impasse between Washington and Tehran over the latter's suspicious nuclear program and its belligerent rhetoric against Israel have hindered further cooperation between India and Iran. Instead, it has drawn Saudi Arabia and India even closer, particularly that India perceives Saudi Arabia as both an ideological counterweight to Pakistan and a compensation for its crumbling bet on Iran. But, in any case, this should not obscure the fact that India still has wide interest in Iran due to geopolitical and economic considerations. And it could contribute to regional security in the Gulf by working as a broker between Iran and the GCC countries.

2- Maritime Security

Closely associated with energy security is maritime security. It is very important due to India's growing commercial ties with the Gulf, especially that most deliveries in this respect are carried out through maritime shipping. Thus, naval power will continue to assume great primacy in the strategic calculations of major powers. Security of trade routes and maritime passages will remain on the top agenda of major powers. In this case, Gulf security and security of the Indian Ocean are strongly interlinked.

The question to be asked here: Are Asian powers (India in our case) ready to share the burden of maritime security? And will the U.S. accept this kind of engagement by Asian powers? India can surely capitalize on its improving relations with Washington in recent years to support the American role as the world's policeman. We argue that the conditions for India's engagement should be based on at least three elements: military cooperation with the U.S., development of its power projection capabilities and the backing of the Gulf countries. And it seems that all three conditions are evolving: the GCC states are receptive of the idea of a collective security system to ensure the stability and security of the region as we have discussed earlier.

Indian-American ties are improving and are better than any previous point in history. Moreover, the American government is acknowledging the growing

status of India in world's affair and the paramount need for greater cooperation between them on global security issues. In this regard, Secretary of state, Condoleezza Rice, maintained that:

“India will soon become the world's most populous nation, as well as one of the world's five largest economies. And of course, as a rising global power, India can be a pillar of stability in a rapidly changing Asia and a strategic partner for the United States as we meet the challenges of the 21st century” (2006: 270).

In July 2006, both governments signed the Civil Nuclear Cooperation Initiative which eliminated a sticking point in their relationship that was constrained after India's nuclear tests in 1998 and its constant refusal to sign the Non-proliferation Treaty. According to Secretary Rice, this agreement by which two-thirds of India's existing civil nuclear reactors will come under the censorship of the International Atomic Energy Agency, is expected to strengthen global non-proliferation regime and “elevate our partnership to a new strategic level” (2006: 271).

With regard to India's potentials as a global power, the Indian leadership seems firmly determined to showcase its power. It has adopted a broader defense strategy aimed at enhancing its power projection capability beyond its subcontinent. Such vision was authorized by Former Prime Minister Atal Behar Vajpayee in 2003. Accordingly, it embarked on a 20-year military modernization plan which started in November 2003. The central element of such plan is the undertaking of huge military build-up of its conventional military power, part of which is directed to building a naval power with global reach. Former Indian Navy Chief Admiral Arun Prakash stated in August 2006 that:

“...the Indian Navy would be a fully-balanced, technologically fighting fit, all-purpose maritime force to be reckoned with...The challenge, therefore, lies in India becoming a maritime power. No one can stop India from becoming a maritime power...Though our maritime interests are now all over, anything that happens between the east coast of Africa and the Malacca Straits is of immediate concern to India” (Janardhan, 2007: 28).

3-Terrorism and Crime

International terrorism has become a serious menace which requires collective international efforts. It does not mostly differentiate between nations and can hit at any time. Saudi Arabia and India have both suffered to a varying

degree from terrorism and other sorts of transnational crime, such as money laundering, drugs and arms smuggling. Therefore, they both have vested interests in combating such challenges. The commitment by both governments to accelerate cooperation between them in order to address these outstanding challenges to their internal security is very evident. It shows the solid stand they share with regard to terrorism and crime. King Abdullah assured the Indian Prime Minister, during his aforementioned visit to India, that his country had “declared a war on terrorism” and said that they would continue their “struggle against terrorism”. “This is a long-term struggle but this is one which will be carried on until this scourge is completely eliminated”, he said. The King also added that he was “against any support to terrorism whether it be of a financial nature or a moral nature”. For his part, the Indian PM described Saudi Arabia as “a very important partner in combating global terrorism” (India Review, 2006: 2). In fact, Saudi Arabia and India signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) during King Abdullah’s visit, which focused on stepping up concerted efforts to combat terrorism, money laundering, drugs and arms smuggling in a sustained and comprehensive manner (IRNA, 2006). This entails greater cooperation and exchange of intelligence information and expertise, in addition to containment of extremism and radical ideologies that breed and encourage unwarranted behavior.

