

Geopolitics of West Asia and India's Regional Engagement

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Abstract: West Asia, known as the Cradle of World's Great Civilizations, the birthplace of Abrahamic religions, the Tri-junction of Continents, the Nursery of World Politics and the Heartland of Energy. It holds immense strategic and geopolitical significance not only for the region and the world but also for India. As, the discovery of oil transformed the region into a global economic center, it also led to destabilizing forces such as political unrest, civil wars, sectarian strife, terrorism and religious extremism. This paper examines the evolving geopolitical landscape influenced by regional and global powers with focus on India's engagement. It highlights India's historical ties through its diaspora and trade activities. It also analyzes how India's soft power and diaspora serve its interests while addressing the growing challenge posed by China's influence in the region. The methods used is a historical analysis of geopolitical changes and an

examination of India's strategic approaches. There is a need for India to navigate these complex dynamics to secure its economic and strategic interests.

Keywords: West Asia, India, Soft power, Regional Geopolitics, Diaspora

Introduction: The idea of ‘Geopolitics’, frequently used in international relations, examines and predicts how governments will act politically on a global scale. Geopolitics as a term was first used at the turn of 20th century by Swedish political scientist Rudolf Kjellen to refer to geographical pursuit of a state's interests. It involves the study of how geographical elements viz., location, climate, natural resources, population, physical topography, and others affect its decisions towards foreign policy and where it stands in the international power structure (Deudney, 2023). Although, Haushofer used the phrase ‘geopolitik’ to shape Germany’s foreign policy. However, he was unable to succinctly define this new idea, its main tenet was the concept of the state as a person or organism, over time moulded into a particular national character by its own geography and history (Britannica, 2023). In this sense, the phrase ‘lebensraum or ‘room to live’ was introduced to refer to the area needed by a strong, growing state to support its inhabitants (Murtoff, 2023). Hitler and the Nazi party would adopt this idea in its most violent and militaristic form in upcoming years. However, geopolitics as a subject was progress pertinently in the late 19th and early 20th centuries only, wherein it was impacted by World Wars, Industrial Revolution, and new technologies. Scholars such as Alfred Thayer Mahan, Halford Mackinder, John Seeley, Karl Haushofer, Friedrich Ratzel, H.G. Wells, Nicholas Spykman, Frederick Jackson Turner, E.H. Carr, Vidal de la Blache, and others have contributed greatly in explaining various approaches to contemporary problems and World geopolitics. Mahan’s historical analysis of “heartland” and the rise of the British Empire has been regarded a

classical work in the history of geopolitics. It has not only given the starting point for the geopolitical debate but also opens a wide canvas for future discourse. Mahan argued that the control of sea routes was decisive point because of the superior mobility over other mode of [land] transport (Mahan, 1890). With the advent of new technologies/Industrial Revolution, the role of land power increased pertinently as rightly pointed out by the Mackinder. He argued that any state that was able to control the heartland would control World politics and thus pose the threat of a worldwide empire. In disagreement, Spykman argued that the “rimland” of Europe and Asia, which was stretched in a crescent, had a tendency to unite would likely dominate the World (Spykman, 1942). On the other hand, German scholars postulated the theory of the ‘pan-region’, which comprises a centrally positioned continent-sized industrial metropol (or major power) surrounded by a resource periphery, to energize Germany’s dominance over the World (O’Loughlin & van der Wusten, 1990).

In this context, the region of West Asia has been one of the richest regions in understanding geopolitics of the region and countries across the World. Both, the economy and human resource are of great concern for changing shape of geopolitics in the region. The influence of power factors and geography of West Asia has been realized by global superpowers and, thus, this has now become a focus of global affairs (Rahman, et. al. 2022). The region turns out none other than the nursery of world geopolitics. Factors such as energy, mineral resources, heritage, human resource, and wealth have contributed greatly in regional geopolitics of West Asia. This region has been regarded as the region of significance in many ways such as the Cradle of World’s Great Civilizations, Birthplace of Abrahamic religions, Tri- junction of Continents, and the Heartland of Energy. However, the region of West Asia has overcome all the connotations of discourse and emerged as a miracle of twenty first century, whereas the region

