Chapter IV
FOREIGN POLICY CONGRUENCE AND THE COUNCIL

Foreign policies of GCC members always had a certain degree of congruence—all these states had a pro-Western bias, maintained good relations with Arab and Islamic countries and followed middle-of-the-road pragmatic policies.

The role of any regional organization is to further expand the area of agreement among its members, including in the field of foreign policy. It has been critically examined in this chapter as to what extent the GCC succeeded in fulfilling this role. To do this, evolution of GCC members' relations with following countries/group of countries has been analysed in depth.¹

i) USSR, China and the countries of Eastern Europe;
ii) Afghanistan;
iii) Egypt;
iv) Western countries;
v) Palestinians and the Arab-Israeli dispute.

Evolution of GCC Countries' Relations with the East European Countries

At the time of formation of the GCC, Kuwait alone had diplomatic relations with East European countries including the USSR and China while Oman had diplomatic relations with

¹ Iran has been dealt with separately.
China alone. Kuwait immediately after its independence had established diplomatic links with the USSR and this relationship was strengthened during the subsequent years in all fields, including defence. When the GCC was formed, there was speculation that diplomatic links between this bloc and the East European countries would soon come into being and Kuwait was expected to play a mediatory role to facilitate this process. After the inception of the GCC its three members Oman, the UAE and Qatar entered into diplomatic relations with the USSR and China. Can this be attributed to the council? Did the GCC play any role in this rapprochement between Oman, Qatar and the UAE and the USSR/China?

Oman established diplomatic relations with the USSR in a sudden move on 26th September, 1985 and there was no evidence to indicate that this major change in the Omani foreign policy was a result of any pan-GCC deliberations. Oman as is well known had pursued a staunchly anti-Soviet policy during the 1970s and the early 1980s and numerous statements were made by Omani Ministers, including Sultan Qaboos himself, highly critical of the USSR. The state-

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4 Sultan Qaboos as late as May, 1984 said that Soviet expansionism posed a greater threat to the Gulf region than the danger of blockade of Hormuz by Iran. Arab News, 31.5.1984.
controlled Omani newspapers routinely published articles condemning the USSR, mainly for supporting South Yemen with which Oman had highly tense relations until the beginning of this decade. That the Omani-USSR rapprochement did not emanate from any pan-GCC initiative would become evident from the following. Oman's Minister of Information, Aziz Rowas, informed Al Siyassah newspaper of Kuwait that Oman had conveyed its decision to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR only a few days before making the announcement to the other GCC states. Quoting from a well-known international daily, "It was also the opinion of Western diplomats in Moscow that the Omani move was not a precursor of any pan-GCC initiative towards the USSR."7

Oman's ties with the USSR registered a steady improvement from 1986 onwards though they did not have a commensurate impact on the commercial relations between the two. Sultan Qaboos went to the extent of appealing to the GCC states to improve relations with the USSR on the eve of the ninth summit. He said inter alia: "The Soviet Union is today not what it was in past years."

As regards China, Oman's relations with that country remained friendly and cordial during the 1980s though it made no major overtures to it like acquiring arms from it.\(^9\) There was also no significant expansion of economic/commercial links between the two in this period. Turning now to the relations between the UAE and the USSR, they were established on 13th November, 1985; significantly enough, though the sixth GCC summit was held in Muscat from 3-6 November, 1985, it was totally silent on this major decision which the UAE intended to take shortly afterwards.\(^10\) Similarly, the UAE established diplomatic ties with China on 1.11.1984. This development again did not find a place in the communique issued by the GCC Foreign Ministers who met subsequently on 22nd November, 1984 or in the GCC summit held on 27-29 November, 1984.\(^11\)

It clearly appears therefore that both Oman and the UAE had acted on their own in recognising the USSR and China during 1984-85. As has been already observed in none of the communiques issued either by the GCC Foreign Ministers or by their Heads of State was there any reference to the kind of policy which the GCC as a group wished to follow vis-a-vis East European countries/China.

\(^9\) Though diplomatic relations between Oman and China were established as early as 1975, the first visit to Oman by a Chinese Foreign Minister took place only in mid-1983. *Arab Times*, 13.3.1983.

\(^10\) See the section dealing with the fifth summit in Part I.

\(^11\) See the section dealing with the sixth summit in Part I.
Continuous improvement was witnessed in the relations between the UAE and the USSR in recent years. While speaking with the Soviet Ambassador in November, 1986, the Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi emphasised the honourable stand adopted by the USSR towards the Middle East causes in general and the Gulf war in particular.\(^\text{12}\) The UAE Minister for Islamic Affairs attended an Islamic conference held in the USSR's Azarbaijan province in October, 1986 and spoke about the freedom of religion prevailing in the USSR on his return.

