



EDITORIAL: INDIAN EXPRESS

GENERAL STUDIES 2: INTERNATIONAL RELATION

TOPIC: BILATERAL, REGIONAL AND GLOBAL GROUPINGS AND AGREEMENTS INVOLVING INDIA AND/OR AFFECTING INDIA'S INTERESTS.

DATE: 18.12.2024

Historic Context and Significance of the Visit

- **First Indian Prime Ministerial Visit in Decades:** Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kuwait is significant as it marks the first visit by an Indian Prime Minister in over four decades. This underscores a decisive shift in India's engagement with the Gulf region.
- **Strategic Importance:** The visit is a testament to the evolving relationship between India and the Gulf, with Modi's leadership fostering enhanced connectivity, commercial cooperation, and security partnerships, reflecting India's strategic interest in the region.
- **Reshaping Middle Eastern Geopolitics:** The timing of the visit coincides with the collapse of the Assad regime in Syria, suggesting the potential restructuring of the Middle Eastern geopolitical landscape, which may have long-term implications for India's foreign policy priorities.

India's Gulf Diplomacy: From Hesitation to Strategic Priority

- **Historical Hesitations:** India's historical approach to the Gulf was shaped by its alignment with Ba'athist republics like Saddam Hussein's Iraq and Hafez al-Assad's Syria. This stance prioritized pan-Arabism and anti-imperialism, often straining ties with Gulf monarchies.
- **Turning Point under Modi:** Under Modi, India has experienced a qualitative transformation in its approach, characterized by high-level engagements and frequent visits to Gulf nations. Modi's leadership has steered India toward a more pragmatic approach, emphasizing strategic partnerships over ideological differences.

Shifting Geopolitical Realities

- **Decline of Ba'athist Republics:** The fall of the Assad regime marks the decline of authoritarian Ba'athist states, which were traditionally aligned against Gulf monarchies. This shift highlights the weakening influence of regimes that were more repressive than the Gulf monarchies.
- **Rise of Modernizing Gulf Monarchies:** Countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE are emerging as modernizing forces in the region. These states are driving religious moderation, social reforms, and economic diversification, making them more aligned with India's strategic priorities.



- **India's Strategic Benefits:** India benefits from these shifts as it seeks deeper ties with these Gulf states in energy, trade, and security. Additionally, the diminishing role of Pakistan in Gulf politics allows India to engage with the region with greater ease.

Towards a Comprehensive Middle East Policy

- **Navigating Regional Dynamics:** India's evolving approach to the Gulf is increasingly complex, with a need to balance the interests of moderate Arab states and non-Arab powers like Iran, Israel, and Turkey. This includes reconciling India's support for the Abraham Accords with its advocacy for Palestinian rights.
- **Promoting Arab-Israeli Cooperation:** Modi's visit to Kuwait highlights India's nuanced position in fostering better cooperation between Arab states and Israel, while encouraging Israel to address Palestinian concerns, which could lead to greater stability in the region.

Conclusion

- **Maturing Engagement with the Gulf:** Prime Minister Modi's visit to Kuwait is emblematic of India's maturing engagement with the Gulf, reflecting a broader strategic vision. This visit solidifies India's role as a key player in the region amidst its evolving geopolitics.
- **Strategic Partnerships:** By prioritizing relationships with moderate Arab states and leveraging its unique position as a bridge between competing regional powers, India is positioning itself as a pivotal player in the region's changing geopolitical dynamics.

Gulf Region: Everything You Need to Know

Member Countries

- **Countries in the Persian Gulf:** The Persian Gulf region is shared by eight countries: Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE). All these nations are members of the United Nations.
- **Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC):** Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE are members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), a political and economic alliance aimed at fostering cooperation among Gulf Arab states.
- **OPEC Membership:** Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, UAE, and Saudi Arabia are also members of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), an intergovernmental organization of oil-exporting countries.

Strategic Importance

- **Oil and Gas Reserves:** The Persian Gulf holds the world's largest proven reserves of oil and natural gas, making it a crucial source of energy for countries globally. Its oil and gas reserves are vital to both regional and global energy security.
- **Strategic Location:** The Persian Gulf is strategically located as a critical shipping lane for global oil exports. The Strait of Hormuz, a narrow waterway between Iran and Oman, is



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particularly important, as it serves as a chokepoint through which a significant portion of the world's oil flows, making the region pivotal to global energy trade and security.

Source: <https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/c-raja-mohan-writes-what-indian-pms-first-visit-to-kuwait-in-four-decades-means-for-diplomacy-in-middle-east-9730737/>



**P.L. RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY | 1447/C, 3rd floor, 15th Main Road,
Anna Nagar West, Chennai-40. Ph.No.044-42323192, 9445032221
Email: plrajmemorial@gmail.com Website: www.plrajiacademy.com
Telegram link: <https://t.me/plrajiacademy> YouTube: P L RAJ IAS & IPS ACADEMY**