While both states attest to combating terrorism, New Delhi and Riyadh may differ over the definition of it. Defining terrorism associates with high levels of subjectivity as it is usually done in relation to the groups considered by governments as terrorists, rather than in terms of the act itself. Most Arab states, including Saudi Arabia, argue in the context of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict that liberation struggle against occupation justifies acts undertaken in its name. Contrary to that, the Indian government categorically rejects terrorist attacks on civilians (Pant, 2006: 50). So, Arabs’ position on terrorism does not conform to increasingly cordial ties between Israel and India in recent years. In fact, the Indian-Israeli connection is a serious obstacle that may hinder closer Saudi-Indo relations. In the early 1990s, India relegated its strong anti-Israeli stance and support for the Palestinian cause. In December 1991, it voted with UN majority to revoke the UN resolution equating Zionism with racism, and by 1992 diplomatic relations with Tel Aviv were restored. This reversal in Indian foreign policy towards Israel was caused by the increased role of Hindu nationalist in domestic politics, in addition to practical economic and security considerations in the post-Cold War (Kapila, 2003). India is now the largest recipient of Israeli arms and Israel is the second largest arms supplier to India after Russia (Sager, 2006). And New Delhi does not certainly identify with the strong anti-Israeli position taken by Saudi Arabia. Furthermore, stalemate in the Arab-Israeli peace talks, along with growing economic and military ties between India and

Israel could adversely affect Saudi-Indian ties, especially that India is not utilizing its connection with Israel to promote peace in the Middle East.

Also, the Indian government is concerned about Saudi Arabia's ideological and spiritual connection with India's 130-million strong Muslim populations and its financial assistance to religious schools and mosques in India, and scholarships offered to Indian students to study in Saudi universities. This is especially so in light of Muslim unease with resurgent Hindu nationalism (Pant, 2006). However, we argue that this should not be worrisome for the Indian government, providing that just and peaceful solutions to outstanding political issues within India (conflict over Kashmir, ethnic tension, *etc.*) are reached. Existence of values of tolerance, solidarity and equality within the Indian political and social systems is helpful in sustaining domestic stability. Mismanagement of these issues will constitute a major cause of incitement for Islamic militancy and extremism in India.

IV. The Way Ahead

Free of the Cold War system of alignment, India and Saudi Arabia are currently better positioned to improve their bilateral relations. The way forward for the two countries rests on developing a model that depends largely on strategic and political dimensions, in addition to the traditional economic and cultural ones. There are some important strategic insights that have to be addressed and reasserted in order to elevate Saudi-Indian ties to a strategic level in the foreseeable future.

First, it is imperative for Saudi Arabia to acknowledge the status of India as an emerging international power with expanding interests in the Gulf. Not only that India's matrix of power is growing considerably and that it is willing to showcase its power and influence beyond its vicinity, but its improving ties with the U.S. provide a window of opportunity for it to become a strategic partner of the U.S., especially as far as Gulf security is concerned.

Second, as Stephen Blank has observed, "the Gulf constitutes a vast strategic buffer, an outer ring,...that cannot be allowed to become a base from which policies inimical to India's interests and security can be pursued with impunity" (2004: 1). This implies that India must pursue a broad strategy of global engagement. Such global strategy of engagement should transcend the traditional concerns of cultural and trade ties to encompass new realities in the domain of counterterrorism, maritime security and defense cooperation with the Gulf region.

Third, India has to reassure Arab states about the nature of its increasing links to Israel and that this will not come at the expense of Arabs historic rights in Palestine. While India is not expected to relegate its tilt towards Tel Aviv, it is imperative for New Delhi to utilize such links in order to promote peace in the Middle East.

Forth, Saudi Arabia can effectively mediate between India and Pakistan to broker a lasting peaceful conclusion to the conflict over Kashmir. In this regard, Saudi Arabia can capitalize on its strong relations with Pakistan to bring the two parties together in order to find a breakthrough to a complicated issue. Ending the Kashmir's issue will certainly eliminate a source of tension in Indo-Pak relations. It will, at the same time, sustain proactive Saudi-Indian ties, particularly that Saudi Arabia has always been identified as a close ally of Pakistan.