It has been discussed in the section dealing with trade and commerce as to how UAE's commercial relations have flourished with the USSR as well as other East European countries and China during the last few years. There were media reports about collaboration between the UAE and the USSR in the field of oil and gas.\(^\text{13}\)

As regards Eastern Europe, the UAE recognised Czechoslovakia in June, 1988 while the Omani Minister for Foreign Affairs indicated that Oman too might extend recognition to some East European countries.\(^\text{14}\)

Though the relations of Oman and the UAE thus became more realxed with the communist countries, there was abs


\(^{13}\) Khaleej Times, 27.4.1988.

olutely no indication that this development was a result of any coordinated policy, whether at the bilateral level between Oman and the UAE or within the GCC as a whole. Further, while commercial cooperation between the UAE and the USSR had shown noticeable improvement, this had not happened as far as commercial relations between Oman and the USSR were concerned. In fact, Sultan Qaboos right from the beginning had decided to restrict Soviet presence in Oman. 15

Turning to Kuwait, it was the only GCC country which had diplomatic relations with the countries of the East Europe and China from the early sixties. The relationship between the Kuwaitis and the Soviets did not begin in very propitious circumstances; Nikita Khrushchev had characterised the Kuwaiti ruler as follows during the early sixties:

"There is some little ruler sitting there, an Arab of course, a Muslim. He has given bribes. He lives the life of a rich but he is trading on the wealth of his people. He never had any consciousness and he will never have any." 16

Despite this derogatory remark by the Soviets, the Kuwaitis signed an economic and technical agreement with them in February, 1965 17 which was followed by establishment of full diplomatic relations. Diplomatic relations


17 Ibid.
with China were established earlier in 1964. 18 During the subsequent years, Kuwait established diplomatic ties with the countries of East Europe and its links with them in the field of economic and commercial cooperation were considerably strengthened. 19 Kuwait even developed a relationship with the Soviets in the defence field and acquired arms from them during the seventies. 20

Immediately after the GCC was constituted in 1981, the Amir of Kuwait visited certain East European countries like Bulgaria, Romania, Hungary and Yugoslavia. The Kuwaiti Foreign Minister had earlier visited the Soviet Union in April, 1981 21 and a high-ranking Kuwaiti delegation had gone to Moscow in connection with arms purchases during the same year. One of the purposes underlying these visits was no doubt to emphasise that Kuwait's membership of the GCC did not dilute in any way its links with the East European countries.

During the visit of the Kuwaiti Foreign Minister to Moscow possibility of Oman abrogating its grant of military facilities to the USA against lowering of tension between Oman and the PIRY was discussed. 22 That such a sensitive

18 Ibid.
19 Ibid., p.172.
20 Nadav Safran, n.2; p.269.
21 Al Watan, dated April, 1981.
22 John A. Sandwick (ed.), n.5, p.158.
topic could be discussed between Kuwait and the USSR was itself reflective of the closeness of the ties between the two.

Subsequently, Kuwait's ties with the Soviet Union developed and strengthened in all fields, political, economic, commercial and defence. The Kuwaiti press routinely commended the USSR's policies while it was generally unsparing in its attacks on the USA for its endorsement of Israel. Kuwaiti banks extended substantial loans to the USSR23 and the Kuwaiti Finance Minister spoke of the possibility of Kuwaiti investment in that country. Kuwait acquired sophisticated anti-aircraft weapons from the USSR in 1984 after they were earlier refused stinger missiles by the USA.24

Subsequently, in early 1987, Kuwait approached the USSR to charter three oil tankers from it as a protection against the mounting Iranian air attacks on Kuwaiti oil carriers.25 This was a very unexpected move on the part of Kuwait which was moreover made without any prior consultations with its GCC partners. A decision to establish a permanent commission for economic cooperation between Kuwait and the USSR was taken in October, 1987 when the Kuwaiti Finance Minister had expressed the hope that economic ties

23 See the section dealing with intra-GCC monetary cooperation in part III.

24 See the section dealing with growth of intra-GCC defence cooperation in part II.

25 See the section on evolution of relations between the GCC and Iran in part II.
between the two nations would reach the same phase of matur-
ity as had happened in case of political links. 26

It was reported in a well-known journal 27 that Kuwait
was planning to charter 10 more oil carriers from the USSR
(though this did not ultimately materialise) and the possi-
bility of Soviet electronic experts being deployed in Ku-
wait was also raised by the same journal.

Kuwait again turned to the USSR during the latter
half of 1988 to acquire arms from it - this move again as
before was not proceeded by an intra-GCC consultations. 27a

Concomitant with the strengthening of Kuwait-USSR
links, the period 1981-87 also witnessed a similar improve-
ment in Kuwait's relations with China, especially in the
economic field. 28 The various steps taken by Kuwait to
strengthen its relations with China, the USSR and the East
European countries in various fields, including that of
defence, were undoubtedly motivated by what it regarded as
dictates of its own national interest and constituted a
continuation of the policy which Kuwait has been following
since the early 1960s. Chartering oil carriers from the
USSR was undoubtedly a very unusual step on the part of
Kuwait and despite its implications and possible repercus-
sions, it was not preceded by intra-GCC consultations, let

27a Arab News, dated 11.17.1988 and Arab Times, 14/15.7.88.
28 See the section on intra-GCC monetary cooperation in
part III.
alone any agreement. One can, therefore, conclude that strengthening of economic, commercial links between Kuwait and the communist world did not represent any pan-GCC strategy. 29

Turning now to Saudi Arabia and Bahrain, none of them had established diplomatic relations with any East European country including the USSR as well as with China until the end of 1988. The Soviet Union had, since the early 1960s, if not earlier, recognised the pivotal importance of Saudi Arabia in the Middle East and had made several attempts towards normalising relations with it. 30 Among the earliest examples of Soviet overtures to Saudi Arabia could be mentioned the offer of Soviet arms to Saudi Arabia in the wake of Egypt's acquisition of weapons from Czechoslovakia in 1955. 31 Speculation about the possibility of Saudi-Soviet ties being established never ceased during the 1970s; for example, the message of congratulations sent by King Faisal of Saudi Arabia to the USSR in November, 1973 had fuelled such rumours. 32

After the GCC came into being, a number of developments took place pointing to the likelihood of resumption

29 Kuwait in fact repeatedly denied that in any way influenced other GCC members to establish relations with the USSR. Al Qaba, 21.3.1982; Arab Times, 21.3.83.

