ABSTRACT

Conflict and Cooperation in Persian Gulf is the best possible and the most apt illustration of regional and international politics in the Persian Gulf. This holds true to politics in, of and about the region since the emergence of this region as an international sub-system, i.e. at the latest after the withdrawal of the British forces east of Suez in 1971 and the imposition of oil embargo in 1973.

The British withdrawal set in motion the above two currents. As many as seven Shiekhdoms decided to merge into a single sovereign unit. But at the same time two shiekhdoms viz., Qatar and Bahrain, who participated in the negotiation to coalesce into a single state, opted out—the reason which underlined their exit was that traditional rivalries between the two prevented them from reconciling to each other’s status in the power-sharing arrangement. Thus conflict and cooperation have been the hallmark of regional politics in the Persian Gulf ever since its emergence as an international sub-system.

Conflict and cooperation are complementary to each other, rather than being opposites. Issues pertaining to cooperation have in themselves been the cause of strains in relations between two or more states, in the Arab Peninsular region. At the same time, the need to conform to a common threat jointly, has diminished mutual rivalries.

This is why most conflicts in the region are among member states of the GCC. These are mainly boundary disputes. Yet, the countries forming the GCC have exhibited cooperation in most sustainable manners. For, they have all been vulnerable to external threats. Hence, there is an ever existing compulsion to cooperate amongst themselves.

Common history, the Arab character, religious bonds and similarity of political systems have bound the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf into a cooperating unit. At the same time the vicissitudes and compulsions of modern day inter-state politics have militated against the unifying role of traditional forces.

No less strong are the 20th century compulsions of maintaining peaceful bilateral relations, which, in turn, act as the forces of inter-state cooperation. This has prevented the militarization of regional disputes. Of course, the region has witnessed two of the most important wars—the first being the longest of the century and the latest, most devastating. The latter can be aptly called a World War in terms of the number of the participating countries. Yet, one notes that a majority of the countless disputes, in the region have fallen short of turning into full-fledged wars.

Interestingly, conflicts in the region have stimulated cooperation. The Iran-Iraq war, which was the major stimulant for the formation of the GCC, is an example in point. Similarly, cooperations have not been able to end conflicts in the region. That the GCC member-states have not devised a mechanism to resolve disputes among themselves once and for all being a vivid example.
Conflicts and cooperation in the Persian Gulf are typically regional in nature. Superpowers deliberately stayed away from influencing the course of border disputes, particularly in the Arab peninsula region. On the other hand, they tried yet failed to influence the course of the Iran-Iraq war and later the Persian Gulf crisis. However in the case of the former, they succeeded in using the situation thrown up by the war to make adjustments in their policies vis-a-vis different actors in the region. The two also succeeded in coordinating their policies toward the war in order to avoid mutual confrontation.

But the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait caused a shift in US policy toward Persian Gulf conflicts. The invasion translated into a war between the US and its allies on one side and Iraq on the other. But this could happen only when US failed to force Saddam Hussein to withdraw from Kuwait using intimidatory tactics. Thus the Persian Gulf war too was an example of a superpower’s failure to influence the course of a regional crisis.

As far as Cooperation is concerned, Superpowers, and for that matter any extra regional power, could not become part of any organisation in the region. As a matter of fact, GCC, the only significant forum of regional cooperation, aims to shroud any obvious cooperation with the US, with a view to preempt domestic opposition to it.

It is the afore-mention perspective which forms, implicitly as well explicitly, the major theme of this research work.

Chapter I gives an overview of regional conflicts. In particular, it deals in detail with all the boundary disputes in the region. This issue may not have been adequately discussed in the following chapters.

The latter, concentrate on specific instances of conflicts and cooperation. Chapter I also discusses ideological and political conflicts in the region which may not have been grave enough to turn into military confrontations. But these conflicts did contribute to the few full-fledged wars that occurred in the region. At the same time, these conflicts have also been down-played by protagonists in the regional drama for the sake of political expediency. This aspect of Persian Gulf conflict has been dealt with in the chapter.

Chapter II tries to locate the superpowers’ interests, roles and strategies in Persian Gulf conflicts as well as their policies towards each other in a regional conflict. The chapter seeks to study the implications of a regional conflict on superpower policies and vice versa. The chapter also assesses the superpowers’ policy of ending, managing and controlling a regional conflict and the amount of success achieved in doing so.

Chapter III gives a detailed description of the Iran-Iraq war from different angles. It specifically tries to re-examine the accepted and established perception of the causes of the war, the attitude of the neutral Persian Gulf states and that of distant neighbours towards the war and the scope of the superpowers’ Persian Gulf policy during the war. It also assesses the implications of the War on the belligerents, and regional and extra-regional states who were directly or indirectly affected by the war.
Chapter IV endeavours to analyse various facets of the cooperation among the Arab countries of the Persian Gulf under the aegis of the GCC. It also makes an attempt to specify the nature of the cooperation among the countries in question before the inception of the GCC. The chapter looks into factors that led to the formation of GCC and places them in descending order of importance.

Chapter V attempts to examine if the Persian Gulf crisis was precipitated by events which occurred immediately before the Iraqi invasion or whether it was a pre-conceived plan.

This chapter attempts to make a distinction between the “events” leading to the invasion and the “causes” behind it. The chapter also delves into a number of other issues, such as whether the US prompted Iraq to invade Kuwait to take on it later?, whether the regional countries gave in to US pressure or whether they really wanted US intervention?, whether the UN played an impartial role in the Gulf crisis or if it was piggybacked by the US? and whether Iraq’s defeat served the purposes of the US and its allies in and outside the region.

Last but not the least, this work hopes to stimulate further researches on the subject-matter, analysing the political dynamics of the Persian Gulf region from conflict-cooperation angle with a view to analyse how do the two forces shape regional politics and not the other way round.