



PERSIAN GULF

PERSIAN GULF 2021-22

India's
Relations with
the Region

Sameena Hameed
Md. Muddassir Quamar
P. R. Kumaraswamy

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Persian Gulf

India's Relations with the Region

Series Editor

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Persian Gulf, the leading publication of the Middle East Institute, New Delhi, India systematically looks at the growing relationship between India and the countries of the Persian Gulf region. Due to rising economic interactions and political engagements, the region has assumed greater importance, and hence requires a methodical study.

About two-thirds of India's oil and gas imports are met by the Persian Gulf countries and the Gulf Arab countries are home to over eight million Indian expatriate labour force. The Persian Gulf is also India's largest sub-regional trading partner and a potential source of investments. As the Persian Gulf witnesses rapid changes, there is a knowledge gap regarding the region and *Persian Gulf* seeks to redress this challenge by offering a systematic understanding of the region, its problems and opportunities for India in the political, economic, social, energy and strategic arena.

Since the publication of the inaugural volume in 2012, the *Persian Gulf* Series covers India's bilateral relations with nine countries, namely, Bahrain, Iran, Iraq, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Yemen as well as the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It examines the relations of the major players such as the US, Russia, China and Pakistan and their impact upon the Indo-Gulf relations. Backed by various primary materials the series seeks to be a platform for informed discussion on this vital region towards its nuanced understanding.

Sameena Hameed · Md. Muddassir Quamar ·
P. R. Kumaraswamy

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To
Professor Joseph A. K echichian
With respect, admiration and gratitude

ABOUT MEI@ND

Founded in October 2009 as a private and not-for-profit academic initiative, the Middle East Institute at New Delhi (MEI@ND) has entered its second decade and re-pledges its commitment to generating a serious, nuanced, scholarly and non-partisan understanding of the region for India. During this period, the MEI has undertaken several academic and outreach activities, including *Contemporary Review of the Middle East*, a refereed quarterly published by Sage (India), book series with Knowledge World and several edited volumes, with the participation of young and budding scholars.

As the region dominates India's political, strategic, economic, energy, cultural and social interests in the broader Middle East, *Persian Gulf Series* was launched in 2012. It systematically tracks, analyses and details bilateral relations annually. Kindle published the inaugural issue.¹ Two subsequent volumes, *Persian Gulf 2013*² and *Persian Gulf 2014*,³ were published by Sage (India). Smashword published the fourth in the Series *Persian Gulf*

¹ *Persian Gulf, 2012*, <https://www.amazon.in/Persian-Gulf-2012-Indias-Relations-ebook/dp/B0099RZ6NG>.

² *Persian Gulf 2013*, <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/persian-gulf-2013/book242306>.

³ *Persian Gulf 2014*, <https://us.sagepub.com/en-us/nam/persian-gulf-2014/book245036>.

2015.⁴ The 2016–17 volume pertaining to events of 2015 and 2016 was published in collaboration with Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (IDSA, renamed Manohar Parrikar-IDSA in February 2020).⁵ Thanks to Sagarika Ghosh, our series found a home in Springer that has published the 2018,⁶ 2019⁷ and 2020⁸ volumes. The present *Persian Gulf 2021–22* is the ninth in the Series and the fourth under Palgrave Macmillan banner. Due to Covid-19 pandemic, we decided to combine the events of 2020 and 2021 in this volume.

The Series began as an edited volume and when we moved to Springer, we settled for co-authorship for greater coherence and timely execution. The basic fundamentals of the Series remain the same, namely, *to present India's relations with the region in a comprehensive, holistic and systematic manner.*

⁴ *Persian Gulf 2015*, <https://www.smashwords.com/books/view/549471>.

⁵ *Persian Gulf 2016-17*, https://idsa.in/book/book_persian-gulf-2017.

⁶ *Persian Gulf 2018*, <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9789811319778>.

⁷ *Persian Gulf 2019*, <https://www.palgrave.com/gp/book/9789811514319>.

⁸ *Persian Gulf 2020*, <https://link.springer.com/book/10.1007/978-981-15-6415-4>.