30 Though technically the diplomatic relations established between the USSR and Saudi Arabia in 1928 were never severed, they are regarded as non-existent.


32 Ibid., pp. 94.
of normal relations between the USSR and Saudi Arabia and among such developments mention may be made of the following.

In 1985, Sheikh Faysal, the eldest son of King Fahd, in his capacity as Minister for Youth Affairs, paid a visit to the Soviet Union accompanied by a Saudi football team; during this visit the Soviets pointedly told him that they had lost the key of their mission in Jeddah and asked whether a duplicate key would be available with the Saudis. 33 This was a clear diplomatic signal from the Soviets evincing their desire to resume normal relations with the Saudis. In January, 1987, the Saudi Oil Minister visited the Soviet Union when he discussed various matters, apart from oil, with the Soviet officials. 34 During the Islamic summit held in Kuwait in January, 1987, the Saudi monarch referred to the Soviet policies as supporting the rights of the Arab Palestinian peoples. 35 The Soviet Ambassador to Kuwait said in January, 1987 that "we are working to develop ties with all the Gulf states especially with Saudi Arabia. 36

Though there was some relaxation of tension between Moscow and Riyadh in 1986/87, the Kingdom continued to have strong reservations vis-a-vis the USSR especially because of the presence of its troops in Afghanistan. A strong

undercurrent of antipathy to communism and suspicion about Moscow's long-term goals continued to influence Saudi relations with the USSR as was the case earlier. "But can justice, reason and logic be expected from Moscow's leaders whose sole intention, ever since the days of Joseph Stalin, has been expansionism at any cost? Undoubtedly, the Russians see in Tehran's isolation an opportunity to befriend it and if possible march through its portals into the Gulf." 37

During early 1988, the Saudi-Soviet ties showed some improvement, no doubt because the USSR had announced its willingness to withdraw its troops from Afghanistan. The Saudi Foreign Minister went to Moscow in February, 1988 38 to solicit its cooperation in imposing an arms embargo on Iran while it agreed to sell it 50,000 tonnes of wheat during the first quarter of that year. 39

Despite the high-level contacts which had taken place between the Kingdom and the USSR from 1985 onwards, the former did not entirely shed its apprehensions about Soviet Union's long-term objectives. No doubt USSR's unwillingness to take an unequivocal stand during the closing months of 1988 about honouring its commitment to withdraw troops from Afghanistan by 15th February, 1989 also stood in the way of a rapprochement between the two. Quoting here from an editorial published in a leading Saudi daily:

"That is encouraging the Soviet Union to redraw its Central Asia-South Asia policy. It is a return to 1979 when Moscow knew that it has nothing to gain in Afghanistan and nothing to lose in the Arabian Sea. A child can guess what will be the next Soviet step though it may wait a decade. It is clear from this excerpt that Saudi Arabia until the end of 1988 apprehended that Moscow had hegemonic designs in the Gulf region.

While, therefore, Riyadh's relations with Moscow remained strained until the end of 1988, as noted earlier Kuwait had acquired arms from the USSR in mid-1988 while Oman had advocated better ties with it in December, 1988.

Turning to China, there was significant improvement in its relations with Saudi Arabia in 1988. In March, 1988, in a surprise move, Saudi Arabia announced acquisition of long-range ballistic missiles from China and the cost of this deal was put at one billion dollars. There was no prior discussion of this Saudi move among the GCC states and its Foreign Ministers in their meeting of 4th June, 1988 did not even allude to this Saudi

40 Arab News, 12.1.1989. See also Saudi Gazette, 7.1.89 which had in its editorial accused the USSR of having hegemonic designs. Saudi Gazette in its editorial dated 17.2.89 described the Soviet withdrawal from Afghanistan as merely tactical to enhance its global policies.

41 Contacts between the Kingdom and China were almost non-existent in earlier years. Visit of a Saudi soccer team to China in early 1987 was looked upon as a significant development. Saudi Gazette 3.2.1987.

42 Arab News, March, 1988. See the section on evolution of GCC's relations with Iran in Part I.
decision despite its obvious political importance.43 A member of the Saudi royal family had reportedly visited China in early 1988 and had agreed to invest 25 million dollars in an Islamic centre and a restaurant in Beijing.44 The Saudi agricultural minister had visited China in the first week of January, 1988 and this represented the first visit by a high-ranking Saudi dignitary to China.45 Saudi Arabia also agreed to supply China with 300,000 tonnes of wheat in 1988.46 A royal envoy from the Kingdom visited China in October, 198847 while the two countries agreed to open trade missions in November, 1988.48

All these developments fuelled media speculation that establishment of relations between Saudi Arabia and China was imminent,49 a development that did not take place until the middle of 1989.

