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Exploring the Synergistic Potentials: Enhancing the Strategic Nexus between India and Saudi Arabia

Zahoor Ahmad Dar[1], Owais Bashir[2]

[1] Research Scholar, Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Hazratbal, Srinagar, J&K, India.
[2] Post Graduate, Department of Political Science, University of Kashmir, Hazratbal, Srinagar, J&K, India.

*** Corresponding Author:**

Zahoor Ahmad Dar
darpoliticalscienceku@gmail.com

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ABSTRACT

The historical entwining of India and Saudi Arabia is attributed to their shared religious, commercial, and cultural legacy. The deepening of their bond is concurrent with the establishment of strategic alliances by both governments. Collaborations between the two nations on energy security have been greatly influenced by Saudi Arabia's extensive oil production and India's escalating energy demands. Additionally, both countries are focused on joint efforts to counter extremist factions and terrorism through bolstered information dissemination, border security, and regional anti-terrorist initiatives. The enhancement of defence and security collaboration between India and Saudi Arabia is evidenced by military alliances, combined exercises, and operational readiness. Furthermore, they are intensifying their economic collaboration in sectors such as infrastructure, healthcare, and information technology to augment their trade relations. India is also keen for Saudi Arabia to invest in its rapidly expanding economy. This document scrutinizes the diplomatic relations between India and Saudi Arabia and delves into diverse areas of convergence.

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INTRODUCTION

The historical relations between India and West Asia are longstanding. Historical events, cultural practices, the development of human society, and the exchange of goods and services deeply root these relations. The cultural connections between these two regions developed into a multifaceted partnership during the mediaeval period. Consequently, there has been a regular exchange of communication and engagement between the Mughal Empire in India and the Safavid and Ottoman empires in West Asia. These ties extended over many domains, but the British colonisation of India fundamentally changed the nature of the interaction between these two regions. Great Britain significantly depended on West Asia to impose its dominion over India; however, trade between these countries declined.[1] The colonial period witnessed the British Empire's exploitative policies in India, primarily aimed at advancing its imperial interests by extracting natural resources and importing finished goods from the colony. The economic needs and interests of the Indian subcontinent were hardly considered, leading to a lopsided trade relationship. However, post-independence, the trade landscape underwent a transformation, which brought about a paradigm shift in trade volumes and posed challenges for various stakeholders. These changes resulted from the altering dynamics of global trade and the emergence of new players in the international economic arena.[2]

Since the end of the Cold War, India's foreign policy towards West Asia has seen significant changes. India should assume a more proactive position in West Asian politics due to the region's current state of unparalleled political, economic, and social instability. For both India and West Asia to thrive, stability in the region is essential.[3] Therefore, it is imperative to comprehend India's foreign policy towards West Asia in the contemporary global context. India's West Asian intentions and goals are becoming increasingly apparent, and it is now pursuing them with incredible determination. In recent years, Indian foreign policy towards West Asia has significantly transformed. From 1947 to 1986, research revealed that the strategy was too ideological and placed excessive emphasis on India's restrained relations with Saudi Arabia rather than prioritising practical considerations.[4]

Religious considerations, geopolitical alliances, the need for energy, and remittances are just a few of the factors that have shaped the Indian government's approach to international affairs in the West Asian region. India's West Asian approach emphasises nonalignment, provides support for national liberation movements, and is dedicated to the interconnection of Asia, Africa, and Latin America. After the Cold War, economic and energy security goals took precedence over philosophical and ideological concerns. Prime Ministers Narasimha Rao of the Congress Party and Atal Bihari Vajpayee of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) changed India's approach to diplomatic relations with West Asian countries. The emergence of five nations from Central Asia impacted the geopolitical relations between India and West Asia.[5] The philosophy of Nehruvian socialism, non-alignment, and anti-imperialism was supplanted by economic liberalisation and more significant links with the United States during the Rao regime. The United States played a significant role in shaping India's stance towards West Asia. India prioritised the Zionist state of Israel in its engagements with West Asia. India is now showing a growing interest in countries located in West Asia. India's West Asian strategy shifted its focus from Egypt, Palestine, and Iraq to including Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. India has established historical ties with the West Asian region. However, recent developments have necessitated a shift in strategic priorities.[6] India has transformed its spontaneous response to specific crises into a planned look-west policy to obtain increased involvement with its West

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Asian neighbours. This policy encompasses a variety of issues, including energy security and counterterrorism, among others. The geopolitical unpredictability of the past decades has compelled India to reevaluate its economic and strategic policies towards West Asia. The unanticipated food crisis, economic slowdown, variations in oil prices, and the military action by the United States in Iraq have all caused the expanding Indian economy to reevaluate its goals for the rest of the globe.[7]

The Vajpayee-led BJP government redirected its focus from West Asia to Israel and the United States. The government of India, under the United Progressive Alliance (UPA), made certain changes to the country's foreign policy towards West Asian nations. The 'look west policy' was first introduced in 2005 by the UPA-I government, which reflects India's growing interest in the countries that are located in its immediate neighbourhood in West Asia. In July 2005, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh advocated the 'look west' policy during a meeting of the Cabinet's trade and economic relations committee. The summit initiated the commencement of discussions for a bilateral free trade agreement between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).[8] During the discussion, Manmohan Singh claimed that the Persian Gulf has a natural economic hinterland, just like South Asia. We want to emphasise to all of our West Asian neighbours the need to maintain strong trade relations. India's looking east approach has bolstered its diplomatic ties with Southeast Asian nations.

