

Research Article

The Gulf Rise in International Politics: The Role of the Gulf Arab States After Regional and International Developments (2022–2025)

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Abstract: In recent years, the Gulf region has increasingly asserted itself as a significant actor within both regional and international frameworks, with its influence in global affairs continuously expanding. The Gulf Arab states have emerged as proactive and influential participants in a wide array of regional and international matters, earning recognition as dependable partners for nations around the world in confronting escalating global challenges while also contributing to the advancement of peace, stability, and development. This evolving role has become particularly prominent during major global disruptions, including the COVID-19 pandemic and the Russia-Ukraine conflict. This study seeks to explore the expanding role of the Arab Gulf states in promoting security at both regional and international levels, with particular focus on their strategies for managing security-related challenges. The main research question responds to the question: How does the foreign policy expansion of the Arab Gulf states influence the international system, and what challenges are associated with the expansion? The study is guided by the assumption that the Gulf's growing influence in the international order is the result of multidimensional political and economic approaches aimed at achieving the promotion of regional and international cooperation. The study results indicate that cooperation within the Gulf forms a significant factor in the resolution of emerging challenges, consequently increasing the states' collective capability to influence international political spheres. The study has been divided into three main parts, culminating in the concluding chapter highlighting the main research findings and providing relevant recommendations.

Keywords: Gulf Role, Growing Gulf Role, Arab Gulf States.

1. Introduction

Launched in a time of great volatility in the region, in response to the multifaceted series of political, economic, and security challenges to the Gulf states. The then prevailing situation called for collective action, to reflect the need for *collective action*. *Collective action thus foresaw the promotion of enhanced political, economic, and security convergence, and thus enhanced stability and boosted intra-regional cooperation* [1]. The foundational objectives of the GCC included facilitating coordinated efforts to address mutual concerns, expanding intra-regional trade, and safeguarding shared strategic interests in regional stability and development. Through its institutional framework, the GCC has enabled member states to align their responses more effectively to evolving regional and global transformations [2].

The primary aims of the GCC included the promotion of coordinated efforts to manage common challenges, expanded intra-regional trade, and the safeguarding of collective strategic interests in the stability and progress in the region. Under its institutional framework, the GCC has enabled the harmonization by the member states of their reactions to the ever-evolving changes in the region and internationally [3]. Additionally, the GCC makes investment in research and development a priority as a method for fostering scientific and technological creativity in main sectors, including agriculture, mining, industrial production, and water and animal resources management. By so doing, the GCC aims to establish a sustainable basis for economic and social development, thus promoting stability, resilience, and long-term growth in the region. Such ambitions signal a common vision by the Gulf states for their collective responsibility to overcome the region's common challenges and enhance their international status [4; 5].

The formation of the GCC was not a sudden occurrence but the result of historical, social, and cultural similarities. The GCC grew from a common identity and value system between member states reinforced by tight religious and cultural bonds, geographic closeness, and a shared vision of the world, which has for years guided regional cooperation efforts [6; 7].

The formation of the GCC met the aspirations of the region's people who were looking for a pragmatic form of unity at the regional level, primarily in response to the absence of meaningful steps toward broader

pan-Arab unity. The shared desire was to reinforce cooperation, deliver stability at the regional level, and forge socio-economic advancements to yield the collective benefit of Gulf societies.

1.1 Research Importance

The Gulf states have gone on to assume an increasingly important position in international political life, most significantly in the areas of security and energy, where their policy decisions have the potential to shape international and regional balances of power. Their primacy in oil and gas production and export makes it possible for them to exercise significant economic influence and thus could play a leading role in the maintenance of international energy stability and supply security. The wealth earned from the resources has thus enabled the states to build large financial surpluses, invested in diversified capital in various world sectors, thus solidifying their participation in and contribution to the world economy. Besides energy, the states have invested significant capital in infrastructure, technological advances, and developmental projects, within and beyond national borders. Such investment has not only enabled domestic economic growth but has also bolstered their soft power and diplomatic influence in the international realm.