What is worth observing is that while Sino-Saudi links strengthened in 1988, links between Kuwait and China had

43 See the section dealing with Foreign Ministers' meeting in part I.
diversified and improved in the years 1985 to 1987, especially in the economic field.\textsuperscript{50}

In a totally unexpected move, Qatar established diplomatic relations with China on 9 July 1988\textsuperscript{51} and with the USSR in the first week of August 1988.\textsuperscript{52} Qatar thus belied the widely-held belief that it would take a major initiative like setting up of relations with a very important communist country only after the Kingdom had done so. There was no prior consultation between Qatar and its GCC allies before it embarked on this step. In mid-April 1989 Bahrain established diplomatic relations with China; as in the case of Qatar, Bahrain had taken this decision entirely on its own and it was not commented upon in the subsequent meeting of Foreign Ministers held in June 1989.

It is thus seen that during this decade all the GCC members improved their ties with the communist bloc, both in the political field as well as commercial. This was an ideal area where these states could have acted in unison but they did not do so. It is worth recalling that none of the four GCC members e.g., Oman, the UAE, Qatar and Bahrain while proceeding to establish diplomatic relations with the USSR/China had deemed it necessary to consult before hand their other GCC partners. Similarly, important decisions like acquisition of major weapon systems from the USSR/

\textsuperscript{50} See the section on intra-GCC monetary cooperation in Pt.III.

\textsuperscript{51} Gulf Times, 10 July 1988.

\textsuperscript{52} Gulf Times, 2.8.1988. Soviet Union was one of the first states to recognise Qatar in 1971 and a senior Qatari official had evinced interest in recognising Qatar in mid-1987 (Gulf Times, 16.5.1987).
China, chartering of oil carriers from the USSR by Kuwait, were taken by these countries solely at the national level and did not in any way represent any pan-GCC approach.

It can, therefore, be concluded that there was no consensus within the GCC as to how relations with the communist world, especially the USSR and China should evolve and develop.

The Afghan question

The entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan in December, 1979 had caused profound perturbations among the GCC countries. During the subsequent meeting of Islamic Foreign Ministers held in Islamabad in January, 1980, all these countries were unanimous in their condemnation of the Soviet Union. While the Soviet action in Afghanistan caused strong opposition within the GCC and while the plight of thousands of Afghan refugees fleeing to Pakistan evoked sympathy in all of them, their reactions to the events subsequently unfolding in that country were far from identical.

It was Saudi Arabia alone which gave massive financial assistance to the Afghan Mujahideens fighting the Soviet troops. It may be recalled that Saudi Arabia had taken the lead in condemning the USSR and was among the first countries to endorse the US call for boycott of Moscow Olympics. Saudi Arabia subsequently severed diplomatic relations with Afghanistan on 7th April, 1980 while some other GCC coun-

tries like Kuwait did not do so.

The differences in the policy perspectives of these countries vis-a-vis Afghanistan can best be gauged by comparing the editorial comments in their newspapers on important events taking place in Afghanistan. Press in all the GCC countries more or less is controlled by the government and reflects its thinking and attitudes.

During October, 1986, the Soviet Union had expressed its willingness to pull back a significant number of troops from Afghanistan as a goodwill gesture.

Arab News of Saudi Arabia editorially commented as follows: "President Zia of Pakistan has rightly described as a facade and smokescreen the recent Soviet announcement of its plan to withdraw 10,000 troops from Afghanistan saying "if the Soviet Union is mindful and wishes to withdraw from Afghanistan, then it should not only pull out substantial troops but also give a time-table for their clearance at as short a time as possible." The chronic global conundrum that Afghanistan has become since the Russian invasion seems extremely difficult to resolve."

"The Soviet Union must realise that it is an invading power that it has for all practical purposes colonised the country and rendered five million of its people homeless seeking refuge in Pakistan and Iran. It is morally bound to keep out of Afghanistan and it is not for Moscow to lay down conditions for withdrawal."55

Khaleej Times of the UAE commented on the same development in a far more favourable manner when it said,\textsuperscript{56} "The point is being missed, deliberately or otherwise, that the Soviet withdrawal is no more than a political gesture; it is meant only to signal Moscow's readiness to consider withdrawing all its men from Afghanistan, which is vital for any durable solution of the crisis. As such it perhaps needs a political response from both the USA and Pakistan and some indication that the Soviet concern over what it calls outside intervention and which made it intervene in Afghanistan in the first place is going to be met."

Kuwait Times commented as follows:\textsuperscript{57} "It would be a pity if this development in Afghanistan is not seen as what it plainly is. The Soviets wish to withdraw and would oblige if the other parties concerned would care to facilitate the process instead of hampering it. The gesture from Moscow calls for a concomitant response in the same kind and currency."

It is evident that the viewpoint expressed in the Saudi editorial differed markedly from those enunciated by the UAE and Kuwaiti press.

Earlier in September, 1985, Omani Foreign Minister while addressing the UN General Assembly during its 49th session said as follows on Afghanistan: "Five years have passed and despite UN resolutions on Afghanistan, the coun-

\textsuperscript{56} Khaleej Times, 9th October, 1986.