passes from various political instability, economic barriers, social change, and surpasses cultural identities, among others. The general level of economic activity was subsistence until the discovery of oil. But soon after the Persian Gulf region's oil was discovered, this became renowned for having a large hydrocarbon resource. The region's economies are now contemporary ones with laissez-faire tendencies (Hitti, 1970). Recent globalization and economic liberalization have had a significant impact on them. Due to a number of essential considerations, including its enormous energy resources, religious significance, geographic proximity to significant countries, history of battles and wars, and the strength of its economies, West Asia has constantly maintained its place in the world's spotlight. Oil in particular has drawn the attention of other nations, including Europeans, Russians, and Americans, particularly since its discovery at the beginning of the 20th century. The Middle East's strategic significance, as defined by Western scholars, is influenced by a number of elements, including its control over important trade routes, distinctive geography and terrain, and the influence of religion and ideology. With a major 31.3% of global oil production, 45% of crude oil exports, and a huge 48.3% of proven oil reserves, the Middle East is recognized as the world's greatest oil-producing region (Rahman, 2009). Due to the involvement of all major powers in its affairs, it is one of the most important regions in the globe. Although, the geopolitics of the region has been studied in limited scope while the actual potential of the region remains unknown.

Literature Review

West Asia has always been a strategically significant region because of its geographical position, historical relevance and enormous natural resources (Abhyankar, 2008). Alfred Thayer Mahan and Halford Mackinder have highlighted the significant importance of the region in world of geopolitics.

Mahan's examination of naval power (Mahan, 2022) and Mackinder's notion of the heartland (Mackinder, 2022) both emphasise the tactical benefits of dominating crucial geographical regions. To study the historical perspective, it is important to analyse the current geopolitical developments. In fact, the formulation of geopolitical ideas has been greatly impacted by the occurrences of the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Mackinder's idea proposed that gaining control over the Eurasian heartland would result in worldwide supremacy because of the significance of the region. Spykman's Rimland thesis argues that the strategic dominance of the coastal periphery of Eurasia is of utmost importance (Diesen, 2021). It provides an opposing viewpoint to Mackinder's thoughts. These theories provide a systematic structure for examining the geopolitical tactics used by dominant nations in the Western Asian region.

West Asia has been characterised by a series of hostilities and political instability. The conflicts include the Arab-Israeli conflict, the Saudi-Yemen dispute, conflict in Iraq and the Syrian civil war. These wars have been thoroughly analysed by researchers, who have investigated their origins, developments and effects on regional and worldwide politics. Ilan Pappé's studies conducted in 1992, 2004 and 2014 on the Arab-Israeli conflict together with Acemoglu and Robinson's assessments in 2012 on political shifts in the region provide unique insights into the complicated relationship between local and international influences. The cradle of recent conflict is due to the discovery of oil in West Asia. It had a profound impact on this region. It propelled the region into an economic powerhouse and resulted in unparalleled economic expansion as well as worldwide importance. Rahman (2009) and other scholars have recorded the impact of oil riches on regional politics and its ability to draw the participation of global powers. Scholars such as Hitti (1970) and Azhar (2017) have observed that the geopolitical

environment has become more complex due to the uneven economic liberalization and uncontrolled globalization tendencies that have occurred in recent decades.

India's Engagement in West Asia

India's longstanding relations with West Asia is originally rooted in trade and the presence of a substantial diaspora. All these have grown into a significant strategic alliance in modern times. The ancient Silk Road was a pivotal channel for cultural and commercial interactions between India and West Asia. It has been the basis for profound economic and social ties. According to Business Standard July 27, 2023 report, "88.8 lakh overseas Indians live in six Gulf nations,"⁶⁵ It has been instrumental in making these bonds stronger. It also contributes significantly to both local economies and India's foreign remittances. In today's context, India's relationship with West Asia have evolved beyond mere economic transactions. It has to encompass strategic dimensions. Rahman (2017) highlights that India's soft power showcased through cultural diplomacy, academic exchanges. The significant Indian diaspora has been crucial in the development of goodwill and it strengthened bilateral ties too. India's focus on energy security, trade and counter-terrorism has further deepened its involvement in the region. However, the rising influence of China in West Asia presents a significant challenge for India.