1.2 Research Problem

The research question centers on establishing the extent of the determinants for the Gulf states to grow their impact on the international system, besides evaluating the various risks and challenges that have outlined and facilitated the upsurge. The determinants include their large hydrocarbon resources and the fairly successful efforts at their diversification economically. Such efforts have seen the emergence of larger and competitive economies that are progressively engaged in the region and the broader world. Moreover, the study examines the political and diplomatic activities in the Gulf states as they try to establish political alliances directed at the maintenance of stability in the region and the projection of themselves as viable international partners in the resolution of common challenges [8]. The study also examines internal and external issues that determine the foreign policy directions of the states, including

domestic socio-political processes, geopolitical rivalry, security threats, and economic weaknesses. Such parameters could either inhibit their influence in the international sphere or support it. That is why the analytical examination of these interconnected yet frequently conflicting parameters becomes significant in the determination of the evolving position of the Gulf states in international governing structures and their new involvement in international security model-making.

1.3 Research Methodology

The study adopts a descriptive-analytical approach in examining the Gulf states' growing involvement in the international system. The study undertakes a systematic analysis of the different determinants that have given rise to this phenomenon with the intention of clarifying the circumstances allowing for the region's growing salience. The study makes special efforts at highlighting the political, economic, and strategic processes that have jointly facilitated the evolution. The analytical method goes a step further in examining the interaction between the internal and external determinants and wider regional and international processes so as to shape the foreign policy directions and strategic decisions of the Gulf states. Through this analysis, the study seeks to draw inferences that not only clarify the Gulf region's changing international involvement but also provide generalizable understanding into the dynamics of international influence within the region. The study also strives to add value to the body of academic work focusing on the dynamics of the region's powers and their interaction within the regions and international political spheres.

1.4 Research Hypothesis

In the analysis of the rising stature of the Gulf states in the international system, economic and political aspects stand as main motivators. The region's great wealth, the mainstay thereof having been large oil and gas reserves, underlies its economic prowess. The wealth-based prosperity, in addition to active diversification efforts, has witnessed the Gulf states consolidate and increase their economic influence in international markets. On the political plane, the states have pursued collective and well-thought-out foreign policy, marked by the building up of bilateral and strategic ties. Through persistent diplomatic initiatives, they have worked to expand their international presence and shape the region and the world. The shifts at the economic and political levels have provided the Gulf states new outlets to secure their salience in international existence, complementary to their capacity to shape outcomes in different areas. Furthermore, the shifting geopolitical dynamics in the region has provided the Gulf states the opportunity to play expanded roles. Being products of the convoluted group of challenges in the region, they have come to be stabilising forces while simultaneously safeguarding their national interests and their geopolitical position.

1.5 Research Aim

The research study seeks to analyse and critically evaluate the essential parameters and root causes responsible for the growing influence of the Gulf states in the international system. The study aims to clarify their roles in the domains of economics, politics, and security and make a case for their enhanced stature globally being the result of effective utilization of energy resources, conscious diversification efforts at the economic levels, and aggressive diplomatic activism. The research subject's special attention to the identification of significant risks and challenges inherent in the enhanced role, such as regional instability, security threats, vulnerabilities at the economic levels, and the changing dynamics in the geopolitics of the world. Undertaking a comprehensive analysis of these interrelated aspects, the study attempts to develop a nuanced understanding of the Gulf states' evolution in the region and the international arena. Such an understanding would, in turn, enable broader inferences concerning the consequences for international relations and long-term stability from their enhanced global outreach.