Saudi Arabia stands out as a distinctive country among the countries in West Asia. India and Saudi Arabia have maintained strong bilateral relations in the fields of politics, trade, and culture for a significant period. Despite having a positive trajectory overall, the armed conflicts that took place in 1967 and 1971 had a negative impact on bilateral relations between India and Pakistan. Pakistan failed to get support from Arab nations for its stance on Kashmir and other issues concerning Muslims in India.[9] The preferential treatment that Saudi Arabia bestowed upon Pakistan accomplished very little in strengthening its ties with India. In September 1969, Muslims convened a summit in Rabat, Morocco, to discuss the Al-Aqsa Mosque in Jerusalem. Leading the Indian delegation was Fakhruddin Ali Ahmad, who flew to Rabat to participate in the conference. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia assumed the role of host for the event. During the oil crisis of the 1970s, India was never placed under an embargo by Saudi Arabia, which supplied India with 25 million metric tonnes, equivalent to 175 million barrels of oil per year. Saudi Arabia exerts a significant influence over both the supply of oil and its price.[10] The countries have a variety of commonalities, not the least of which is an interest in oil. After Indonesia, India has the second-largest Muslim population in the world, and a significant number of its citizens go to Saudi Arabia every year to pay homage to the holy cities of Mecca and Madina. A substantial amount of cultural interaction takes place. Various capacities throughout the Kingdom employ over one and a half million Indian nationals. The government of India is considering emulating Saudi Arabia's archaic political structure in the hopes that this could revive the country's economy. The connection between Saudi Arabia and India revolves around energy. India ranks as the fourth-largest buyer of Saudi oil, behind China, the United States, and Japan. Analysts anticipate that India will triple its crude oil imports from Saudi Arabia over the next twenty years.[11]

The Saudi monarch's visit to India in 2006 coincided with the signing of the Delhi Declaration, which paved the way for increased levels of collaboration and mutual understanding between the two nations. The declaration emphasised energy security and terrorism while also pledging to engage in other sectors such as health, education, research, information technology, agriculture, sports, and more. To accelerate the implementation of the

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Delhi Declaration, the leaders also decided to hold frequent joint commission meetings. The leaders of both countries met with King Abdullah and discussed the Palestinian problem while also emphasising their common aim for peace, stability, and economic prosperity.[12] India provided Saudi students with the option to pursue graduate and doctoral degrees at technological universities, and the two countries formed deeper links to enhance human resources in the telecommunications sector. During his appearance as Chief Guest at the celebration of India's Republic Day in 2006, the King of Saudi Arabia made a cryptic statement concerning the possibility of India becoming an observer of the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). Even though it has the second-largest Muslim population in the world after Indonesia, India has been prevented from joining the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) due to objections from Pakistan. It is prominent and influential worldwide because 29% of the Arab League, GCC, and ECO are members of the OIC.[13] However, the bilateral defence cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia has progressed significantly due to the Riyadh Declaration and Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh's reciprocal visit to Saudi Arabia in 2010.

Subsequently, in 2019, two productive visits between high-level officials from India and Saudi Arabia substantially enhanced bilateral relations. Recent visits by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi strengthened the relationship as one of a strategic partnership between the two countries. The Saudi government's declaration in 2019 that it was considering investment opportunities in India with a cumulative value of more than one hundred billion dollars over the next five years has helped to enhance ties between the two countries further. The increase in the number of pilgrims allowed to do the Hajj by India from 170,000 to 200,000 is considered to be a cornerstone of the bilateral relationship. The Indian government considers this project as its greatest undertaking conducted beyond its borders.[14]

In 2019, Prime Minister Modi and the Saudi Crown Prince signed a bilateral agreement to establish a new council known as the Strategic Partnership Council. The nations must coordinate their existing arrangements for bilateral cooperation across all areas of cooperation in accordance with the requirements of the Strategic Partnership Council. During Modi's visit to Saudi Arabia in 2019, his government and King Salman of Saudi Arabia signed eleven more agreements. These included collaborations in the areas of security, the defence industry, civil aviation, renewable energy, diplomatic institutions, the fight against drug trafficking, strategic petroleum reserves, small and medium-sized businesses, stock exchanges, and the introduction of the Rupay card digital payment system to serve the needs of the Indian diaspora and pilgrims who visit the country.[15] All of these concepts demonstrate how economically and politically close Saudi Arabia and India are to one another.