Gaps in Existing Research

Although there has been a lot of study on the geopolitics of West Asia, but still there are important areas that have not been fully explored, particularly in terms of combining historical background with present geopolitical trends. A comprehensive examination is required that could emphasise the responsibilities played by growing nations like as India. Furthermore, the extent to which India's

⁶⁵Business Standard. "More than 66% of 1.34 crore NRIs live in Gulf countries: RTI reply," July 27, 2023. https://www.business-standard.com/india-news/more-than-66-of-1-34-crore-nris-live-in-gulf-countries-rti-reply-123072701032_1.html.

soft power and its diaspora impact its strategic interests in the region has not been well analysed. This paper seeks to fill these gaps by offering a comprehensive examination of the geopolitical terrain in West Asia with a particular focus on India's engagement. The study aims to provide a detailed knowledge of how India might navigate the complex geopolitical landscape of West Asia by combining historical perspectives with current advancements.

Emerging Architecture of Geopolitics in West Asia and Its Impact on India

Historical Context and Regional Dynamics

The West Asia region has historically been shaped by the rivalries and influences of various global powers. European countries, imperial Russia and capitalist America have always kept this region under their close watch. These powers have had a lasting impact on the political, social and economic landscapes of West Asian countries. Due to exogenous pressure and international influence, there are instability and conflict always in this region often resulting in instability and conflict (Hudson, 2013). The local rulers, frequently influenced by external forces, have contributed to ongoing strife, with internal divisions based on familial and personal interests becoming most evident during conflicts.

A Brief Reflection of The Key Geopolitical Conflicts of the Region

Arab-Israel Conflict: The foundation of the State of Israel in 1948 marked the beginning of prolonged conflicts between native Arab Palestinians and Israeli settlers. This conflict has evolved from intercommunal strife into political and military confrontations. It remains one of the world's longest-standing unresolved disputes. The area's significance to Muslims, Christians and Jews adds a religious dimension to the predominantly political conflict (Pappe, 2004). External influences such as the support of the United States for Israel and the control of

strategic chokepoints like the Suez Canal have further complicated the situation (Chorev, 2023).

Saudi-Yemen Conflict: The current crisis in Yemen stems from the failed political transition in 2011 from President Ali Abdullah Saleh to his deputy, Abdrabbuh Mansour Hadi. The rise of the Houthi militias, supported by Iran and the subsequent Saudi-led military intervention have exacerbated the conflict. It led to significant human and economic losses (Dosari & George, 2020). The humanitarian crisis in Yemen is described by the United Nations as one of the worst ever. It has displaced millions and caused severe malnutrition and disease (HRW, 2021).

Syrian Crisis: Since the Arab Spring of 2011, Syria has been embroiled in a devastating civil war involving multiple domestic and foreign parties. The Syrian Armed Forces, supported by Russia, Iran and Hezbollah face opposition from an international coalition led by the United States and supported by Turkey (Nawaz et al., 2021). The conflict has caused a severe humanitarian crisis with millions of refugees and internally displaced persons (Farinelli, 2020).

Qatar's Economic Blockade and Exit from OPEC: Qatar's strategic shift towards natural gas and its exit from OPEC in 2018, following a blockade by Saudi Arabia and its allies have reshaped regional geopolitics. Qatar has strengthened alliances with Turkey and Iran to mitigate the blockade's impact. It challenges Saudi Arabia's dominance within the GCC and highlighting the limitations of OPEC as a unified oil cartel (Wright, 2018).

Iranian Nuclear Deal and U.S. Sanctions: The unilateral withdrawal of the United States from the JCPOA in 2018 and the subsequent re-imposition of sanctions on

Iran have had significant economic and strategic repercussions. These sanctions have hindered Iran's ability to fund large-scale projects and maintain its energy trade, complicating regional dynamics (Ernest, 2018).

Implications for India

India's strategic interests in West Asia are closely tied to its energy stability and regional security. It requires reliable oil and gas supplies from the region. However, the presence of conflicts like the Arab-Israeli war and the Saudi-Yemen dispute poses a danger to this stability. It has the potential to interrupt the smooth flow of energy and have an influence on global oil prices. In order to protect its energy requirements and economic interests India must cultivate positive diplomatic ties with crucial countries in the Western Asian region, like Israel, Palestine, Saudi Arabia and Iran. To Successfully negotiate the complicated geopolitical landscape of the region, India requires careful management of diplomatic relations with at least above said countries. To cultivating strong connections with Israel provides advantages in terms of technology and defence. To support Palestinian self-determination resonates with India's longstanding opposition to colonialism and occupation. India needs to maintain cautious management of its ties with Saudi Arabia and Iran due to the strategic significance of the Chabahar Port project and the need for reliable energy resources. India may enhance its influence and contribute to regional stability by actively participating in peacekeeping and diplomatic activities. It can position India as a mediator in regional crises. Moreover, India's commitment to regional stability also include its concern for humanitarian issues, particularly the crises in Yemen and Syria. It needs enhanced international collaboration and prejudice free intension. India can enhance its soft power and showcase its position as a conscientious global participant by aiding refugees and backing international humanitarian initiatives.