1.6 Research Structure

The structure of this study is organised into three main sections:

- The first section explores the role of the Gulf states within the international system, comprising two sub-parts: the first addresses the strategic importance of this role, while the second examines the objectives pursued by the Gulf states in their international engagements.
- The second section investigates the primary factors driving the emergence of the Gulf states as influential actors. This section is divided into two components: one focusing on the economic aspects

underpinning this ascent, and the other analysing the political and diplomatic dimensions that have supported their growing international relevance.

- The third section assesses the key risks and challenges associated with the Gulf's expanding influence. It is presented in two sub-sections: the first addresses issues related to regional security and political dynamics, while the second considers the economic vulnerabilities confronting the Gulf states.

The study concludes with a final section that synthesises the major findings and offers targeted recommendations based on the analysis presented.

2. The Gulf Role in The International System

To ensure the protection of their strategic interests and the increase of their influence at the international arena, the Gulf states have engaged in a calculated adjustment of their external partnerships and alliances. Current changes in the international geopolitical environment have encouraged the states to redouble their efforts in the building of strategic ties. Distinguishing events, including the aftermath effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Ukraine conflict, and the rise to prominence of China as a leading force in international politics, have identified the importance in the lessening of reliance upon any particular international power. The policy of diversification has the effect of affirming the autonomy of the Gulf states and solidifying their position within the international system [9; 10]. In this regard, the Gulf states have diversified their diplomatic efforts by engaging with various international and regional actors. Such engagements are geared towards bolstering political stability, achieving economic resilience, and aiding the continuity of national developmental agendas and the sustainability of the energy sector. Through such diplomatic efforts, the Gulf states are equally playing their part in the resolution of regional disputes, contributing to the provision of international multilateral efforts, and providing policy responses to the world's most pressing challenges such as energy security, environmental transformation, and post-crisis economic recovery. By employing an informed and multi-pronged international relations strategy, the Gulf states are increasingly emerging as influential actors who are able to determine their own region- and international-level priorities in line with their sustained strategic agendas [11].

2.1 The Importance of the Gulf Role

The area in the Arabian Gulf has great geopolitical importance because it serves as the region where Asia and Europe are connected by land, sea, and air corridors. Frequently described as the geographic center of the Arab East, it exercises strategic control over a number of important bodies of water, seaways, and sea-lanes that are at the heart of world trade flows [12]. The area is also blessed with a favorable climate and rich natural and mineral resources, increasing its geostrategic value. Of great significance here is the Strait of Hormuz, one of the most important sea chokepoints in the world, regulated by international navigation laws [13]. As a reaction to these geopolitical and economic endowments, the Gulf states have become progressively assertive within the international system by widening their network of international relations and reframing their international role in world politics. Faced with changing world structures of power and increased geopolitical instability, the states have actively engaged in diversified partnerships to safeguard their national interests while refraining from involvement in the competition between main powers. Such a strategy not only works to safeguard their sovereignty but also serves broader regional stability [14].

The states in the Gulf have also enhanced their influence globally in a series of favourable and diplomatic actions. These include intervening in bilateral disputes in the multilateral arena and negotiating the exchange or release of prisoners and hostages, above all in issues involving the United States, Russia, and Iran. Such actions have earned the states in the Gulf fame as effective and neutral third-party interveners. Beyond that, they have been at the center in hosting and sponsoring political dialogues in high-profile issues, including those involving Ukraine and Sudan [15]. Qatar's political engagement in Afghanistan serves as another illustration for the Gulf region's increasing support for establishing peace, communication, and sustained stability in the region. The Gulf region stands out economically by being the world's top oil producer, boasting the biggest known oil and natural gas reserves.

The region also hosts extensive port infrastructure and fuelling hubs, contributing to its critical role in the global energy supply chain. In recent years, its economic prominence has expanded through comprehensive national development strategies articulated in long-term vision plans, such as Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030, the UAE's Vision 2031, and the strategic frameworks introduced by Qatar, Kuwait, and Oman for 2035 and 2040 [16]. Such strategies revolve around smart governance, the creation of smart urban nodes, and accelerated economic

diversification, thus making the Gulf increasingly competitive as a destination for foreign investment. Particular salience has been accorded to economic cooperation with China, which has been one main collaborator in the fields of infrastructure, trade, and digital technology. The region has thus become one area where competition between China and America will most likely escalate, in particular in sectors related to energy and digital infrastructure [17].