\textsuperscript{57} Kuwait Times, 15th October, 1986.
try and its people are still subject to foreign occupation. This is an example of foreign interference in the internal affairs of other countries by use of force. The people of Afghanistan must be given a choice to decide the system of government according to their wish without foreign interference. 58

It is to be observed that the Omani foreign minister carefully avoided mentioning the USSR by name as the country occupying Afghanistan. Moreover, he also referred to the need for foreign interference to cease there which meant disapproval of the role being played by the Mujahideens with the support of the USA, Saudi Arabia, etc.

Subsequently, in December, 1986, the Kabul government evinced interest in establishing a government of national unity and Gorbachov alluded to the possible return of the former Afghan King as the Head of the proposed new regime. This represented undoubtedly a highly important political initiative from Moscow and Kabul. The reaction of the GCC then was quite revealing.

Saudi Gazette commented on these developments editorially as follows: "Optimism about the new Afghan communist leader Najibullah reminds of the hopes pinned on Stalin when he came into power in the Soviet Union after Lenin; much of it emanating from half understanding the reality of the situation and incomplete knowledge of the person."

"In view of all this Najibullah's plan to form a

'national unity' government does not appear to have a firm basis. Anti-communist and anti-Russian forces in Afghanistan form a great majority. They find the Soviet rhetoric more for the superpower consumption than as a sign of fair-play. "59

Khaleej Times made editorial comment as follows: "Even if it is interpreted as a deliberate political ploy to divide Mujahideens the truce document certainly goes further than any other peace overtures made so far by Kabul or Moscow. It is designed to reassure both people within Afghanistan and the Afghan refugees abroad that a serious effort is to be made at reconciliation and by its emphasis on Islam, it wishes to signal that the days of Hafizullah Amin's hard-line Marxism are over for good."60

The Amir of Kuwait sent a message to the Soviet Union expressing appreciation over its announcement that the USSR will pull out its forces from Afghanistan if a settlement was reached. 61 Editorials also appeared in the Kuwaiti press stressing the need for solution in view of the compromising postures adopted by the USSR and Afghanistan. 62

The UAE Foreign Minister while addressing the UN General Assembly in October, 1986 called for a comprehensive

59 Saudi Gazette, 15th December, 1986.
61 Gulf Times of Qatar, 5.3.1987.
settlement in Afghanistan based on guarantees of independence and non-interference. 63

The Permanent Representative of Kuwait while addressing the 42nd session of the UN General Assembly in November, 1987 called for a political solution of the Afghan crisis in conformity with the wishes and aspirations of the Afghan people. He also asserted that such a solution should be based on international laws and charters and could not be achieved through the use of force. 64 The Kuwaiti representative in his speech avoided making a critical reference to the USSR nor did he allude to the Afghan Mujahideens. These excerpts from the speeches of the Kuwaiti and the UAE delegates in the UN clearly bring out that their support for Afghan Mujahideens was far from being unqualified and total.

Saudi dignitaries including King Fahd himself expressed whole-hearted support for the Afghan Mujahideens during the eighth GCC summit held in December, 1987. Quoting from the inaugural speech delivered by King Fahd during this summit:

"He expressed full support of the GCC to Afghan Mujahideens in their just struggle, adding that the GCC hopes that the Soviet Union would respond to international appeals for withdrawal from Afghanistan." 65

63 Khaleej Times, 5.10.1986.
64 Al Qabas, 10.11.1987.
Quoting now from an interview given by the Saudi Foreign Minister during this summit:

"Relations between the Soviet Union and the Organisation of Islamic Conference can improve and expand only if Russian forces withdraw immediately from Afghanistan. I think the withdrawal of Soviet troops from Afghanistan is the primary necessity towards peaceful settlement."

"But so far, the Soviets had not shown any change in their attitude."

Subsequently, despite the strong sympathy affirmed for the Afghan Mujahideens by King Fahd during the eighth GCC summit, this issue was not alluded to in the summit communique.

Important developments pertaining to Afghanistan which took place during 1988 further highlighted the differences in perception between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC vis-a-vis this issue. It may be recalled that this period witnessed signing of the Geneva accords as well as beginning of the withdrawal of the Soviet troops which commenced from 15th May, 1988. The Soviet decision to pull out from Afghanistan was generally hailed everywhere as a laudable step.

Though the Saudi government generally avoided official comments on the Geneva accords as well as on the Soviet decision to withdraw from Afghanistan, the state-controlled


67 See the section dealing with the eighth summit in part I.
Saudi press remained highly sceptical of long-term Soviet intentions. It emphasised again and again through numerous editorials the total Saudi solidarity with the Mujahideens as well as the need to establish a broad-based interim government there which would permit the return of the refugees.

Quoted below are some excerpts from editorials in the Saudi press which vividly illustrate that Saudi Arabia never really believed that Moscow was serious about disengaging totally from Afghanistan:

"The truth is that, regardless of the euphoria generated by the Soviet offer of withdrawal, the Russians are unwilling to let go off Afghanistan even after they have pulled out their estimated 115,000 troops there; only some 600 miles from the Gulf, the country is too big a prize for the Kremlin to give up easily." 68

"As it is widely believed, the Soviet Union will probably pull its troops out of Afghanistan in the foreseeable future. But it would be dangerously naive to believe that the Russians are actually going to disengage from Afghanistan. They want Afghanistan to plunge into chaos and not have a viable government so that Moscow will have a pretext for continued interference in Afghanistan." 69

"Given the Soviet Union's determination to retain control of Afghanistan, the Kremlin's reported plan to divide

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69 Ibid., 29.2.1988.
Afghanistan into two zones cannot be dismissed as far-fetched. And the only way to forestall such a possibility is to continue pressure for an equitable settlement in Afghanistan, pressure including continued military and other assistance to the Mujahideens.  