India has both prospects and difficulties due to the increasing impact of foreign countries such as the United States and China in West Asia. India may enhance its strategic position by engaging in collaboration with the United States, while simultaneously being cautious to avoid being entangled in regional rivalries. To counter China's growing influence, it is necessary to strengthen economic and strategic relationships with important regional actors, while safeguarding India's interests in the face of changing geopolitical circumstances. India's understanding of the dynamic geopolitical landscape in West Asia is characterised by long-standing rivalries, continuing wars and strategic realignments. India can protect its interests and promote regional stability by adopting a well-balanced diplomatic strategy. As discussed above, India can actively participate in humanitarian initiatives and secure its energy resources. India's proactive involvement and strategic insight would be crucial in handling the complicated issues and possibilities in the evolving West Asian region.

Geopolitical Architecture of External and Regional Powers

United States of America

In terms of external forces, the United States has a long-standing, amiable relationship with the Arab Gulf nations, particularly Saudi Arabia. Due to its location atop the greatest known proven oil reserves in the world, which are crucial to US interests, the Arab Gulf has gained strategic significance (Feierstein, et, al. 2022). As a result, the US has consistently supported the Arab Gulf against a variety of geopolitical dangers (Saab, 2002). In many ways, Saudi Arabia does regard the American military presence in the country to be a privilege (US Department of States, 2022). Security and oil, the two original components, still form the basis of the friendship, but oil continues to serve as its center of gravity. With the exception of Saudi Arabia, which was withdrawn in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks, the United States maintains defense installations in Iraq and all of the

GCC countries. The US also oversees the naval operation Sentinel, which ensures ship safety across the Strait of Hormuz and the Gulf and involves GCC and EU countries (Katzman, 2020). Leaders in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates believed that the United States was leaving the area under President Obama. This exercise has caused severe alarm, especially in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. While imposing 'maximum pressure' on Iran and withdrawal from the JCPoA, the administration of President Trump reformed US Gulf doctrine and attempted to reassure Saudi Arabia and the UAE (Yildiz, 2020). Both the current and past US administrations avoided taking positions in the Saudi/UAE-Qatari impasse, instead calling for GCC unity to be restored. However, a united GCC was considered as a prerequisite for the Middle East Strategic Alliance (MESA), also known as the 'Arab NATO'. The Trump administration announced the MESA project in May 2017, with the goal of bringing together all regional allies of the US, including the GCC, Egypt, and Jordan, and institutionalizing their collaboration on economic, political, and security matters. However, continuous rivalries among regional actors jeopardize the project's viability. Additionally, the Saudis have repeatedly challenged the US hegemony in the Gulf region. Recently, the US has shown a passive attitude of endorsing the winner instead of trying to forge the course of events (Hudson, 2018).

The European Union

The Iranian nuclear deal negotiations were a litmus test for EU's foreign policy instruments. Former High Representative of foreign affairs and security policy of EU, Federica Mogherini and her staff were instrumental in brokering this agreement, and the EU has done all possible efforts to keep it in place even after withdrawal by the United States. The EU and the US share the goal of preventing Iran from developing nuclear weapons capabilities. Europeans are likewise tired of Iran's hostile efforts overseas, as evidenced, for example, by the EU's placing of

Iran's security services on the EU Terrorist List in January 2019, in reaction to failed threats on European soil. In reaction to persistent human rights breaches in Iran, the EU implemented sanctions in 2011. Overall, compared to the United States, the largest EU countries have approached the Saudi-Iranian rivalry with more neutrality. A payment system called INSTEX, implemented across the EU in June 2019, was created by Germany, France, and the United Kingdom to safeguard commerce activities between the EU and Iran in areas exempted from US sanctions (Kudahl, et al. 2021; Young, 2019). Due to Saudi Arabia's dismal record on human rights, Europeans are likewise considerably more skeptical on the relationship with the Saudi government. For instances, France, Italy, and the UK have sent military forces to the Gulf during EMASOH, the European Maritime Awareness in the Strait of Hormuz mission, and excluded Saudi Arabia. It was commanded by France and involves eight EU members along with GCC countries, which aims to protect the right of navigation in the Gulf (EPRS, 2022). However, the European countries have yet to develop a cogent strategy for the Gulf region.