Despite this emerging geopolitical competition, the Gulf states have sought to avoid direct alignment with either side in rivalries such as the United States–China or United States–Russia power blocs. Instead, their strategy is to align with the rising cohort of middle powers and use that positioning to mediate tensions and advocate for de-escalation. By adopting this approach, the Gulf states aim to enhance their international influence and position themselves as contributors to global stability and cooperative development [18]. The rising authority of the Gulf states has come to ever-clearer light as they have increased their involvement in international mediation and won real results through strategic cooperation agreements with the great powers. Their changing role as mediators has in turn been buttressed by their membership in international organizations like the G20 and BRICS and their active hosting of principal international assemblies and summits. Such efforts are indicative of the Gulf states' wider policy to increase their involvement in world decision-making processes, above all in the fields of politics, security, and economic governance [19].

2.2 Objectives of the Gulf Role

With the emerging area tensions and the different security, political, and economic challenges that were the mainstay in the region then, the GCC was duly established on 25 May 1981. The step was due to a strategic move by the Gulf region states to overcome the challenges at hand by the coordination of politics, security cooperation, economic union, and search for stability in the region. [20].

The creation of the GCC was based on the recognition by the states in the region of their different but closely connected systems, shared values drawn from Islam, and a shared conviction in a common destiny. Such a founding vision was characterised by a feeling of cultural and social similarity between their citizens, and a shared ambition to reach complete cohesion and reciprocal interdependence in every field. The main goals of the GCC are:

- Fostering development and integration across various domains among the member states, with the ultimate aim of achieving unity.
- Enhancing interpersonal and intersocietal ties among the peoples of the member countries through diverse collaborative fields.
- Implementing harmonised regulatory systems in a broad range of sectors, such as economic development, social services, culture, healthcare, commerce, finance, transportation, customs, education, media, and tourism.
- Promoting scientific advancement in areas such as industry, agriculture, and mining, and supporting the establishment of joint scientific research institutions.

Such goals also highlight the intention to build harmonised systems within most important fields, such as trade, finance, transport, education, law, media, health, culture, tourism, and administrative cooperation. The GCC also aims to support collective scientific and technical advances in strategic areas such as agriculture, mining, water resources, and livestock production. Common research projects, transfrontier developmental projects, and enhanced private-sector involvement are also on the agenda for its integration programme. The decision to form the GCC during the early 1980s was shaped by a constellation of historical, social, and cultural factors rather than arising from short-term political motivations. The member states share longstanding religious affiliations, cultural cohesion, and familial interconnections, all of which are reinforced by their geographical proximity and mutual sense of identity. These commonalities contributed to deeper alignment and served as a foundation for regional integration efforts.

The formation of the GCC can also be seen as a response to the limitations of wider pan-Arab unity efforts, offering a more pragmatic and

achievable form of regional cooperation [21]. The Gulf states perceive their rising power and global influence as instruments to advance broader Arab interests and collective regional ambitions. They envisage leveraging economic growth, diplomatic capital, and political strength to achieve several key goals, including:

- Ensuring the security and stability of Arab nations, and safeguarding citizens from both internal disturbances and external threats.
- Reinforcing and expanding cooperative Arab initiatives among regional stakeholders to advance the cause of Arab unity.
- Promoting peace and regional stability through increased trade, mutual investment, and economic partnerships, while discouraging the use of force in the resolution of disputes between Arab countries.
- Generating opportunities for economic development through the creation of a sustainable economic base aimed at improving the quality of life across Arab societies.
- Enhancing Arab capacity in science, technology, and knowledge production by investing in education, fostering innovation, and accelerating knowledge-based development, thereby elevating the region's global competitiveness.