The hostile attitude of the Saudi press vis-à-vis the USSR remained unchanged even after the Soviet troops began withdrawal from that country as scheduled from 15th May, 1988. This would become clear from the following excerpt from an editorial published in Arab News:

"From the extremely belligerent statements the Soviet leaders have made on Afghanistan in the past week, it looks as if we are back to square one on the matter."

"As we have said many times before, the Soviet Union is not sincere about its intended withdrawal from Afghanistan, since that country, situated so close to the Gulf, is too big a strategic prize to give up easily."

On the other hand, press in other GCC countries generally took a far more charitable view of the Geneva accords as well as the Soviet decision to withdraw from Afghanistan. To give one instance, an editorial published in Kuwait Times is quoted:

"No matter how intensely the refugees disagree with

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70 Ibid., 6.4.1988.
the Kabul regime, the fact would have to be seen that there has been a series of initiatives from Kabul. How far they are to be trusted and relied upon would remain unknown so long as they are not tested with an open mind and a will to respond to what turns out to be genuinely constructive."

The Geneva accords on Afghanistan are unique in many ways. They say so much which is hard to believe."

Policy differences on Afghanistan between Saudi Arabia and the rest of the GCC were not confined only to press comments but were reflected in concrete actions taken by the Kingdom. In January, 1988, Saudi Arabia decided to levy a special surcharge of one Saudi Rial on all soccer tickets sold in the Kingdom, revenue from which was to be disbursed among the Afghan Mujahideens.\textsuperscript{73} It may be emphasised that no other GCC member had extended financial help to the Mujahideens at least during recent years. Prince Salman, Governor of Riyadh, said in a press statement in April, 1988 that Saudi Arabia considered Afghan issue as one of the most important Islamic issues that deserved material and moral support.\textsuperscript{74}

Intra-GCC discord on Afghanistan could be seen by analysing the speeches made by GCC dignitaries in the UN in September, 1988. The Foreign Minister of Oman while addressing the UN during the last week of September, 1988 said inter alia on Afghanistan: "We express our complete satisfaction

\textsuperscript{73} Arab News, 20.1.1988.

\textsuperscript{74} Riyadh Daily, 3.5.1988.
with the steps taken with regard to the withdrawal of foreign forces from Afghanistan and the latitude accorded to the Afghan people in choosing the system that it desires without outside interference.

Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia in his address to the UN while speaking on the same subject drew attention to the heroic struggle of the Afghan Mujahideens in defence of their religion and rights and to the need for establishment of the future government of Afghanistan according to their (Mujahideens') wishes which would lead to return of Afghan refugees from abroad. He also condemned the violation of Pakistan airspace by Afghan planes and expressed appreciation of the Kingdom over the tremendous humanitarian role played by the Government of Pakistan in giving shelter to four million Afghan refugees. 75

However, the Amir of Kuwait, even while addressing the UN in his capacity as the Chairman of the fifth session of the Islamic Conference Organisation, did not deem it necessary either to refer to the struggle of Afghan Mujahideens or to the necessity of return of Afghan refugees. While eulogizing(167,779),(915,794) the former President of Pakistan Zia-ul-Huq, the Amir made no allusion to the role played by him in Afghanistan as was done by the Saudi Foreign Minister. 76

75 Al Sharq Al Awsat, 1.10.1988.
76 Al Qabas, 29.9.1988.
Subsequently, Saudi media began to criticise the USSR in harsh terms when it appeared that it may not honour its commitment to withdraw from Afghanistan by 15th February, 1989. It also continued to express solidarity with the Mujahideens and refused to acknowledge any role for members of the Najibullah government in any future set up in that country. The media in other GCC members, on the other hand, continued to advocate a conciliatory approach and Al-Qabas of Kuwait editorially called on the opposition groups in Afghanistan (scrupulously avoiding the phrase Mujahideens) to follow the path of negotiations and abandon violent means.

Subsequently, the intra-GCC differences on Afghanistan were sharply highlighted in March, 1989 when only two of its members - Saudi Arabia and Bahrain - recognized the provisional Afghan government set up by the Mujahideens in February, 1989. What is more significant, the GCC Foreign Ministers meeting in early March, 1989 did not even refer in their communique to the crucial developments taking place in Afghanistan even though they were due to be discussed by the ICO (Islamic Conference Organization) a few days later.

The ninth GCC summit communique issued in December, 1988 expressed the hope that the talks between the USSR and

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79 Times of India, 15.3.1989.
Mujahideens would lead to permanent peace in Afghanistan based on "its unity, independence, non-aligned character, and Islamic personality".\textsuperscript{81} It is to be noted that in this 'heroic struggle' of communique, there was no reference to the Mujahideens, return of the Afghan refugees or the pre-eminent role which the Afghan Mujahideens should have in any future government of that country. Evidently, most GCC members were disinclined to annoy Moscow and were not ready to express support for the Mujahideens.\textsuperscript{82}

It is also significant that the only earlier reference to Afghanistan in GCC summit communiques came in the second summit when concern was expressed over the situation in Afghanistan "on account of the threat posed by it to the security of the Gulf."\textsuperscript{83} As regards the GCC Foreign Ministers, Afghanistan did not figure in any of their communiques except for a solitary reference in the statement issued after their fourth meeting in October, 1981.\textsuperscript{84}

The fact that Afghanistan did not almost at all figure in the statements/communiques issued by GCC Heads of State/Foreign Ministers cannot but point towards existence of a major intra-GCC rift on this issue.