India-Saudi Trade Cooperation: The Bedrock of Relationships

Saudi Arabia has emerged as India's preferred partner for trade and investment due to the substantial strategic and economic benefits it offers. In response to the dynamic nature of the global economy, Saudi Arabia is aggressively pursuing a strategy of economic diversification that extends beyond hydrocarbons to other areas. To achieve this goal, the country is looking into alternative investment strategies and forming new relationships with countries from all over the world. India stood as the preferred partner in a world of uncertainty as a result of its forward-thinking and cost-effective technological advancements, as well as its relatively stable political and economic climate. With the establishment of the India-Saudi

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Arabia Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) in 2019, India became the fourth country to partner with Saudi Arabia, following the United Kingdom, France, and China, respectively.[16] The objective is that this would lead to deeper cooperation across a wide range of economic, investment, social, political, and security issues. The food security that India provides to Saudi Arabia is a reflection of the energy security that Saudi Arabia supplies to India. India obtains this security from Saudi Arabia. The Middle East supplies India with more than sixty per cent of its crude oil imports, which results in India being excessively reliant on imports to satisfy its need for energy. The majority of India's crude oil, petroleum products, fertilisers, raw plastic, and organic and inorganic chemicals are imported from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is also India's largest source of raw plastic.[17] However, Saudi Arabia heavily relies on imports to meet its local demand for food and manufactured items, including textiles. As a consequence of this, the economic and investment relations between the two countries are incredibly beneficial to both countries.

The Future Investment Initiative (FII) has become a well-known global platform where businesses and governments collaborate to identify areas of innovation that drive long-term, widespread economic growth. On October 24 and 25, 2023, the FII held its seventh annual conference in Riyadh, the Saudi capital, with the theme "The New Compass" as the primary subject of discussion. This provided a productive venue for the global business community and its leaders to examine the re-emerging international economic order in light of recent events, with the additional goals of promoting commerce, trade, and investment. The influential figure in Indian politics, Indian Minister Piyush Goyal, was instrumental in fostering economic ties between India and the wealthiest entrepreneurs in the United States of America to improve opportunities for trade and investment.[18] The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia has a strong interest in exploring the possibility of collaborating with India on the research and development of diamonds generated in laboratories utilising cutting-edge technologies. Leading Saudi jeweller Dana Al-Alami recently partnered with its Indian counterpart, Green Lab Diamonds. Additionally, Saudi Arabia and India decided to collaborate on the development and production of green hydrogen and renewable energy, the establishment of robust and cooperative supply chains, and the facilitation of electrical interconnections during times of crisis and emergency.[19]

India's annual trade with the Arab world is currently worth more than $240 billion. India is the second-largest trading partner for Saudi Arabia in terms of the volume of goods exchanged. In the financial year 2022-2023, the bilateral trade between India and Saudi Arabia reached an unprecedented $52.75 billion, marking a record-breaking achievement. The Saudi Arabian market is particularly strong for Indian exports of automobiles, refined and value-added petroleum products, rice, organic chemicals, copper items, telecommunications equipment, buffalo meat, and aluminium goods.

However, it must import commodities like petroleum, fertilisers, plastics, organic and inorganic chemicals, etc., from other countries. In 2022, India surpassed China as Saudi Arabia's second-largest export market, with a trade surplus of $36 billion. Saudi Arabia exported $46.2 billion worth of goods and services to India during 2022. India's tenure as G20 president coincided with the hosting of several major international events, all of which helped solidify India's position as a preferred destination for foreign investment and trade. During the G20 conference, India unveiled the India-Middle East European Corridor (IMEC), a new trade route. This route will connect India, the Middle East, and Europe. The success of this project is greatly dependent on Saudi Arabia. Indian businesses have greatly benefited from the recent

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structural reforms in Saudi Arabia, particularly the legislation encouraging foreign investments, corporate governance, and capital markets.[21] Saudi companies can discover low-priced prospects in India's artificial intelligence and robotics sector, its education and healthcare sector, its green technology and sustainability sector, and its green manufacturing sector.

Shri Piyush Goyal, the Union Minister of Commerce and Industry, Food and Public Distribution, and Textiles, suggested that the Saudi Sovereign Wealth Fund establish a presence in the Gujarat International Finance Tech (GIFT) city. The Saudi Ministry of Commerce and Invest India are considering forming a collaboration with the Saudi Arabian Industry Chamber (FICCI) to open an office in the Saudi capital of Riyadh. During their bilateral discussions, he raised the topic of India's potential assistance in the areas of design, building, personnel, and economic expansion. He expressed hope, noting that Saudi investments in India's food processing industry might be a critical factor in improving agricultural output and food safety in the country.[22] The initiation of investment in Saudi Arabia's agricultural industry has already started. Despite the legislative prohibition on foreign organisations buying agricultural land in India, the Saudi Agricultural and Livestock Investment Company (SALIC), which is owned by the Public Investment Fund (PIF), has obtained ownership holdings in Indian exporting companies. SALIC has purchased a 33 per cent share of LT Foods, an Indian firm that manufactures a well-known international rice brand. In June 2022, the Federation of Indian Export Organisations (FIEO) dispatched a delegation to the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia. The delegation facilitated business-to-business (B2B) meetings between the guests and regional chambers in Riyadh, Jeddah, and Dammam throughout their tour. In particular, in September 2022, delegates from India's Trade Promotion Council (TPCI) gathered in Riyadh with some of the world's most successful grocery and retail corporations. According to Mr. Goyal, the pharmaceutical industry has tremendous potential. He suggested that enhanced collaboration between the regulatory authorities of Saudi Arabia and India would benefit the pharmaceutical businesses of both nations.[23] The residents of Saudi Arabia would benefit from this since it would facilitate their access to pharmaceuticals manufactured in India, therefore encouraging Indian pharmaceutical companies to establish a presence in the nation.