The People Republic of China

The People's Republic of China maintains a relatively low profile in Gulf regional problems. Since 1990, the Chinese government took a well-planned and methodical approach to establish diplomatic ties with Gulf countries. Beijing participated in the JCPoA discussions and supports Iran's reintegration into the global market (Scita, 2023). Iran is a key member in China's One Belt and One Road (OBOR) initiative, and it has signed a 'comprehensive strategic partnership' pact with Iran, but it also signed similar accords with Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and other Gulf states (Chaziza, 2020; Sarker, et al., 2018). China's main priority in the region is on its oil resources. A quarter of the crude oil that crosses the Strait of Hormuz travels for China. It meets over 40% of China's oil demand (Kassomeh, & Qanas, 2023; Almujeem, 2021). However, China is

increasingly looking for opportunities for investments in other Gulf sectors. On July, 10 2018, Chinese President, Xi Jinping, in 8th Ministerial Meeting of the China-Arab Co-operation Forum spoke about collaboration, cooperation, and finding win-win solutions for Beijing and the Arab world (China Diplomacy, 2018). The epidemic of COVID-19 sparked significant humanitarian engagement among the Gulf countries and China (Fulton, 2020). Beijing has so far refrained from deploying naval forces to secure the commerce route via the Strait of Hormuz, however the Chinese Navy stationed in Djibouti provides some power projection capabilities in the region. Beijing also increased its role in Gulf defense through boosting military infrastructure to the region, particularly drones, and conducting joint naval maneuvers with Tehran and Riyadh in 2019 (Gurol & Scita, 2020). Nonetheless, at this point, China is familiarizing itself with the Gulf region and is hesitant to become completely involved in regional politics. China's long-term investments in West Asia might be considered as essential and as a component of China's long-term strategic goals in the area. China's economic growth in the region is unquestionably well-received and has the potential to have a significant impact on local affairs. In fact, China is adhering to its policy of not interfering in local affairs or controversial West Asian problems. China, in contrast to the United States, is anticipated to navigate the Middle East's many ups and downs with caution even in the years to come (Lehr, 2018). Further, the Euro-Atlantic partners have to recognize that China has strengthened its presence in the region by delivering medical help to the Gulf during the global epidemic and carrying out 'mask diplomacy' (Milton-Edwards, 2023). China's financial strength is equally projected to rise, while the naval station in Djibouti offers the possibility for military projection. Given the trend of China's conduct throughout various areas where its economic dominance eventually translates into political influence, it is realistic to expect an ever-more aggressive China in the Gulf region (Lons, 2020).

If the Allies fail to rekindle its economic, technological, security, and humanitarian links towards the Gulf, these countries might gradually shift to other global powers, particularly China, to secure regional stability and prosperity.

Re-Emergence of Russian Federation

Russia's active support for the Assad administration, as well as the deployment of Russian airpower and troops on the ground in Syria, propelled Russia into a regional player. Moscow, on the other hand, lacks an overarching plan for the Gulf. Russia fails to maintain a direct military presence in the Gulf, and its economic relationship with the region is limited. However, the military action by Russia in Syria in 2015 gave Moscow the largest impetus to re-enter the West Asian politics (Borshchevskaya, 2022). Aside from supporting Bashar Al-Asa's regime in Syria, Putin administration has not even shown a slight interest in getting involved in any of the region's numerous problems, including the crisis in Yemen, the Arab-Israeli peace process, and the disagreement between Qatar and its neighbors (Charap, et al., 2019; Charap, 2013). Moreover, the confluence of interest in Syria has strengthened the Russian-Iranian cooperation, while this alliance provides a secondary channel for Tehran to reduce the consequences of US sanctions. Moscow's backing for Iran is part of its strategy to challenge the US worldwide hegemony (Yetiv, & Katerina, 2018). However, Iran is an extremely independent actor, and Russia's influence in Tehran is extremely limited. Even during peacetime, the Iranian constitution forbids foreign military presence on its territory (Mousavian & Chitsazian, 2020). Moscow, too, is not afraid to strengthen ties with Iran's regional foes, notably Israel, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates. It seems doubtful that Moscow will provide strategic weaponry to Iran, which could irritate Russia's other regional friends, such as Israel (Allison, 2013). Russia and the UAE are both backing the Libyan crisis (Kuznetsov, 2018; Marson, 2018). However, Russia has nearly doubled its exports of weaponry to the region in the