The main points of disagreement between Saudi Arabia and other GCC members vis-a-vis Afghanistan could be summarised:

\textsuperscript{81} Al Qabas, 22.12.1988.

\textsuperscript{82} Hindu, 24.12.1988.

\textsuperscript{83} See the section dealing with second summit in part I.

\textsuperscript{84} See the section dealing with GCC Foreign Ministers' meetings.
sed as follows.

Saudi Arabia had extended large-scale financial assistance to the Mujahideens and had backed them in every way. Saudi dignitaries maintained close contacts with the Mujahideen leaders and the Saudi support for their movement was an important plank of the Kingdom's foreign policy. The Saudi media too expressed its solidarity with the Mujahideens without any reservations which was undoubtedly reflective of the Saudi policy. The other GCC countries, on the other hand, gave no financial support to the Mujahideens except perhaps during the first phase of the Afghan conflict. They did not support the Mujahideens politically; in their official statements the GCC dignitaries did not endorse the basic demands of the Mujahideens and usually avoided even use of that phrase. (e.g. the word Mujahideens).

Saudi Arabia had made it clear as early as mid-1980 that its relations with the USSR could improve only after it withdrew its troops from Afghanistan; no other GCC member had adopted such a policy. In fact, three GCC members, Oman, the UAE and Qatar recognised the USSR during the years 1985-1988.

Saudi Arabia right from the beginning was highly sympathetic to and appreciative of the role being played by Pakistan in giving succour and shelter to over 3 million Afghan

85 Riyadh Daily in its editorial dated 21.2.1989 had denounced the USSR "as being like a leper when its troops were deployed in Afghanistan." 

refugees. The Saudi Foreign Minister while addressing the Islamic Conference Organisation in Islamabad in January, 1980 had assured Pakistan that the Kingdom would stand by it to repel any aggression, communist or non-communist. No other GCC member had backed Pakistan in this manner. One of the main factors which endeared the former Pak President Zia-ul-Huq to the Kingdom was his willingness to give total backing to the armed struggle of the Afghan Mujahideens and therefore his death and subsequent election of Benazir Bhutto led to some strain in Saudi-Pak relations. No such development took place in case of other GCC members.

The fact that Saudi Arabia extended total support to the Afghan Mujahideens in their armed struggle with the USSR need not cause any surprise. Saudi Arabia has a long history of backing anti-communist movements and is known to have helped the Contras in Nicaragua in mid-eighties. What is

87 From Pakistan Times, January, 1980.
88 It was believed that Ms. Bhutto's Afghan policy would be different from that of Zia-ul-Huq and she would be less supportive of the Afghan Mujahideens.
noteworthy is that creation of the GCC in no way induced other GCC members to adopt a more sympathetic attitude towards anti-communist movements.

**Egyptian Factor**

**Relations with Egypt:**

Relations of the GCC countries with Egypt evolved along parallel lines following the signing of the Camp David accords between Egypt and Israel. All the GCC member countries except Oman broke off diplomatic relations with Egypt; however, ties with Egypt in the fields of trade, commerce, recruitment of Egyptian workers etc. remained unaffected. All the GCC members continued to trade with Egypt and no restrictions were placed on migration of Egyptian workers to these countries. After the assassination of President Sadat, gradual improvement began in the relationship of GCC members with Egypt, concomitant with the thaw in Egypt's ties with the rest of the Arab world. There was press speculation during the early years of the Iraq-Iran conflict that Egyptian troops in large numbers might be dep-

91 Oman remained a firm supporter of Camp David accords and Sultan Qaboos said in December 1983 that these accords represented "the only constructive step towards settlement of the Middle East problem taken until then". Arab News: 19.12.1983. Also see Nada Saffran, n.2, pp. 279, 281.

92 See bulletins issued by Central Bank of Egypt giving figures of remittances from expatriate Egyptians for the years 1980-83.

93 The UAE recognized the need for improved relations with Egypt after Hosni Mubarak assumed power. Khaleej Times, 29.12.1988.
loyed to assist the Iraqis and that Egypt's re-entry into the Arab League was imminent. 94 During a meeting of GCC Foreign Ministers held in May, 1982 the Saudi Foreign Minister had made a reference to the possible reinstatement of Egypt into the Arab League. 95

In December, 1983, Yasser Arafat visited Cairo and Egypt was re-admitted into the Islamic Conference Organisation; subsequently, diplomatic relations were established between Jordan and Egypt in 1984. 96 These developments were to prove the precursor of normalisation of ties between Egypt and the GCC.

King Fahd gave a press interview to the Egyptian semi-official newspaper 'Al Ahram' in July, 1986 in which he said that "what brings happiness to Egypt gratifies us and Egypt's tribulations are our tribulations." 97 He also said that Saudi Arabia had not forgotten Egypt and the Egyptian people even for one moment. 98 This was the first statement made by a Saudi monarch to the Egyptian press in several years and these warm sentiments expressed by King Fahd vis-à-vis Egypt were certainly significant.