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ABBREVIATIONS

AAI	Aramco Asia India Pvt. Ltd.
ACD	Asia Cooperation Dialogue
ACLE	Armed Conflict Location and Event Data, US
ACPRA	Civil and Political Rights Association, Saudi Arabia
ADCCI	Abu Dhabi Chamber of Commerce and Industry
ADHRB	Americans for Democracy and Human Rights in Bahrain
ADIA	Abu Dhabi Investment Authority
ADIPEC	Abu Dhabi International Petroleum Exhibition and Conference
ADNOC	Abu Dhabi National Oil Company
ADQ	Abu Dhabi Development Holding Company
AED	Emirati Dirham
AI	Artificial Intelligence
AIM	Atal Innovation Mission, India
APEDA	Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority, India
AQAP	Al-Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula
b/d	Barrels Per Day
BAPCO	Bahrain Petroleum Company
bbf	Barrels
bcfpd	Billion Cubic Feet Per Day
BCCI	Board of Control for Cricket in India
BCHR	Bahrain Centre for Human Rights
bcm	Billion Cubic Metre
BEDB	Bahrain Economic Development Board
BEL	Bharat Electronics Limited, India
BHD	Bahraini Dinar

BJP	Bharatiya Janata Party
BNA	Bahrain News Agency
BOO	Build-Own-Operate
BP	British Petroleum
BPCL	Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited
CAA	Citizenship Amendment Act, India
CBSE	Central Board of Secondary Education
CBY	Central Bank of Yemen
CDSCO	Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation, Saudi Arabia
CDTIC	Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company, Iran
CEF	Clean Fuel Project
CEIC	CEIC Data (A Global Financial Research Company Headquartered in Hong Kong)
CENTCOM	Central Command, US
CEPA	Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement, India
CIA	Central Intelligence Agency, US
cif	Cost, Insurance and Freight
CII	Confederation of Indian Industries
CNPC	China National Petroleum Corporation
COAS	Chief of Army Staff, India
CoNS	Chief of Naval Staff, India
CSB	Central Statistical Bureau, Kuwait
DAFZ	Dubai Airport Free Zone Authority
DEWA	Dubai Water and Electricity Authority
DGFT	Director General of Foreign Trade, India
DIFC	Dubai International Financial Centre
DIMDEX	International Maritime Defence Exhibition and Conference
DPIIT	Department for Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade, India
DPPA	Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs, United Nations
DRI	Directorate of Revenue Intelligence, India
DWE	Dubai Women's Establishment plan
EAPC	Europe Asia Pipeline Corporation (EAPC), Israel
ECR	Emigration Check Required, India
EDC	Ethylene Dichloride Facility, UAE
EGIC	Euro-Gulf Information Centre
EIA	Energy Information Administration, US
EIU	Economist Intelligence Unit
EPC	Engineering Procurement and Construction
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agricultural Organisation, United Nations

FATF	Financial Action Task Force
FCSA	Federal Competitive and Statistics Authority, UAE
FCSC	Federal Competitiveness and Statistics Centre, UAE
FDI	Foreign Direct Investment
FEED	Front-End Engineering Design
FFFAI	Federation of Freight Forwarders' Associations in India
FGF	Future Generation Fund, Kuwait
FICCI	Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry
FII	Foreign Institutional Investment
Fintech	Financial Technology
FNC	Federal National Council, UAE
FOB	Free On Board
FSC	Federal Supreme Council, UAE
FSRU	Floating Storage and Regasification Unit
FTA	Free Trade Agreement
FTO	Foreign Terrorist Organisation, US
GAMI	General Authority of Military Industries, Saudi Arabia
GCC	Gulf Cooperation of Council
GCCIPTC	Intellectual Property Training Centre of the General Secretariat of the Cooperation Council
GCC-SG	Secretariat-General of Gulf Cooperation Council
GCC-STAT	GCC Statistical Centre
GDI	Gender Development Index
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GECF	Gas Exporting Countries Forum
GGGR	Global Gender Gap Report
GII	Gender Inequality Index
GNA	Government of National Accord, Libya
GNI	Gross National Income
GNP	Gross National Product
GoI	Government of India
GPC	General People's Congress, Yemen
GRF	General Reserve Fund, Kuwait
GST	Goods and Services Tax, India
GSTATS	General Authority for Statistics
GW	Giga Watt
HDI	Human Development Index
HDR	Human Development Reports
HIPL	Hindustan Infralog Private Limited, India
HLTFI	High-Level Task Force on Investment, India
HRW	Human Rights Watch, New York
IAEA	International Atomic Energy Agency
IAF	Indian Air Force