3. Dimensions Influencing the Rise of the Gulf Role

In recent years, the Gulf states have markedly expanded their involvement in both regional and international affairs [22]. This enhanced role is primarily attributed to their substantial economic and financial capacity, underpinned by abundant oil reserves and strategic resource management. Furthermore, the Gulf states have cultivated influential relationships with numerous global powers, a development facilitated by their consistent political stability, secure domestic environments, and adoption of balanced foreign policies.

3.1 Economic Dimensions of the Gulf's Rising Role

During the past decades, the Gulf states' influence has expanded significantly in the entire scope of regional and international life. Such heightened salience is grounded on numerous basic pillars, mainly their huge financial and economic strength, as well as their massive oil reservoirs. With as much as 30 percent of the world-verified oil reservoirs and world leaders in oil exportations, the Gulf states occupy a strategic position in international energy dynamics, thus making them indispensable actors in the international energy field [23]. These economic advantages have reinforced their roles within key international platforms. Notably, Saudi Arabia has secured full membership in the G20, an organisation comprising the largest global economies (refer to Table 1), while the United Arab Emirates has gained observer status and actively participates in the group's proceedings. The fiscal surpluses generated by these states have enabled them to extend their global outreach through humanitarian aid, development financing, and the cultivation of enduring economic alliances, all of which have elevated their international standing [24].

In consonance with changing international dynamics, the Gulf states have been trying to expand their political and economic relations beyond other Western allies in the past, extending their interaction to other countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. While extending their outreach in this direction, they have also been trying to give priority to interaction with emerging international challenges, especially issues concerning the sustainability of energy, environmental resilience, and water and food supply security. As calculated in the recent regional economic surveys, it can be seen that the growth in the Gulf economies has been driven by the non-oil sectors to a considerable extent. The trend mirrors the pace of broad-based reform plans and diversification strategies that are refashioning the region's economic environment [25]. The GCC has consequently established itself as one of the most powerful regional blocs worldwide, leveraging substantial strategic assets and economic capacity, with the total gross domestic product of its member states now exceeding USD 2.4 trillion.

Table 1: Projected Economic Growth Rates of Gulf States for 2024–2026 and Key Contributing Factors

| Country | 2024 | 2025–2026 | Reason |
|--------------|-------|-----------|--|
| Bahrain | 3.5 % | 3.3 % | Growth in diverse non-oil activities and increased oil production. |
| Kuwait | 1 % | 2.6 % | Rising oil production and acceleration of infrastructure projects. |
| Oman | – | 3 % | Increased oil production, ongoing reforms, and non-oil sector investments. |
| Qatar | 2.3 % | 3.4 % | New infrastructure projects and expansion in industry and tourism. |
| Saudi Arabia | 4.6 % | 4.5 % | Strong growth in non-oil sectors such as tourism, transport, logistics, and ICT (AI). |
| UAE | 3.3 % | 4.1 % | Strong performance in tourism, real estate, construction, transport, and industry, supported by oil production recovery. |

3.2 Political and Diplomatic Dimensions of the Gulf's Rising Role

In recent decades, the Gulf states have taken progressively bigger roles within the region and in the international arena, deeply intensifying their involvement throughout the world system. The states have been reliable cooperation partners in the resolution of hard international challenges, actively contributing to the upholding of peace, security, and sustainable world development. The changing trajectory of their activity manifested in particular during the most critical world affairs, including the pandemic caused by the novel COVID-19 virus and the confrontation between Russia and Ukraine [26]. Several key developments have illustrated the Gulf's expanding diplomatic and strategic footprint. Notable examples include their support for post-conflict reconstruction efforts in Syria, Saudi Arabia's mediation in facilitating Lebanon's presidential elections following a protracted leadership vacuum, and Qatar's role in brokering ceasefire agreements in Gaza. The UAE's high-profile engagement at the World Economic Forum in Davos further underscored its growing international presence. Moreover, Oman has reiterated its willingness to resume mediation between the United States and Iran concerning the Iranian nuclear programme, exemplifying the proactive diplomatic stance adopted by the Gulf states [27].