Fifth, Saudi Arabia has tried recently to move beyond its traditional approach of looking at India through Pakistani lenses. And India should do the same especially that it is now more satisfied with the balance of power in the subcontinent. Achieving a strategic edge over Pakistan should ease India's sensitivity about traditional cooperation between Riyadh and Islamabad which would ultimately strengthen Saudi-Indian ties.

Sixth, Saudi Arabia and India should work closely in support of each other's cause at regional and international forums. For example, Riyadh can support India's candidacy for a United Nations Security Council seat; and both countries can enhance bilateral cooperation in various fields within an institutional framework (through existing regional organizations or by possibly establishing new ones).

Seventh, a GCC-India Security dialogue should be established that will serve as the principal security coordination mechanism between the two parties. The core objectives of the dialogue are the promotion of common interests and to provide a framework for India's engagement with the GCC states in the following areas: the improvement of GCC defense capabilities; resolution of regional security issues; counter-proliferation; and counter-terrorism and internal security.

Finally, cultural and economic ties have always been ahead of political and strategic ones. The cornerstone of a flourished relationship rests on confronting pressing political and security challenges in a responsible and constructive manner through establishing strategic partnership in all respected matters.

V. Conclusion

This study has shown that the future awaiting Saudi-Indian relationship is promising due to the common interests they share and the removal of the constraints placed upon it by the Cold War system and alliances. Other regional political and military developments which were perceived to have strained it have also been mitigated. The two countries are now cooperating to face common strategic challenges arising from terrorism, transnational crime and extremism, in addition to promoting peace and stability in their respective regions. This is especially so in light of the fact that Gulf security and security of the Indian Ocean are closely interlinked. India is becoming more reliant on oil imported from the Gulf region as its economy continues to grow rapidly. Improvement in India's relations with the U.S. on the one hand, and India's development of its naval power on the other are expected to enhance India's capacity to contribute to Gulf security. This would stimulate military and political cooperation between Saudi Arabia and India.

As a result, it has been emphasized that both countries retain mutual geo-strategic imperatives, necessitating the growing warmth in their relations. To this extent, security will ultimately be the bedrock on which Saudi-Indo relations will prosper. This means that the real challenge facing them is how to work out a formula for robust cooperation on acute political and security issues which will take bilateral ties beyond its traditional fundamentals of trade, oil and labor.

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العلاقات السعودية - الهندية: صعوبات الماضي، وفرص الحاضر، والآفاق المستقبلية

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المستخلص. يناقش هذا البحث التطورات التي مرت بها العلاقات السعودية الهندية من منظور استراتيجي، ويتبنى منهجاً نظرياً يرتكز على أسس التحليل الواقعي في العلاقات الدولية، ومن خلاله يحاول تشخيص ماضي وحاضر هذه العلاقات واستشراف فرص التعاون المستقبلية، لاسيما في ظل التقارب الذي بدا واضحاً على السياسة الخارجية لكل من البلدين في الآونة الأخيرة.

ويؤكد على أن أية دراسة موضوعية لتطور العلاقات بين البلدين يجب أن تركز على نقطتين رئيسيتين: أولاً، طبيعة هيكلية النظام الدولي وأنماط التفاعل داخله خلال فترة الحرب الباردة وما بعدها وأثر ذلك على العلاقات الإقليمية، بما فيها العلاقات بين البلدين. أما النقطة الثانية فتدور حول الأهمية الاستراتيجية والاقتصادية لمنطقة الخليج بالنسبة للقوى العالمية الناشئة والعظمى على حد سواء.

ويخلص البحث إلى أن العلاقات السعودية الهندية عانت من فتور خلال فترة الحرب الباردة حتمه التأزم الدولي والإقليمي ونظام الأحلاف السائد آنذاك، أصبحت بموجبه السعودية والهند على طرفي نقيض. لكن انتهاء الحرب الباردة ساهم في إزالة العوائق البنيوية مما خلق فرصاً جديدة للتعاون، خاصة في المجال الاستراتيجي. من هنا يوصي هذا البحث بضرورة تطوير رؤية استراتيجية مشتركة تركز على عدد من الحقائق والمعطيات يمكن من خلالها مجابهة التحديات الاستراتيجية القائمة واستغلال الفرص السانحة للتعاون في مجالات أمن الطاقة، وأمن الممرات المائية، ومكافحة الإرهاب والجريمة المنظمة، مما سوف يساهم في دفع عجلة العلاقات خارج إطارها التقليدي القائم على التجارة، والعمالة والتفاعل الثقافي.