IBN	India Business Network
IBPC	Indian Business and Professional Council
ICA	Federal Authority for Identity and Citizenship, UAE
ICAI	Institute of Chartered Accountants of India
ICC	International Cricket Council
IDEX	International Defence Exhibition, Abu Dhabi
IDPs	Internally-Displaced Persons
IEEFA	Institute for Energy Economics and Financial Analysis, United States
IGA	Information and eGovernance Authority, Bahrain
IGU	International Gas Union
ILO	International Labour Organisation
IMF	International Monetary Fund
INSTC	International North-South Transportation Corridor
INSTEX	Instrument in Support of Trade Exchanges, (EU)
IOC	Indian Oil Corporation
IOCs	International Oil Companies
IOR	Indian Ocean Region
IORA	Indian Ocean Rim Association
IOSCG	India-Oman Strategic Consultative Group
IoT	Internet of Things
IPGCFZ	India Ports Global Chabahar Free Zone
IPGL	India Ports Global Limited
IPL	Indian Premier League (cricket)
IPN	Indian Professional Network
IPO	Initial Public Offering
IPP	Independent Power Producer
IPU	Inter-Parliamentary Union
IQD	Iraqi Dinar
IRCON	Indian Railways Construction Limited
IRFFI	International Reconstruction Fund Facility for Iraq
IRGC	Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps
IRI	Islamic Republic of Iran
IRNA	Iranian News Agency
IRR	Iranian Rial
ISIS	Islamic State of Iraq and Syria
ISN	Indian Sports Network
ISPRL	Indian Strategic Petroleum Reserves Limited
ISRO	Indian Space Research Organisation
IT	Information Technology
ITC	International Trade Centre, Geneva
ITEC	Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation
ITUC	International Trades Union Confederation

IWPP	Independent Water and Power plant
JAFZA	Jebel Ali Free Zone, UAE
JCM	Joint Commission Meeting, India
JCPOA	Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran)
JWG	Joint-Working Group
KAPP	Kuwait Authority for Partnership Projects
KDIPA	Kuwait Direct Investment Promotion Authority
KDP	Kurdistan Democratic Party
KIA	Kuwait Investment Authority
KOC	Kuwait Oil Company
KRG	Kurdish Regional Government, Iraq
KSA	Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
KUNA	Kuwait News Agency
KVS	Kendriya Vidyalaya Sangathan, India
KWD	Kuwaiti Dinar
KWh	Kilowatt Hour
LNA	Libyan National Army
LNG	Liquefied Natural Gas
LPG	Liquefied Petroleum Gas
MADLSA	Ministry of Administrative Development, Labour and Social Affairs, Qatar
MBC	Middle East Broadcasting Centre
MbN	Mohammed bin Nayef, former Crown Prince of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
mbpd	Million Barrels Per Day
MbS	Mohammed bin Salman, Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
MbZ	Mohamed bin Zayed, Ruler of Abu Dhabi and President of UAE
mcfpd	Million Cubic Feet Per Day
mcm	Million Cubic Metre
mcmpd	Million Cubic Metre Per Day
MEA	Ministry of External Affairs, India
MEES	Middle East Economic Survey, Nicosia
MERS	Middle East Respiratory Syndrome
MFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
MFNE	Ministry of Finance and National Economy, Bahrain
MICE	Meetings, Incentive Conference and Exhibition
mmbtu	Million British Thermal Unit
mmcuft	Million Standard Cubic Feet
mmt	Million Metric Tonnes
MNCs	Multi-National Corporations
MoD	Ministry of Defence