To capitalise on India's expertise in startup businesses, India has proposed the creation of a "Startup Bridge" as well as a Joint Working Group on education and the development of skills. These initiatives aim to bring the two nations together. Saudi Arabia will provide complete physical and digital infrastructure to establish Startup Bridge in Riyadh. Saudi Arabia has the ability to bolster India's energy security by increasing the supply of resources like oil and fertiliser. During the bilateral conversations, the two leaders agreed to accelerate the implementation of the West Coast refinery project in Raigarh, Maharashtra. The project involves financial contributions from Aramco, a renowned oil business in Saudi Arabia, Abu Dhabi National Oil in the United Arab Emirates, and state-owned oil corporations in India. Furthermore, the stakeholders have reached an agreement to establish a Joint Task Force to identify and oversee the allocation of the $100 billion in Saudi investment. The Joint Task Force has allocated around US$50 billion to the refinery project, which represents approximately half of the total investment committed. The remaining fifty percent of the funds were distributed among several projects, including gas grids and optical fibres.[24]

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Defence and Counterterrorism Relations: The Flowering Buds of Cooperation

India and Saudi Arabia have strengthened their diplomatic ties since Indian Prime Minister Manmohan Singh visited the country in 2010. The signing of the Riyadh Declaration established a strategic alliance between the two states, elevating their prior level of engagement to that of a strategic partnership. Both countries have agreed that terrorism poses a significant threat to all civilizations and have emphasised the crucial need for collaborative efforts to eradicate this menace globally. The leaders have pledged to enhance data sharing in the fight against human trafficking, money laundering, drug trade, terrorism, and weapons smuggling. After this, in 2012, India's then-Defence Minister, AK Antony, travelled to Saudi Arabia to meet with his counterpart there. It was the inaugural visit of an Indian defence minister to Riyadh. In February 2014, the two nations made significant progress in aligning their security strategies by signing a Memorandum of Understanding on Security Cooperation.[25]

Furthermore, the two countries reached a consensus to form a Joint Cooperation and Defence Committee (JCDC) with the aim of enhancing their collaborative efforts in defence and fostering a greater comprehension of it. As of 2019, there have been four meetings between 2012 and 2019 among the members of the committee. During each of these discussions and meetings, the two sides have mutually agreed to collaborate on matters pertaining to marine security, the sharing of intelligence, and conducting training and skill development exercises. As a result of the JCDC meetings, the level of maritime security cooperation between the two countries has increased.[26] In addition, both parties have participated in activities aimed at training and capacity building; there has also been collaboration between the two sides on hydrographic matters. Since the early 2000s, there has been a rise in the frequency of naval encounters between the Royal Saudi Navy, the Indian Navy, and the Coast Guard. In addition, Indian ships have conducted several goodwill visits to ports in Saudi Arabia. The Indian Embassy in Saudi Arabia made a statement in February 2020 when the Indian Coast Guard ship Samudra Paheredar stopped in Riyadh. The statement suggested that the visits "symbolise our intention to strengthen our collaboration with the Kingdom in defence-related affairs." In February 2018, Admiral Sunil Lanba, who serves as the chairman of the chiefs of staff committee and chief of the naval staff, visited Saudi Arabia with the aim of enhancing marine relations between New Delhi and Riyadh. While on his journey, he had meetings with Mohammad bin Abdullah Al-Aysesh, the Deputy Defence Minister of Saudi Arabia, as well as the leaders of several branches of the military. This action was undertaken to enhance the maritime connections between the two major urban centres. In addition to these events, Lanba visited the Al-Riyadh class frigate HMS Dammam, the Naval Operations Centre, the Naval Fire and Rescue School, and the Western Fleet in Jeddah. All of these locations are in Saudi Arabia.[27] Reports indicate that Saudi Arabia has shown a keenness to enhance its collaboration with India in maritime security in the western area of the Indian Ocean. This region is home to some of the world's busiest shipping channels, including those in the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden, the Arabian Sea, the Gulf of Oman, and the Persian Gulf. India is a prominent global maritime power. These factors are also very important for India, as emphasised in the Indian Navy's 2015 Maritime Security Strategy.[28]

Saudi military officers have participated in various training programmes at the Indian National Defence College, the Indian College of Defence Management, and the Indian Defence Services and Staff College. The Saudi General Authority of Military Industries and the Indian Department of Defence Production recently signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU), which signifies a commitment towards greater cooperation between the two nations in the area

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of defence production. Since their immediate neighbours were so close and since they had hostile relations with them, defence and security were significant objectives for both countries. Both countries are dedicated to strengthening their defence and security capabilities in all domains. Consequently, the two nations decided to intensify bilateral defence cooperation through the exchange of visits by military personnel and experts, the conduct of joint military exercises, the exchange of visits by ships and aircraft, the supply of arms and ammunition, and their joint development.[29] In response to Prime Minister Modi's visit, they expressed approval for the decision to convene the second session of the Joint Committee on Defence Cooperation in Riyadh. Both nations considered the issue of maritime security significantly and expressed their commitment to enhancing it in the Gulf and Indian Ocean regions, which are vital for the security and economy of both countries. Furthermore, they pledged to enhance mutual collaboration during instances of natural calamities and the evacuation of conflict zones. The escalation of terrorism worldwide poses a significant menace that necessitates the attention and action of every nation. It demonstrates no preference for the countries it targets and has the ability to attack at any given moment.