Amid escalating military tensions between Israel and Iran, the Gulf states have explicitly voiced their opposition to breaches of Iranian sovereignty. They have advocated for ceasefire mechanisms and called for renewed diplomatic negotiations under Gulf auspices. While affirming their support for Iran's sovereign integrity, the Gulf states have continued to promote peaceful resolutions to the nuclear issue, rejecting military solutions and encouraging compliance with international nuclear non-proliferation frameworks [28]. Alongside their material capabilities, the Gulf states have successfully expanded their soft power. The UAE, for instance, has achieved tenth place globally and the highest regional ranking in recognised soft power indices, signalling its favourable international reputation and regional influence. Similarly, Saudi Arabia possesses significant cultural and religious soft power, particularly through its stewardship of the two holy mosques, which elevates its standing across the Islamic world [29]. The Gulf states have played central roles in addressing three major global crises, contributing to their enhanced international stature:

1. **COVID-19 Pandemic:** The UAE and Saudi Arabia made substantial contributions to global health responses by extending humanitarian assistance and relief to the worst-affected countries. These actions received recognition from prominent international humanitarian and public health organisations.
2. **Ukraine War:** The Gulf states maintained a position of diplomatic neutrality, which enabled them to participate in mediation efforts. The UAE initiated direct engagement with Russia in pursuit of peaceful solutions, while Saudi Arabia successfully negotiated a prisoner exchange agreement between Russia and Ukraine.
3. **Climate Change:** Acknowledging the critical importance of climate action, Gulf states—especially the UAE and Saudi Arabia—have introduced several ambitious initiatives aimed at achieving carbon neutrality. In November 2022, the UAE and the United States announced a joint initiative involving USD 100 billion in clean energy investment, targeting a generation capacity of 100 gigawatts across both countries and internationally by 2035.

Within Arab, regional, and global platforms, the Gulf states have consistently advocated for unified political stances grounded in the principles of mutual respect, non-intervention in domestic affairs, and shared strategic interests. These positions are aligned with their broader objectives of safeguarding national and regional stability. With these diplomatic and developmental efforts, the Gulf states have solidified their geopolitical importance, widened their involvement in international governance, and renewed their commitment to upholding international peace and security. Their strategic collaborations with various states and regional groupings equally seal their status as effective actors in the international system.

4. Challenges And Risks of the Gulf's Rising Role

The Gulf region and the states within it are in the midst of a thorny series of distinct challenges and threats, driven by swiftly changing regional and international dynamics that persistently redefine their positions within the international order. The states act in world affairs by various but equally important routes, yet their stands are also shaped by radical changes. The region is in the throes of great turbulence, involving the recasting of previously well-established alliances, shifts in the makeup and operation of security apparatuses, and mounting pressures

to complete economic diversification. Taken together, these are transforming the way the Gulf states try to stabilize and increase their strategic reach. The emergence of new international alliances, the redirection of global power interests towards the Gulf, persistent regional conflicts, and ongoing security vulnerabilities are all prompting these states to craft policies that are forward-looking, constructive, and strategically balanced.

Meanwhile, the Gulf states are confronted by global processes such as climate change, rapid technology shifts, and shifting patterns in the energy markets. The challenges involved are a double-edged package encompassing threats to existing structures as well as prospects for leadership and innovation. Realization and identification of such interlinked challenges are called for in measuring the Gulf states' ability to maintain a tenuous equilibrium in fulfilling their foreign policy aims. This implies national interests protection, domestic political stability, and contributions to international peace and prosperity in the context of sustainable advances and collective engagement [30; 31].