MoF	Ministry of Finance
MOFA	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Qatar
MoH	Ministry of Health
MoI	Ministry of Interior, Qatar
MOM	Manage, Operate and Maintain
MoPH	Ministry of Public Health, Qatar
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
MPNG	Ministry of Petroleum and Natural Gas, India
mtpa	Million Tonnes Per Annum
MW	Mega Watt
NAAC	National Assessment and Accreditation Council, India
NAVDEX	Naval Defence Exhibition, Abu Dhabi
NBD	National Bank of Abu Dhabi (NBD)
NBI	National Bank of Iraq
NCE	National Centre for Employment, Oman
NDC	Nationally Determined Contribution
NEC	National Election Commission, UAE
NIA	National Investigation Agency, India
NIIF	National Infrastructure Investment Fund, India
NIMA	Forex Management Integrated System
NIRF	National Institutional Ranking Framework, India
NISI	National Information for Statistics & Information, Oman
NPCI	National Payments Corporation of India
NPK	Nitrogen, Phosphorous and Potassium
NRC	National Register of Citizens, India
NRI	Non-Resident Indian
NSE	National Stock Exchange, India
NSSA	National Space Science Agency, Bahrain
OCHA	UN Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
OECD	Observatory of Economic Complexity, MIT Media Lab, United States
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
OETC	Oman Electricity Transmission Company
OIC	Organisation of Islamic Cooperation
OIJF	Oman India Joint Investment Fund
OIR	Operation Inherent Resolve
OMIFCO	Oman India Fertiliser Company
OMR	Omani Rial
ONGC	Oil and Natural Gas Commission, India
OOC	Oman Oil Company
OPEC	Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries
OPEC+	OPEC plus (Members of OPEC and Azerbaijan, Bahrain, Brunei, Kazakhstan, Malaysia, Mexico, Oman, Russia, South Sudan and Sudan)

PAI Division	Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran Division, MEA, India
PBD	Pravasi Bharatiya Divas (Overseas Indians Day)
PDS	Public Distribution System, Iraq
PDTC	Power for Defence Technology Co, Saudi Arabia
PIB	Press Information Bureau, India
PIF	Public Investment Fund, Saudi Arabia
PIO	Persons of Indian Origin
PMF	Popular Mobilisation Force, Iraq
PMI	Purchasing Manager's Index
PoK	Pakistan-occupied Kashmir
PPEs	Personal Protection Equipments
PPP	Public-Private Partnership
PPP	Purchasing Power Parity
PPTs	Production Plateau Targets
PSA	Planning and Statistics Authority, Qatar
PSF	Peninsula Shield Force, GCC
PSL	Private Sector Participation Law, Saudi Arabia
PTA	Preferential Trade Agreement
PVC	Polyvinyl Chloride
QAR	Qatari Riyal
QIA	Qatar Investment Authority
RAS	Recirculating Aquaculture Systems, UAE
RBI	Reserve Bank of India
RCC	Redeployment Coordination Committee, United Nations
RSF	Reporters Without Borders
RTA	Roads and Transport Authority, Dubai
SABIC	Saudi Arabian Basic Industries Corporation
SAGIA	Saudi Arabian General Investment Authority
SAMA	Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority
SAR	Saudi Rial
SARS	Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome
SCO	Shanghai Cooperation Organisation
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SDR	Special Drawing Rights, IMF
SEP	Strategic Energy Partnership
SFD	Saudi Fund for Development
SFDA	Saudi Food & Drug Authority
SGRF	State General Reserve Fund of Oman
SII	Serum Institute of India
SLoCs	Sea Lines of Communication
SME	Small and Medium Enterprises
SOMO	State Organisation for the Marketing of Oil, Iraq
SPC, UAE	Supreme Petroleum Council, UAE