last five years and it is expected that with current orders amounting \$24 billion, arms sell might be increased by many folds in upcoming years. On contrary, U.S. sales expected to be stable and could be grow nearly \$81 billion in next ten years (Lukyanov, 2018). To summarize, Russia's aims in the Gulf appear to be pragmatic and adaptable, prioritizing the safeguarding of past regimes and ensuring the coordination with international oil market activity. Russian officials have suggested establishing a regional security organization similar to the OSCE, but the practicality of this plan is exceedingly doubtful (Borshchevskaya, 2021). Further, China has also shown interest to embark on the foundation for upcoming geopolitical maneuvers in West Asia region (Alami, 2022). Economic growth in the Russian Far East, Central Asia, and the Arctic expected to consolidate strategically Chinese influence in accordance to Jinping's more assertive foreign policy. Beijing has already walked a thin line between cooperating with and competing with Russia, depending on one's point of view (Stronski et al., 2018).

Architecture of India and West Asia Relations

Trade and cultural ties between India and the Arab world date back to the third millennium B.C. Contacts were made between early dynastic Sumerian traders and those of the Kulli civilization in Southern Baluchistan, most likely just after 28000 B.C. The era of the 'golden age' of trade links between India and the Arab world may be defined as the time from the establishment of Islam in the 7th century A.D. to about the 10th century A.D. (Mudium, 1994). Based on shared kinship, friendship, trade, and commerce, our ties are still strengthening. The sociocultural connection of Indian Muslims as a result of their holy sites of Macca and Madina being located in this region may be considered as another equally significant element that determines India's foreign policy (Rahman, 2017). More than a lakh Muslims from India perform the Hajj each year. They act as a unifying factor between two areas. Energy and labor have been India's two main economic drivers

with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) for the past fifty years. Indian expatriates have made up a sizable, though not dominant, portion of the regional labor market, and India has relied substantially on energy imports from the area. This connection has undoubtedly benefited both parties. However, the relationship is still far less varied and fruitful than it could be. India now occupies a prominent position in global trade. Its commerce increased from \$9.5 billion in 2000–2001 to \$77.8 billion on average yearly basis between 2011–2015. It is noteworthy to note that since 2011, India has traded more with the rest of the world than China (Anand, 2017), despite total commerce declining in 2015–16, falling to \$64.3 billion (a 15% decrease from the previous year).

India's Growing Energy Requirements

India's economy has been expanding steadily in the age of globalization and openness, as have its energy needs. Oil and gas are crucial sources for ensuring the security of the energy supply. In 2017, India was the fourth-largest importer of LNG (Liquefied Natural Gas) and the third-largest user of oil. India has depended largely on the importation of oil and gases from West Asian nations to suit its needs. Saudi Arabia, Iraq, and Kuwait are the three major nations in West Asia that largely meet India's energy needs. The West Asian region provides almost all of the world's gas needs. Therefore, West Asian nations have been of the utmost strategic importance to India. West Asia continues to be essential for ensuring India's energy security since its energy needs are expanding quickly. It is crucial to be aware that more than 4/5 of India's oil and gas needs are met by outside sources (Azhar, 2017). The expansion of the Indian economy has also significantly increased the country's use of oil and gas.

Indian Migration and Diaspora

The early days of oil discoveries and exploration was when the labor migration from India to the GCC began. The revenue of oil exporting and producing nations

in the area increased significantly as a result of a sharp rise in oil prices. A great deal of effort was put into several development projects, including building roads and creating amenities like schools, hospitals, homes, airports, offices, and commercial buildings. Due to this, not only highly skilled workers but also semi-skilled and unskilled workers were in demand. India is not just the second-most populous nation in the world, with an excess of labor, but it also boasts a huge pool of highly skilled and educated labor. Indians were the first group of people to go to the Gulf countries as opportunities to make more money appeared, and they were ideally positioned to supply these expanding demands. As a result, chances for these unemployed people to find productive employment are presented by the migration of Indian labor to the Gulf region (Rahman, et al., 2017). In the current situation, these migrants, also known as Diaspora communities, have been actively participating in the social, political, and economic growth of their home countries for many years. These contributions are usually motivated by a feeling of responsibility towards the place of origin, but they are mostly facilitated by deep connections to one's homeland. According to the HCL study, the Indian diaspora has a substantial buying power of almost \$300 billion. It indicates India's significant potential to stimulate economic development. Indian communities and Gulf-based civil societies must be reorganized in order to actively engage in governmental activities. By doing this, India can take advantage of its diaspora and create effective strategies to address the issues caused by Indian migrants to the Gulf. Indian migrants in the Gulf must be seen as soft power, playing a key role for both their home country and the host society.