Both Saudi Arabia and India have experienced varying degrees of terrorism and various forms of transnational crime, including money laundering, drug trafficking, and arms smuggling. Hence, it is mutually beneficial for them to collaborate in order to surmount these challenges. Both governments are unequivocally committed to enhancing their cooperation in order to combat these persistent threats to their respective national security. It demonstrates their unwavering dedication to combating terrorism and illegal activities. India and Saudi Arabia are deeply committed to eradicating terrorism worldwide.[30] After September 11, 2001, people concluded that countries like India and Saudi Arabia were vulnerable to acts of terrorism affiliated with Al Qaeda. Given India's track record of triumph in counterterrorism efforts, it possesses the capabilities to assist Saudi Arabia in confronting significant global menaces in the near future. India has had terrorist assaults over several decades, unlike Saudi Arabia. The heads of state from both nations released a joint statement known as the Riyadh Declaration, in which they reiterated their prior denunciation of the worldwide occurrence of terrorism, extremism, and violence. They emphasised that this phenomenon poses a danger to all societies, irrespective of race, colour, or religion. In order to counteract terrorism, money laundering, narcotics, firearms, and human trafficking, the two nations have reached an agreement to enhance collaboration in the exchange of information and establish collaborative strategies. The signing of the extradition agreement as well as the transfer agreement brought a sigh of relief to them.

Furthermore, both factions urged the global community to combat terrorism with strong determination. Excluding Saudi Arabia from the group, which includes Pakistan responsible for financing state-sponsored terrorism and engaging in a proxy war against India, is a positive development. The Saudi Arabian government has consistently aided India in apprehending high-profile terrorist suspects. It is worth noting that in 2012, Saudi Arabia assisted India in arresting Zabiuddin Ansari, also known as Abu Jundal, a terror suspect accused of involvement in the 2008 Mumbai attacks.[31] Saudi Arabia expelled Abdul Salam, the mastermind behind a fraudulent scheme involving counterfeit Indian rupee notes, in December 2016. The visit of Prince Salman to India occurred during a period of heightened political tension following the recent terrorist attack on a CRPF convoy in Pulwama, which claimed the lives of more than 40 Indian army officers. Jaish-e-Mohammed, a terrorist outfit operating from Pakistan, carried out the attack. Prince Salman's visit to India resulted in a solid urging to take decisive action against

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terrorism and nations that support or fund terrorist groups in collaboration with the global community. India and Saudi Arabia intend to establish a Joint Working Group on Counterterrorism and launch a 'Comprehensive Security Dialogue' led by their respective national security advisors.

Space Collaboration and Energy Ties: Deepening Areas of Relationship

Both India and Saudi Arabia are exploring space corporations for potential opportunities. The Indian government is considering the possibility of reducing the restrictions on foreign direct investment (FDI) in the space sector as a means to attract participation from international parties. Rajesh Kumar Singh, Secretary of the Department for the Promotion of Industry and Internal Trade (DPIIT), highlighted the significant opportunities for Saudi Arabian corporations to make investments in various sectors in India. The sectors encompassed are aviation, pharmaceuticals, medications, renewable energy, food processing, and agritech. Rajesh Kumar Singh also brought up the possibility of Saudi Arabian businesses establishing enterprises in India. He underlined the breadth of potential for collaboration in a variety of sectors, such as artificial intelligence, robotics, cybersecurity, automation, and space. These are all examples of fields in which opportunities for collaboration are abundant. The purpose of India's initiative to reduce restrictions on foreign direct investment (FDI) in the aircraft industry is to stimulate private sector and international investment.[32] Currently, the government has the authority to grant clearance for foreign direct investment (FDI) of up to one hundred percent in the space sector, namely for the creation and operation of satellites. Saudi Arabian companies have also made investments in India's solar and wind energy sectors. Collaboration between Saudi Arabia's military industry and India's "Make in India" campaign is another potential route for cooperative defence projects that are in the best interests of both countries. This would be a win-win situation for both countries. Furthermore, they endorsed funding for the establishment of large-scale pharmaceutical parks and the development of the food processing sector, enabling them to take advantage of India's flourishing agro-tech startup ecosystem.

India and Saudi Arabia's relations have progressed primarily due to their energy resource dealings. King Abdullah underlined the importance of Saudi Arabia's energy resources to the rapidly expanding economy of the country during his visit to India in 2006. India is among the most rapidly expanding economies globally. Throughout the journey, the two nations signed a Strategic Energy Partnership (SEP), which prioritises cooperation in the energy sector that is mutually beneficial. The Strategic Energy Partnership (SEP) formally urged Saudi Arabia to provide India with consistent, secure, and enhanced crude oil supplies under long-term contracts that have no specified end date. Until recently, Saudi Arabia was regularly the primary source of crude oil for India, fulfilling around 20 percent of the nation's overall oil requirements.[33] After Qatar, Saudi Arabia is India's second-most significant supplier of LPG. The majority of Saudi Arabia's exports to India, amounting to at least $27 billion and consisting of oil and petrochemicals, account for over ninety percent of their overall value. Petroleum imports from Saudi Arabia amount to $23 billion, constituting about 80% of the total value of all Indian imports from Saudi Arabia.