4.1 Regional Security and Political Challenges

On 29 March 2023, the Gulf states formally presented their strategic vision for regional security during a forum convened by the GCC General Secretariat in Riyadh [32]. This initiative was announced in the context of increased regional and international changes that called for additional efforts to confront emerging challenges and their broader implications. The Gulf states enshrined an intention to strengthen collective security measures, reduce tensions in the region, accept prevailing instability, and resolve disputes through diplomatic and economic frameworks. Embracing peaceful dispute resolution, the vision firmly rejected the resort to force, opting rather for the promotion of dialogue and negotiating processes to preserve regional stability and sovereignty. This vision for security also highlighted a series of priority goals: bolstering action to prevent the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), redoubling efforts to counter terrorism by tackling its causes and funding networks, devising effective responses to climate change, and promoting fruitful international interaction grounded in coexistence and reciprocal respect. The Gulf region today has to confront a series of urgent external challenges, including:

1. **Iran:** The Gulf states view Iran's regional efforts, most notably its intervention in the internal affairs of Iraq, Lebanon, Syria, and Yemen, as a significant and persistent threat. The aftermath of the US-led occupation of Iraq seriously undermined Iraq's military capacity, allowing Iran to become a prime beneficiary, thus tilting the region's balance of power. The Gulf states' concerns are as much about Iran's conventional military capability or possible attainment of nuclear weapons. There is apprehension that enhanced military capabilities may embolden Tehran to expand its historic spheres of influence across Iraq, Palestine, Lebanon, Yemen, and other Arab states, thereby deepening regional instability.
2. **Extremism and Terrorism:** While the threat from organised terrorist organisations has declined, extremism in the region remains a significant security threat throughout the Gulf and broader region. Defeating the military ambitions of ISIS in Iraq and Syria and the neutralizing of Al-Qaeda activities in Yemen and other areas has lessened near-term threats. Yet the endurance of ideological extremism, alongside the absence of systemic attempts by states to dismantle its doctrinal underpinnings and socio-political enablers, maintains in place an environment within which radical ideologies can potentially persist and recur.
3. **Cybersecurity Threats:** Cyber threats have increasingly come to the fore for the Gulf states and the wider international community as a significant area of concern, threatening seriously the region's essential infrastructures and national security systems. The convergence of cybercrime, cyberattacks, and fast-paced technological changes has seen the security breaches become increasingly sophisticated and more frequent. The Gulf states have thus invested heavily to deploy enhanced cyber resilience in public institutions, private sectors, and critical service sectors. The measures are in addition to the formulation of national strategies for confronting cybersecurity, updating the legislation concerning electronic crimes and digital transactions, as well as the issuance of data protection legislation. The UAE has been at the forefront in taking a multidisciplinary approach by setting up a National Cybersecurity Council, promoting the regulatory supervision of social media networks, and incorporating the promotion of cybersecurity in its wider agenda for digital governance and economic transformation for the growth and promotion of innovation and technology.

4.2 Economic Challenges

The economies of the Gulf states remain heavily dependent on petroleum exports and associated oil-related industries, which constitute the principal drivers of national revenue. However, declining oil reserves combined with increasing global energy demands have intensified the need for these states to transition away from oil dependency, particularly in light of forecasts anticipating the gradual decline of the oil era. Major issues include the following:

1. **Economic Diversification:** The continued reliance on hydrocarbons as the dominant source of income renders Gulf economies highly susceptible to volatility in global energy markets. In response, these states are intensifying efforts to diversify their economic structures by expanding sectors such as tourism, manufacturing, and advanced technology. Initiatives such as Saudi Vision 2030 and the UAE Vision 2071 exemplify the prioritisation of economic diversification as a core component of long-term national planning.
2. **Investment and Technology:** Despite efforts by the government to build entrepreneurial activity and start-up culture, there are several structural issues at hand. Minimal access to financial capital, time-consuming bureaucratic procedures, and regulatory framework terms still yet to be favorable to tap foreign investment are a few issues. To give momentum to digital transformation, there would be a requirement for significant digital infrastructure up-gradation, investment in artificial intelligence, upgradation in the technological competence of the work force, and roll-out of regulatory norms favorable for growth driven by innovation.
3. **Demographics and Labour Market:** Although job opportunities exist, unemployment among Gulf nationals remains comparatively high. This issue is largely attributed to the dominance of expatriate labour and the misalignment between educational outcomes and labour market requirements. Addressing this concern necessitates robust localisation strategies, the expansion of vocational training programmes that align with industry needs, and systemic educational reform aimed at strengthening collaboration between academic institutions and the private sector.
4. **Environmental and Sustainability Challenges:** The area has huge environmental challenges, epitomised most by the lack of freshwater resources. The challenges are widened by the impacts of climate change and the patterns of unsustainable resource utilisation. The challenges are met by investing in solar energy and other renewable forms of energy in the long run, alongside prudent strategies for utilisation of resources and long-term technical and financial assistance to the sustainability of the environment.
5. **Geopolitical Factors:** Ongoing regional tensions and the Gulf's complex economic relationships with major powers, particularly the United States and China, continue to shape economic performance. Geopolitical developments can affect oil prices, foreign direct investment flows, and trade volumes. It is therefore imperative for Gulf states to maintain balanced foreign policy strategies that support economic stability.

The Gulf has maintained momentum in sectors such as green finance, renewable energy, and in areas of artificial intelligence, leveraging capital-intensive infrastructure and a broad-based ICT base. Regional cooperation in the form of cooperation between universities, research centers, and the private sector also encourages the region's technological advances in the Middle East and North Africa. For instance, in the Gulf region, green finance can build up to over USD 2 trillion of GDP by 2030, generating over one million jobs.

5. Conclusion

The Gulf Cooperation Council has become one of the globe's most significant regional groupings. With a collective gross domestic product in excess of USD 2.4 trillion, its economic influence reflects the Council's international scope; however, its value exceeds the realm of markets and the bloc as a strategic supplier of fossil fuels that help to stabilise world energy systems. GCC states have significantly increased their involvement in international and regional politics in recent years to project a larger, more positive profile. This recalibration has enabled the GCC to become a steady strategic partner for great powers at key moments of crisis and instability. Gulf cooperation has become bolder and intentional, transforming the bloc from one of relative marginality to one of ambitious attempts at strategic autonomy. Such a shift reflects sustained efforts by leadership to increase alliance-level cooperation by external actors while pursuing ever-more unified foreign and defence policies. This intention is to diminish reliance on great-power groupings and to protect the region from their rivalry. The GCC thus positions itself as an equalised, agenda-forming player in world politics, wielding influence by giving priority to stabilisation in the region and durable strategic interests.

6. Key Findings

1. The Gulf states contribute meaningfully to fostering the principles of openness and tolerance, positioning themselves as key supporters of regional and international peace, security, and stability.
2. They are determined to develop and sustain strategic relations with main world players by skillfully balancing national priorities and the common Gulf interests.
3. Such states are stepping up the pace in raising their profile in the world order through working on holistic developmental strategies, focusing investment in knowledge-based sectors, and harnessing the momentum of technological change as the foundation for transforming their economies.

7. Recommendations

1. It is imperative to prioritise economic diversification by strengthening industrial development, thereby reducing excessive reliance on hydrocarbon revenues.
2. Greater emphasis should be placed on expanding investment in renewable energy sources, particularly clean energy and green hydrogen, while fostering international research collaborations aimed at enhancing education systems and building specialised skills among the younger generation.
3. Maintaining equilibrium in foreign policy is crucial, which requires adherence to a multipolar strategy that avoids exclusive alignment with any single global power amid shifting geopolitical landscapes.

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