SPC, Yemen	Supreme Political Council, Yemen
SPR	Strategic Petroleum Reserve
SSIFS	Sushma Swaraj Institute of Foreign Services, India
STC	Saudi Trading Corporation
STC	Southern Transition Council, Yemen
SWF	Sovereign Wealth Fund
SWIFT	Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication
TCE	Tata Consulting Engineers, India
tcf	Trillion Cubic Feet
tcm	Trillion Cubic Metre
TEUs	Twenty-foot Equivalent Units
TEXPROCIL	The Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council
TPCI	Trade Promotion Council of India
TSCs	Technical Service Contracts
TWH	Tera Watt Hour
UAV	Unmanned Aerial Vehicle
UNCTD	United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
UNDP	UN Development Programme
UNESCWA	United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia
UNGA	United Nations General Assembly
UNHRC	United Nations Human Rights Council
UNMHA	United Nations Mission to support the Hodeida Agreement
UN-OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
UNSC	United Nations Security Council
UPR	Universal Periodic Review (UN)
USAID	US Agency for International Development
USCIRF	United States Commission on International Religious Freedom
USTZ	US Trade Zone, Bahrain
VAT	Value-Added Tax
VLSFO	Very Low Sulphur Fuel Oil
VoIP	Voice Over Internet Services
VPN	Virtual Private Networks
WHO	World Health Organisation
WLL	With Limited Liability
WTI	West Texas Intermediate (Oil Standard)
YER	Yemeni Rial
YOY	Year-On-Year

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Introduction

The global Covid-19 pandemic brought double jeopardy for the Persian Gulf region, crash in the oil revenues and sustained health risk for its multinational residents, mostly comprising expatriates. The Covid-19 reached UAE in early February 2020 and was declared a global pandemic by the World Health Organisation (WHO) on 11 March 2020. The health-led economic and social crises once again reinforced the importance of the Persian Gulf in India's strategic calculus. Prolonged human sufferings and hardships were accompanied by supply disruptions, shrinking of economies and markets, large-scale job redundancies and bleak and uncertain future. The long-term economic and social costs are still unfathomable but would be enduring. Until December 2021, India witnessed at least 481,080 deaths and 34,838,804 infections due to Covid-19, while the figures for the Persian Gulf region were 175,435 and 10,491,702, respectively.¹

The fragility of human life, however, did not bring about any radical shift in state behaviours and the region continued to suffer from a host of tensions, conflicts and self-inflicted miseries. While countries with advanced technologies and economic resources were able to survive the pandemic, poorer ones continued to fall behind. With severely restricted international travels, countries settled for virtual meetings and Covid-19

¹ WHO, "WHO coronavirus (covid-19) dashboard", 6 April 2022, <https://covid19.who.int/>, accessed 7 April 2022.

diplomacy but with limited success. Initially, India helped the Persian Gulf region with vaccine and healthcare support and was reciprocated by them when the second wave hit the country in early 2021. Despite the past experiences, the evacuation of Indian nationals either stranded in foreign lands due to lockdown or job loss proved herculean. The gradual reopening and sluggish economic recovery from the mid-2021 raised hopes of a post-Covid-19 future. What were the political, economic and domestic challenges that faced the Persian Gulf region during 2020 and 2021?

REGIONAL TRENDS

Some important developments that can have short-to-medium and medium-to-long-term implications for the Persian Gulf countries would also affect India's engagements and interests in the region. The political situations, both country-specific and wider regional events, may limit or expand India's interests in the region. The salience of the Persian Gulf in the global economy, connectivity and trade and commerce stems from its predominance in the energy market, strategic location and logistics. The geopolitical turmoil from its enduring conflicts and often unforeseen political breakthroughs have both appalled and surprised the observers of the region. What were the most important issues that affected the regional politics during 2020 and 2021?

The Trump Presidency: There is a general opinion that during his four years in office (2017–2021), President Donald Trump added to instability in the Persian Gulf and the wider Middle East through a series of controversial policies. His positions on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict,² “maximum pressure” policy towards Iran³ and his refusal to prevent, resolve or minimise the GCC crisis⁴ added to regional tension. The unveiling of the Trump Peace Plan (Peace to Prosperity: A Vision to

² Talmiz Ahmad, “Trump’s toxic legacy in West Asia,” *Outlook India*, November 27, 2020, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/world-news-trumps-toxic-legacy-in-west-asia/365509>, accessed 7 April 2022.