Additional commodities encompass natural gases and hydrocarbons, constituting around 4% of the total. Furthermore, there are polymers and other products in the downstream sector of the fossil fuel industry, as well as industrial and organic chemicals and metals. Conversely, Riyadh is endeavouring to broaden its range of commodities by incorporating non-

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oil products into its trading portfolio. In this regard, one of the most serious competitors is the Saudi Arabian automotive industry, which is responsible for the manufacturing of Renaults, Mercedeses, and, most significantly, Volvos. The Saudi Arabian automotive sector is responsible for the production of these vehicles.

India and Saudi Arabia have recognised the urgent need to reduce dependence on fossil fuels, decrease carbon emissions, and address environmental degradation caused by rapid climate change. As a result, both countries have prioritised the development and implementation of renewable energy and associated technology. This occurs as a result of people becoming more aware of the critical need to minimise their dependency on energy sources that are generated by fossil fuels, which are fast running out. Although still in its early stages, there are signs that the leadership of both nations is interested in intensifying their cooperation in this field. In the beginning of 2021, the Indian company Larsen & Toubro (L&T), based in Mumbai, received the contract to build the Sudair solar PV project in Saudi Arabia.[34] If finished, this project would be the greatest solar power plant in the world. The power output will reach 1.5 gigawatts. Furthermore, it has been asserted that there is a pursuit for cooperative endeavours to establish submarine cables linking the western coast of Gujarat in India with the West Asian (WA) region, namely along the Saudi Arabian coastline. This would provide a linkage between the two regions. Based on estimations, this would cost between $15 and $18 billion. The primary objective of this project is to establish a sustainable or eco-friendly energy system. Another main objective is to identify remedies for the issues caused by fluctuations in solar and wind energy. Although recently proposed, the present Indian government is very committed to actualizing the International Solar Alliance. However, it is important to note that the alliance has not yet been formed. India, along with the other G20 nations, including Saudi Arabia, is expected to make more investments in these programmes. Additionally, other nations with similar interests will also be included, recognizing the significance of renewable energy in promoting sustainable practices within the growing global framework.

Diaspora and Culture: The Blooming Aspects of Cooperation

At the 32nd annual Janadriyah, the Saudi National Festival of Heritage and Culture, India was the "Guest of Honour" from the 7th to the 28th of February, 2018. King Salman inaugurated the festivities, while External Affairs Minister of India Sushma Swaraj attended the inaugural ceremony. The legalisation of yoga as a sports activity in Saudi Arabia in November 2017 has significantly contributed to the rapid expansion of its popularity in the country. A significant number of Saudi nationals, particularly young people, as well as members of the diplomatic community, journalists, and members of the Indian diaspora, joined the Embassy's celebrations of the International Day of Yoga (IDY) in major districts of Riyadh in 2018 and 2019. The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia became the first country in the Gulf area to implement such standards when the Ministry of Sports and the Indian Ministry of AYUSH signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Yoga Cooperation on International Yoga Day 2021. The Gandhian statue was revealed at the Embassy on October 2, 2019, as part of a series of celebrations honouring Mahatma Gandhi's 150th birth anniversary.[35] The Embassy organised a grand commemoration on November 14, 2019, in tribute to Shri Guru Nanak Dev Ji on the momentous occasion of his 550th birth anniversary. The celebration of 'Azadi ka Amrit Mahotsav' in 2021–22 will pay tribute to India's 75 years of independence. This celebration coincided with the 75th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic ties between India and Saudi Arabia. The Embassy has scheduled a range of events from May 2021 to

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August 2023, including a golf tournament, a bike rally, cultural events, exhibitions, academic activities such as quizzes, and an international film festival.

The Kingdom currently has a population of about 2.8 million Indian nationals who are residing and employed there, contributing significant amounts of foreign currency. Members of the Indian diaspora in Saudi Arabia hold a wide range of skilled and unskilled positions, including entrepreneurs, educators, healthcare providers, legal professionals, technical workers, and executives. The Diaspora significantly contributes to the improvement of relations between the two countries. The Saudi Arabian government has acknowledged the significant role of the Indian population in the country's progress and modernization. India relies heavily on strong ties with West Asian nations, particularly Saudi Arabia, to ensure the welfare of its expatriate Indian population, especially their prompt evacuation in case of emergencies.[36] Saudi Arabia, through Operation Raahat, led the secure evacuation of several Indians and other nationals during the 2015 Yemen crisis.

