

International Relations This Week: 42nd Gulf Cooperation Council Meeting

International relations is a very important segment of the [UPSC syllabus](#). In this series, we present an analysis of the most important international issues and developments that occurred over the past week relevant for the IAS exam. In this article, you can learn more about the 42nd council meeting of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

Video link: <https://youtu.be/l9UWgdNYcec>

Context:

The 42nd GCC summit took place in the Saudi Arabian capital Riyadh.

Gulf Cooperation Council

- Foreign ministers signed a treaty creating the Gulf Cooperation Council during the inaugural session of the GCC summit in 1981.
- Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, Kuwait, Qatar, Oman, and the United Arab Emirates were among the six Gulf states represented.
- In the midst of the worldwide epidemic, GCC nations are at the top of the list of the world's 30 safest countries.

Know more about the [Gulf Cooperation Council \(GCC\)](#).



Image Source: Center for International Communication

Divergences and Dynamics of the Gulf

1. Salvaging JCPOA:

- The GCC's 42nd summit coincides with talks between Iran and Western countries aimed at reviving the historic Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ([JCPOA](#)), which was signed in 2015.
- Although Oman, Kuwait, and Qatar have maintained diplomatic relations with Iran, recent de-escalation steps have managed to close some of the gaps.
- Iran's new negotiation team has taken a harsh stance in the seventh round of talks in Vienna, demanding that the US ease all sanctions.

2. Maintaining Stability:

- While supporting and serving Arab and Islamic objectives, the GCC ensures security and stability in the Gulf area.
- Members of the Gulf Cooperation Council are scheduled to debate methods to bring the conflict in Yemen to a halt, as well as Tehran's ties to the Houthi rebels and the involvement of Iran-linked militias in Iraq, Syria, and Lebanon.

3. Uncertainty in the Gulf:

- a. This year, the UAE signalled a shift in policy toward Iran, moving away from confrontation and toward negotiation.
 - b. Similarly, for the first time this year, Saudi Arabia held face-to-face negotiations with its regional adversary, Iraq, with officials from both nations meeting four times in Baghdad, Iraq's capital.
4. **Regional de-escalation**
 - a. The UAE also tried to improve relations with Qatar, Turkey, and even the Iran-backed Assad administration in Syria.
 - b. Qatar, which was unexpectedly blacklisted for three years, has attempted to portray itself as a mediator between the US and Iran, as well as the US and the [Taliban](#) in Afghanistan.
5. **Economic ties**
 - a. Despite rivalry for foreign money and oil output limits, GCC nations are likely to emphasize the necessity of working together to improve investment prospects.
 - b. Saudi Arabia's conservative government has failed to attract the international investments needed to realize its Vision 2030.
 - c. Foreign companies frequently bypass Saudi Arabia in favour of the United Arab Emirates, which has increased its deregulation measures in order to attract investment.
 - d. In July, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates clashed over the latter's oil output quota within the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries ([OPEC](#)).
6. **Combating climate change, securing food and water**
 - a. Climate change and resource management are two soft security problems on which the GCC governments are likely to find more agreement.
 - b. The GCC members are expected to explore new agreements to improve collaboration on international climate policy and renewable energy, as well as the implementation of a circular carbon economy, water security, and food security.
 - c. An oil disaster in the Red Sea would have far-reaching consequences for Saudi Arabia, Eritrea, and Djibouti, as well as Yemen.

Gulf Cooperation Council & Changing Geopolitics

- **Changing Geopolitics**
 - Ongoing concerns with Iran, the COVID-19 epidemic, Afghanistan's uncertain future under Taliban leadership, the situation in Yemen, and doubt about Washington's genuine commitment to Middle Eastern security in the current period are just a few of the challenges.
 - Instead of continuing to pursue zero-sum agendas in the area based on aggressive foreign policies, the Middle East's major power centres have spent the year attempting to find more diplomatic and pragmatic solutions to regional difficulties.
- **Economy Drives Reconciliation**
 - In the midst of the worldwide epidemic, economic considerations appear to be at the forefront of Arab foreign policy decision-making.
 - Officials in Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates recognise that improving relations with Qatar might result in significant economic benefits for their countries.
 - The GCC as a whole is still divided, and there's an undercurrent of economic competitiveness between the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Qatar that will make policymaking difficult.
- **Facing East:**
 - The Saudis and others in the GCC appear to feel that establishing a more cohesive strategy to dealing with Iran suits the Arab states' security interests the best, which the embargo of Qatar has rendered nearly impossible.
 - While tensions between Riyadh and Doha are expected to persist, Saudi Arabia considers Iran to be the greatest danger to the GCC's collective security.
 - This explains why Riyadh was the key driving force behind the al-Ula meeting.

- Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Arab governments have claimed that Oman is too close to Iran and is unwilling to assist Riyadh-led measures aimed at putting pressure on Tehran.

Qatar-Saudi Arabia Tensions and Reconciliation

- The signature of the al-Ula accord is still recent, given the restoration of relations between all Gulf Arab rulers less than a year ago.
- The 42nd GCC summit offers a chance for the various monarchs engaged in the previous quarrel to reach a better degree of reconciliation.
- Although certain sensitive foreign policy issues are likely to continue to divide the GCC, there are hints that officials in Abu Dhabi and Riyadh are moving away from a zero-sum approach to the region.
- Such changes in the way Abu Dhabi and Riyadh conduct foreign policy in the Gulf sub-region have given everyone in the GCC reason to be hopeful about the impending summit later this month.

India & Gulf Cooperation Council

- **Significance of GCC for India**
 - **Diaspora:** India's old, historical ties with the GCC States, coupled with increasing imports of oil and gas, growing trade and investment, and presence of approximately 6.5 million Indian workers in the region, are of vital interest to India.
 - **Geopolitics:** The Gulf constitutes the "immediate" neighbourhood of India separated only by the Arabian Sea.
 - **Stake in Gulf:** India, therefore, has a vital stake in the stability, security and economic well being of the Gulf.
 - **Trade:** The GCC has emerged as a major trading partner of India. It has vast potential as India's investment partner for the future.
 - **Energy Resource:** The GCC's substantial oil and gas reserves are of utmost importance for India's energy needs. In short, the GCC offers tremendous potential for cooperation in trade, investment, energy, manpower, etc.
 - **Economic and Commercial Relations:** India's economic linkage with the GCC has increased steadily, especially due to growth in oil imports.
- **Strategic relations**
 - From a geopolitical standpoint, India and the Gulf Cooperation Council share a goal for regional political stability and security.
 - India and the Gulf Cooperation Council have shared political and security concerns, which translate into efforts for peace, security, and stability in the Gulf area and South Asia.
 - The emergence of similar security views opens up new possibilities for future GCC-India collaboration.
- **India-GCC FTA**
 - In 2004, India and the Gulf Ties Council inked a Framework Agreement in New Delhi aimed at improving and growing economic cooperation between the two.
 - There have been two rounds of discussions to finalize issues such as tariff regulations, rules of origin, and so on.
 - The India-GCC Free Trade Agreement is currently being negotiated.