³ Eric Cortellessa, “Trump reimposes Iran sanctions, says goal is ‘maximum pressure’”, *The Times of Israel*, 6 August 2018, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-signs-order-on-new-iran-sanctions-says-us-policy-is-pressure/>, accessed 7 April 2022.

⁴ Imad K. Harb, “The doubts surrounding Trump’s work on GCC reconciliation”, Arab Center Washington DC, 9 April 2018, <https://arabcenterdc.org/resource/the-doubts-surrounding-trumps-work-on-gcc-reconciliation/>, accessed 7 April 2022.

Improve the Lives of the Palestinian and Israeli People)⁵ on 28 January 2020 marked a new chapter in the Middle East. While the lopsided “Deal of the Century”⁶ only widened the Israeli-Palestinian gap,⁷ the Trump Peace Plan hastened Israel’s normalisation with key Arab countries in the form of Abraham Accord⁸ signed between Israel and the UAE and Bahrain on 15 September.⁹ The process was strengthened when Sudan¹⁰ (23 October) and Morocco¹¹ (10 December) normalised relations with Israel.

The moves of Bahrain and UAE, close allies of Saudi Arabia, indicated Riyadh’s greenlight to Arab–Israeli normalisation,¹² even without the resolution of the Palestinian conflict. In his last days in office, President Trump exerted pressure on Al-Sauds to move closer to Israel and Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu even paid a secret visit to the Kingdom.¹³

⁵ Jonathan Marcus, “Trump releases long-awaited Middle-East peace plan”, BBC, 28 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51288218>, accessed 7 April 2022.

⁶ Jeremy Bowen, “Trump’s Middle East peace plan: ‘Deal of the century’ is huge gamble”, BBC, 29 January 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-51263815>, accessed 7 April 2022.

⁷ Ali Sawafta and Nidal al-Mughrabi, “‘Slap of the century’: Palestinians reject Trump Mideast plan”, *Reuters*, 28 January 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-palestinians-plan-reactions-idUSKBN1ZR2BN>, accessed 7 April 2022.

⁸ The Accord is named after Abraham, the patriarch of the three monotheistic religions, Judaism, Christianity and Islam.

⁹ Steve Holland, Dan Williams and Aziz El Yaakoubi, “Bahrain follows Emirates in normalising ties with Israel”, *Reuters*, 11 September 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-bahrain-usa-idUSKBN26226T>, accessed 7 April 2022.

¹⁰ *Al-Jazeera*, “Sudan agrees to normalise relations with Israel, Trump says”, 23 October 2020, <https://www.Aazeera.com/news/2020/10/23/sudan-agrees-to-normalise-relations-with-israel-trump-says>, accessed 7 April 2022.

¹¹ BBC, “Morocco latest country to normalise ties with Israel in US-brokered deal”, 10 December 2020, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-55266089>, accessed 7 April 2022.

¹² Natasha Turak, “Saudi Arabia is the ‘white whale’ of Israel’s Middle East peace deals, Jerusalem official says”, *CNBC*, 12 October 2020, <https://www.cnb.com/2020/10/12/saudi-arabia-is-the-white-whale-of-israels-middle-east-peace-deals-jerusalem-official-says.html>, accessed 7 April 2022.

¹³ Oliver Holmes, “Netanyahu holds secret meeting with Saudi crown prince”, *The Guardian*, 23 November 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/world/2020/nov/23/benjamin-netanyahu-secret-meeting-saudi-crown-prince-mohammed-bin-salman?CMP=Share_iOSApp_Other, accessed 6 April 2022.

Riyadh continues to hesitate as it sees normalisation as a leverage for its larger regional agenda and influence.¹⁴ Trump Administration touted Kuwait¹⁵ and even Pakistan¹⁶ as potential candidates for normalisation. In September 2021, several Iraqis issued a public call for a similar move¹⁷ but nothing happened until the year end. Though Oman and Qatar did not take any steps, both have been hosting Israeli leaders and tourists for the past few years.¹⁸

The Abraham Accords were followed by Israel and Gulf Arab countries exchanging ambassadors, opening of embassies and establishing direct air and sea links. The Israel pavilion at Dubai Expo was inaugurated on 8 October 2021 by Israeli Minister of Tourism Yoel Razvozov,¹⁹ with many Israeli companies and businesses showcasing the Israeli products, technology and culture.²⁰ Under the Biden Administration, the Israel-Gulf relations blossomed into mini-Quad in October 2021 with India and the

¹⁴ Hussein Ibish, “Why Saudi Arabia is now in no rush to recognise Israel”, *Haaretz*, 7 July 2021, <https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/.premium-why-saudi-arabia-is-now-in-no-rush-to-recognize-israel-1.9976034>, accessed 7 April 2022.