In addition to their existing cooperation in the economic and energy domains and their engagement in defence and terrorism, India and Saudi Arabia have begun focusing on the Diaspora. The Indian diaspora in Saudi Arabia has become an integral part of Arab culture, mostly due to the influence of Arab traditions. A significant Indian diaspora in Saudi Arabia has significantly enhanced the consolidation of cultural ties between India and Saudi Arabia. Significant strides have been achieved in the community's endeavour to foster deeper ties between India and Saudi Arabia. Given the aforementioned circumstances, it is of the utmost importance for the two nations to continue to interact often and share their respective cultures to keep their bonds of friendship intact. The promotion of yoga strongly boosted public understanding of the bilateral interaction between the two nations, thereby fostering cultural engagement.[37]

The Saudi government's directions to promote the "Saudization" plan are expected to significantly impact Indian expatriates, particularly due to the prohibition on expats holding specific posts, which aims to provide more work opportunities for Saudi nationals. The Indian diaspora is experiencing significant distress due to the imposition of the 'family tax' in Saudi Arabia, which requires employed expatriates to make a monthly payment of 100 riyals (about Rs 1,700) per dependent. A family consisting of an Indian expatriate, his wife, and their two children would require a monthly budget of 300 riyals to meet their living expenses in Dubai. This has been a significant obstacle for the vast number of Indian nationals now living in Saudi Arabia. Due to the strengthening of ties between the two countries, Saudi Arabia could reconsider its policies that impact India's large and generally advantageous Indian diaspora. India and Saudi Arabia can potentially address issues that may harm their alliance, such as the concerns of the Indian Diaspora.[38] This might help them expand the range of their bilateral cooperation while still maintaining a harmonious equilibrium between their specific interests. Saudi Arabia has a significant population of Indian diaspora who should strive to use their presence in the country for their own benefit.

Currently, Saudi Arabia is dedicating its resources to maximising the growth of its entertainment and tourist industries. However, there is no greater illustration of how commerce and the arts can operate together than in the entertainment sector. The Indian film industry is now experiencing a remarkable surge and has emerged as one of the most promising new economic sectors in Saudi Arabia. India is a linguistically diverse nation, and its film industry reflects this diversity. Given the significant presence of South Indians in the diaspora, it is

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logical to expect a quick growth of their film industry. The Saudi diaspora, mostly consisting of people from Kerala, might potentially gain advantages from the Malayalam film industry.

Health Sector and COVID-19: The Soft Element of Cooperation

Collaboration between the two countries in the field of medicine has the potential to yield substantial advantages. If they can collaborate in this sector, it will be beneficial for everyone. In 2006, Hamad bin Abdullah Al-Manie, the Minister of Health of Saudi Arabia, visited India and expressed his desire to strengthen collaboration in the healthcare sector, particularly in areas such as telemedicine, training, and exchange programmes for physicians. ASSOCHAM, the Associated Chamber of Commerce and Industry of India, hosted the convened assembly where the aforementioned statements were delivered. The primary objectives are to expand healthcare services, build healthcare infrastructure, and enhance health-related technology. India is a significant manufacturer and distributor of medicines.[39] India's expertise in genetic drug development, its abundant supply of skilled medical professionals, and its cost-efficient research and development initiatives indicate the importance of India and Saudi Arabia engaging in negotiations on this issue.

In late 2019, a worldwide outbreak of COVID-19 garnered significant attention due to its potential to have severe consequences beyond just physical well-being. Due to this unexpected occurrence, it is essential to have knowledge of both conventional and non-traditional forms of security. India has strengthened its healthcare connections with the broader West Asian region, namely in the domains of vaccine manufacturing, cooperative medical research, and the exchange of exemplary methods. India and Saudi Arabia, both active participants in G20 meetings, should prioritise enhancing bilateral cooperation in developing resilient healthcare systems. During the peak of the epidemic, the Indian government deployed a large number of medical professionals to Saudi Arabia to assist in combating the disease. Saudi Arabia has made an exception by approving the "Covishield" vaccination from the Serum Institute of India for international visitors, which is unusual for a country like Saudi Arabia.[40] The Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Health and Medical Goods Laws, signed between India and Saudi Arabia during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Riyadh in 2019, can enhance the level of bilateral relations. Having a well-documented agreement in place should facilitate the enhancement of collaboration for both parties.

Throughout the epidemic, the two nations have maintained regular communication, collaborating to provide a consistent supply of food, medication, and other necessary items. The Kingdom sent two consignments in February and March of 2021 in response to the COVID outbreak in India. These shipments included liquid oxygen and 4.5 million doses of the COVID-19 vaccine acquired from India. The Saudi government assisted the local Indian population by offering free access to their hospital system and other services throughout the epidemic. Since the start of the epidemic, the Vande Bharat Mission has actively repatriated over 800,000 Indians using charter flights.

India-Saudi Arabia Collaboration: A Strategic Relationship

The Saudi perspective on India has witnessed shifts over time. After the conclusion of the Cold War and India's emergence as a prominent global power, Saudi Arabia started acknowledging the importance and possibilities associated with the nation. Saudi Arabia has praised India for its democratic framework and continuous economic progress. At first, Saudi foreign policy did not give significant importance to India as it had other regional concerns.

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Saudi Arabia's foremost foreign policy concern is the Gulf region, followed by the Islamic and Arab worlds. Following the 9/11 attacks, Western countries started to regard Saudi Arabia with suspicion, which caused a notable change in the Saudi government's approach towards India.[41] The subsequent cultural backlash in Western countries compelled the Saudis to intensify their engagement with the rest of the world, particularly in Asia.