India's Soft Power Approach

India's soft power is evident in many areas, including international law and multilateral diplomacy, Bollywood, food, yoga, its democratic nature, neutrality, and non-interference. Similar to how we already know that diaspora uses a variety

of tactics to influence political allies, the media, international states and non-state organizations, and the governments of both their home and host nations. Political lobbying, media campaigns, fundraising events, the use of contemporary communication technology, election participation, and numerous other activities fall under this category (Gharekhan, 2018). India has a lot of potential to become a world leader by using soft power strategically because it has quickly grown in influence for a young nation in its 75 years of independence (Shivakumar, 2022). Prime Minister, Mr. Narendra Modi, has recently included the use of soft power diplomacy as an instrument for foreign policy. The Indian Diaspora's global presence has grown to be a crucial component in projecting one's soft power influence. They are seen as an essential bridging link between two regions and an unofficial ambassador to foreign policy. It is indisputable that the Indian diaspora in the Gulf has historically received little attention. India has only recently begun to place importance on the Gulf region, as evidenced by the Indian prime minister's diplomatic trips to West Asian nations in general and the Gulf States in particular, including Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Iran, and Israel. The UAE reciprocated by giving permission for the construction of a temple there. This recent change in posture is the result of a substantial migration of Indian workers into the GGC economies; these workers, who number close to 9 million, have a significant positive impact on both the Indian and Gulf economies.

Conclusions

The past decade has seen the West Asian and Gulf regions embroiled in a cycle of insecurity and instability that fundamentally altered the larger security environment. Structural changes have set free forces that destabilize the region. It led to multi-layered conflicts involving numerous local, regional and global actors. Political unrest, civil wars, sectarian strife, terrorism, religious extremism and secessionist movements have severely impacted the common folk. It in fact led to forced

migration and significant economic losses. These issues have created a death-defying security situation and heightened regional rivalries. The threats and security concerns due to these conflicts have significantly affected the international relations of West Asian and GCC countries.

At the beginning, people saw Arab Spring as democratic transformations and a reconfiguration of the regional system. But the second phase has been hampered by a lack of progress and an increase in bloodshed. It happened mostly due to the absence of cohesive backing from international bodies. The current state of unrest has given rise to several security concerns for the local population and has had far-reaching implications for the international community. The changing geopolitical landscape has reduced regional and international interest in political changes, therefore it narrowed the potential for significant transformation. On one hand the United States and Russia persist in their competition by providing military equipment to Gulf states. On the other hand, India maintains a cautious stance as an observer. India's main concerns in West Asia are mostly economic rather than political or hegemonic, like USA and Russia. It requires a cautious approach to the complicated geopolitical panorama. As a result, India's practical approach to its foreign policy in West Asia has been well embraced by other countries in the region. The Indian diaspora residing in Gulf nations strengthens India's influence by using a soft power approaches hitherto they continued strengthening its economic relationships. India's economic stability is heavily reliant on guaranteeing energy security from West Asia. Furthermore, the ongoing crisis in West Asia necessitates that India adopts a more diplomatic and assertive approach. It has the capacity to maintain equilibrium in relationships between competing parties and participate in humanitarian endeavours. India's involvement in peacekeeping activities is vital for safeguarding its interests and promoting stability in the region.

Finally, we can say that, India has both difficulties and possibilities in the evolving geopolitical panorama of West Asia. Therefore, India should take a sophisticated and proactive strategy. Due to the region's volatility caused by complicated historical rivalries, continuing hostilities and strategic adjustments, India can effectively handle the volatile situation in West Asia by maintaining diplomatic contacts, using its diaspora and securing its energy resources. It is necessary to understand the deep implications of these geopolitical processes in order to improve India's strategic orientation and promote stability at both regional and global levels.

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