¹⁵ Jacob Magid, “Trump says Kuwait may soon normalise ties with Israel,” *The Times of Israel*, 19 September 2020, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/trump-says-kuwait-may-soon-normalize-with-israel-after-meeting-its-ruling-emir/>, accessed 6 April 2022.

¹⁶ Lahav Harkov, “Pakistan’s PM Imran Khan pressured to recognise Israel”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 16 November 2020, <https://www.jpost.com/international/pakistans-pm-imran-khan-pressured-to-recognize-israel-649154>., accessed 6 April 2022.

¹⁷ Lazar Berman and Aaron Boxerman, “Over 300 prominent Iraqis publicly call for full peace with Israel,” *The Times of Israel*, September 24, 2021, <https://www.timesofisrael.com/250-prominent-iraqis-publicly-call-for-full-peace-with-israel/>, accessed 6 April 2022.

¹⁸ *Middle East Eye*, “Oman says it is time to accept Israel in region and ‘move to a new world’”, 29 October 2018, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/oman-says-it-time-accept-israel-region-and-move-new-world>, accessed 7 April 2022; *Reuters*, “Israeli deputy premier begins rare Qatar visit”, 30 January 2007, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-israel-qatar-peres-idUSL2975296720070129>, accessed 7 April 2022.

¹⁹ *Gulf News*, “Israel Pavilion opens at Expo 2020 Dubai”, 8 October 2021, <https://gulfnews.com/expo-2020/pavilions/israel-pavilion-opens-at-expo-2020-dubai-1.82812963>, accessed 6 April 2022.

²⁰ *The National*, “Hanukkah celebrations begin at Israel’s Expo 2020 pavilion”, 29 November 2021, <https://www.thenationalnews.com/uae/expo-2020/2021/11/29/hanukkah-celebrations-begin-at-israels-expo-2020-pavilion/>, accessed 6 April 2022.

US joining Israel and UAE.²¹ Indeed, the growth of Israel-Gulf relations was one of the major talking point in the geopolitics of the Persian Gulf since mid-2020.²² The Tokyo Olympics 2020 held in July the following year, witnessed some interesting moments. Moving away from decades of cultural boycott, Saudi Judoka Tahani Alqahtani competed against Raz Hershko of Israel.²³ The Abraham Accords also provided an opportunity for Ankara to flag its pro-Palestinian credentials and call normalisation as “hypocritical behaviour” on the part of UAE and a “stab in the back” of the Palestinian cause. It even threatened to suspend ties with Emirates,²⁴ but Turkey’s economic fragility forced President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to eventually mellow down. The sabre-rattling soon faded as many saw Erdoğan’s duality; he was critical of the Emirati normalisation with Israel even while maintaining the Turkish embassy in Tel Aviv.²⁵

Change of the US Administration: The period under review witnessed the return of the Democrats to the White House. During his 2020 election campaign, President Trump unsuccessfully leveraged a possible Arab–Israeli peace to shore up his domestic popularity and his “Deal of the Century” was unveiled in January amid his impeachment trial in the US Senate.²⁶ Indeed, the Abraham Accords happened weeks before the 4 November 2020 presidential elections. Despite these efforts, Trump who presided over a deeply divided American population,

²¹ PR Kumaraswamy, “New Quad signals India’s strategic shift in Middle East”, *The New Indian Express*, 23 October 2021, <https://www.newindianexpress.com/opinions/columns/2021/oct/23/new-quad-signals-indias-strategic-shift-in-middle-east-2374582.html>, accessed 7 April 2022.