The events of 9/11 compelled Saudi Arabia to see the imprudence of relying solely on the United States for its diplomatic aspirations. Consequently, Saudi Arabia decided to enhance its relations with its neighbouring countries. As a result, countries such as India, China, and Japan have been the primary focus of Saudi Arabia's attention. According to Abdul Aziz Sager, the chairman of the Gulf Research Centre in Jeddah, India's fast economic growth, increasing regional and global influence, ongoing military modernization, and strong political system are changing the geopolitical landscape and playing a role in reshaping regional and international relations. Like other nations, Saudi Arabia is determined to strengthen its influence in the post-crisis international order-building process in order to preserve its own national interests and promote moderation and stability. In light of these considerations, it is logical that the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Republic of India would want to forge a comprehensive alliance that would work to the advantage of both nations.[42] While the United States is now Saudi Arabia's primary security ally, it is imperative for Saudi Arabia to also broaden its security collaboration and engage with India in this regard. Saudi Arabia might potentially enhance its ability to handle increasing security and strategic goals by using India's assistance, considering India's credibility and position as an impartial participant in the Asian region.

Saudi Arabia intentionally severed its relationships with neighbouring countries and Western allies in order to shift its attention towards Asia. King Abdullah embarked on a journey to China and India in January 2006 to establish the framework for Saudi Arabia's new policy, which encompasses both economic and strategic objectives. Saudi Arabia would benefit from new prospects as countries such as China and India, which have a high need for oil, explore other markets for their manufactured products. To achieve long-term market stability, it is necessary to shift economic attention from developed Western countries to rapidly growing Asian nations. In recent years, the United States has reduced its dependence on the Gulf region as a primary supplier of oil. In 2011, the United States experienced a decrease in crude oil imports from the Gulf region, with a total of 679 million barrels, compared to the highest recorded amount of 1,007 million barrels in 2001.[43] The United States imported 438 million barrels of oil from Saudi Arabia in 2011, a decrease from the 608 million barrels imported in 2001. Saudi Arabia has identified India as a promising energy market due to the United States' shift towards less dependence on the Gulf region and increased energy self-sufficiency. As a result, Saudi Arabia has been exploring new opportunities in the East. Furthermore, it necessitates enhancing Saudi Arabia's diplomatic efforts and increasing the kingdom's international prominence. The previous US ambassador to the Kingdom described King Abdullah's trip to India and China in 2006 as an extremely important visit. India's 'Look West' policy, implemented in 2005 to enhance relations with the countries in its extended vicinity in the Gulf region, seems to have influenced the Saudi decision to look 'East'.[44]

From the perspective of Saudi Arabia, important challenges still need resolution. Saudi Arabia is deeply alarmed by the defence collaboration between India and Iran. The relationship between Saudi Arabia and Iran has been affected by various factors, such as their competition for regional supremacy, religious divisions, efforts to exert influence and control over the global oil market, the involvement of the United States in the region, and Iran's nuclear

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programme. As a result of conflicting interests, the two nations have engaged in proxy conflicts in many locations, such as Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen. The Iranian nuclear project is the most significant danger to Saudi Arabia. Iran's nuclear project has sparked regional and global concerns, prompting India to advocate for the establishment of a nuclear-weapon-free zone in the region. Riyadh finds it challenging to accept both the defence collaboration between India and Iran as well as India's willingness to engage with Iran on a political level. India's opposition to Iran at the IAEA would certainly gratify the Saudis.[45] Moreover, Saudi Arabia is concerned by India's burgeoning ties with Israel, particularly the procurement of Israeli armaments by the nation. Although India has declared its unwavering support for the Palestinian cause, irrespective of its connections with Israel, there is apprehension among many in Saudi Arabia that India's backing for the Palestinian struggle may diminish if its relations with Israel get stronger. However, Riyadh struggles to fully embrace India's increasing connections with the Zionist regime.

CONCLUSION

Although there has been substantial advancement in political and strategic collaboration between the two nations, it remains inadequate compared to the advances achieved in the commercial and economic sectors. However, the changing geopolitical situation and expanding worldwide significance of both nations demand deeper collaboration than simply commercial interchange. Riyad responded with compassion, as India's Prime Minister Modi clearly expressed India's desire to move beyond a simple trade partnership with Saudi Arabia. According to him, this visit and the signing of a number of agreements and memoranda of understanding reflect a new era of strategic partnership between the two countries. King Abdullah concurred, describing the journey as historic and emphasising that the relationship had acquired a "strategic" nature. Recent high-level discussions and agreements have significantly deepened the degree of trust. Both nations should enthusiastically engage in mutual collaboration and explore several avenues of engagement since the trust deficit that arose during the Cold War seems to be diminishing. The subsequent significant development will entail the mutual recognition of each nation's influence and jurisdiction inside their respective territories, as well as collaboration in addressing political, economic, and security matters that impact both areas. Both nations will need to maintain the momentum generated by the visits of two high-level officials and expand robust economic relations into a stronger strategic partnership. By coordinating their efforts, they may attain their aims.

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