²² Marc Daou, “After UAE and Bahrain, will other Gulf states start to get closer to Israel?”, *France 24*, 12 September 2020, <https://www.france24.com/en/20200912-after-uae-and-bahrain-will-other-gulf-states-start-to-get-closer-to-israel>, accessed 7 April 2022.

²³ Dan Palmer, “IJF praises Saudi Arabian for facing Israeli opponent at Tokyo 2020”, *Inside the Game*, 30 July 2021, <https://www.insidethegames.biz/articles/1110991/judo-israel-saudi-arabia-bout>, accessed 6 April 2022.

²⁴ Daren Butler and Tuvan Gumrukcu “Turkey may suspend ties with UAE over Israel deal, Erdoğan says”, *Reuters*, 14 August 2020, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-isr-acl-emirates-turkey-idUSKCN25A00N>, accessed 6 April 2022.

²⁵ *Al-Jazeera*, “Turkey appoints ambassador to Israel after two years: Report”, 14 December 2020, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2020/12/14/turkey-selects-new-ambassador-to-israel-report>, accessed 7 April 2022.

²⁶ Jeremy Herb, “Senate impeachment trial of Donald Trump officially begins”, *CNN*, 16 January 2020, <https://edition.cnn.com/2020/01/16/politics/senate-impeachment-trial-starts/index.html>, accessed 7 April 2022.

especially over his mismanagement of the Covid-19 pandemic,²⁷ lost his re-election bid. His refusal to gracefully concede to President-elect Joe Biden caused considerable uncertainty over smooth transition and culminated in the insurrection of 6 January 2021 when unruly pro-Trump mob temporarily paralysing the Capitol.²⁸ President Trump was even absent during the customary official ceremony when Joe Biden took over as the 46th President of the US on 20 January 2021.

The Biden Administration and the excessive presence of Obama administration officials caused some anxiety in the Middle East, especially Persian Gulf.²⁹ During his election campaign, Biden reiterated his commitment to the Iran nuclear deal that he shepherded as Obama's deputy and expressed his desire to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) that limited the scope of the Iranian nuclear programme.³⁰ Within days after assuming office, President Biden appointed Robert Malley as his special representative for Iran³¹ and the nuclear talks with Iran began in Vienna on 2 April 2021.³² The hopes for an agreement before the Iranian presidential elections (18 June) and the inauguration of President Ebrahim Raisi (5 August) did not materialise.

²⁷ Yasmeen Abutaleb, Ashley Parker, Josh Dawsey and Philip Rucker, "The inside story of how Trump's denial, mismanagement and magical thinking,

led to the pandemic's dark winter", *The Washington Post*, 19 December 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/graphics/2020/politics/trump-covid-pandemic-dark-winter/>, accessed 7 April 2022.

²⁸ Marisa Penaloza, "Trump supporters storm U.S. Capitol, clash with police", *NPR*, 6 January 2021, <https://www.npr.org/sections/congress-electoral-college-tally-live-updates/2021/01/06/953616207/diehard-trump-supporters-gather-in-the-nations-capital-to-protest-election-resul>, accessed 7 April 2022.

²⁹ Anchal Vohra, "Biden's team is packed with Obama's advisers", Observer Research Foundation, 16 January 2021, <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/bidens-team-is-packed-with-obamas-advisers/>, accessed 7 April 2022.

³⁰ Kelsey Davenport and Julia Masterson, "Biden officials express support for re-joining Iran nuclear deal", Arms Control Association, 28 January 2021, <https://www.armscontrol.org/blog/2021-01/p4-1-iran-nuclear-deal-alert>, accessed 7 April 2022.

³¹ Matt Spetalnick and Arshad Mohammed, "Former Obama aide Malley named Biden's top envoy on Iran: Official", *Reuters*, 29 January 2021, <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-iran-envoy-idUSKBN29X2XQ>, accessed 7 April 2022.

³² European Union External Service, "JCPOA: Joint Commission to meet virtually", 1 April 2021, https://www.ecas.europa.eu/ecas/jcpoa-joint-commission-meet-virtually_en, accessed 6 April 2022.