Subsequently, in July, 1986, Saudi Arabia donated

94 Nadav Saffran, n.2, p.383.
95 Kuwait News Agency Arabic Publications on GCC, February, 1983.
96 Al Ahram, October, 1984.
97 Ibid., 7.7.1986.
98 Ibid.
200,000 tonnes of wheat to Egypt\textsuperscript{99} and during that year contacts with the Egyptian leadership were established by senior members of the Saudi royal family.\textsuperscript{100} Relations between Egypt and Saudi Arabia continued to improve during 1987 and a high-ranking Saudi military delegation visited Cairo in January, 1987.\textsuperscript{101} Subsequently, a Saudi cultural week was celebrated in Cairo in June, 1987 and it was inaugurated by President Mubarak himself.\textsuperscript{102} There was also persistent press speculation over the possible deployment of Egyptian troops on a large scale in Saudi Arabia for its defence.\textsuperscript{103}

An important landmark in the evolution of relations between Egypt and the UAE came when President Mubarak visited the UAE during the last week of January, 1987 after attending the Islamic summit in Kuwait earlier. Commenting on this visit, an important UAE daily said editorially, "President Mubarak's presence at the Islamic summit in Kuwait, his meeting there with several Arab leaders, including President Assad of Syria, and his subsequent visits to Oman and the UAE, all indicate that the process of formally normalising Arab ties with Egypt is now well under way. Cairo's

\textsuperscript{99} Riyadh Daily, 13.7.1986.
\textsuperscript{100} APS Diplomat, 16-23 March, 1987, pp. 141.
\textsuperscript{101} Ibid., 3-10 January, 1987, pp. 17.
\textsuperscript{102} Riyadh Daily, 17 June, 1987.
\textsuperscript{103} APS Diplomat, 16-23 March, 1987, pp. 141.
relations with Oman were never broken but the UAE had followed the Arab League's directive to suspend ties following Egyptian acceptance of the Camp David agreement with Israel. In practice, Egypt has continued to have de facto relations with most Arab countries and the position may soon be legally sanctified.\textsuperscript{104}

There is no doubt that President Mubarak's visit to the UAE in January, 1987 signified formal acknowledgement of the improvement in bilateral ties between these two countries which had occurred during the previous years. The semi-official UAE newspaper Al Ittihad commended the outcome of this visit as follows:

"President Mubarak's visit deepens the closeness of friendship and destiny between the two brotherly peoples."\textsuperscript{105}

Turning now to Kuwaiti-Egyptian relations, they too began to register distinct improvement from mid-1986. In an interview given by the Kuwaiti Prime Minister, he said inter alia, "time has come for Egypt to play its role in the Islamic conference. Egypt nestles lovingly in the hearts of the Arab people. Restoring relations (between Egypt and the Arab countries) is a mere procedural matter."\textsuperscript{106}

During April, 1987, a high-level Egyptian delegation visited Kuwait soliciting Kuwaiti investment in the Egyptian economy. While welcoming this delegation, the Prime Minister

\textsuperscript{104} Khaleej Times, 1.2.1987.
\textsuperscript{105} Riyadh Daily, 1.2.1987.
\textsuperscript{106} Al Watan, 8.10.1986.
of Kuwait emphasised "Kuwait's keenness to bolster cooperation with Egypt in all fields and said cooperation between the two sisterly countries has been and would continue to exist." He also said, "we believe in the feasibility and benefits of this visit and meetings at the official and popular levels. He also expressed willingness of the Kuwaiti government to extend all facilities required for developing commercial and financial cooperation. Praising Egypt's role in the Arab world he said, "we cannot forget the role of the Egyptian people and their clear support to their brothers of the GCC."

Following the Iranian missile attacks on Kuwait in September/October, 1987, Egypt expressed in strong terms its support to Kuwait and other GCC members. Immediately after his re-election in October, 1987, President Mubarak said inter alia: "We side with Kuwait with all our feelings and our potentials in her defence of her sovereignty and the safety of her people." A few days later, Egypt again officially denounced Iranian aggression against Kuwait and proclaimed its willingness to assume its inter-Arab responsibilities towards brotherly Kuwait.

108 Ibid.
In an interview with the noted Kuwaiti journalist Ahmed Al Jarallah, President Mubarak personally reiterated Egypt's whole-hearted support for Kuwait. 111

Like other members of the GCC, Bahrain too began to voice its interest in strengthening ties with Egypt. The Amir of Bahrain in a press interview in the first week of November, 1987 said, "Egypt has been always present with us, either through its national attitude in supporting Iraq or in its attitude of standing against the dangers that threaten the Arab world. " Egypt has been with the Arabs all the time and there is no reason for its formal absence!112

Following the Amman Arab Summit held on 8th November, 1987, all the GCC member countries (except Oman which always had relations with Egypt) re-established diplomatic ties with Egypt. Defence cooperation between Kuwait and Egypt was openly acknowledged; about 100 Egyptian pilots and air force personnel were deployed in Kuwait before formal relations were established. 113 There was speculation in the press about further strengthening of defence cooperation between Egypt and Kuwait. 114

It is interesting to observe how the GCC members followed remarkably similar policies vis-à-vis Egypt - they broke relations with it at the same time; they began to cooperate

closely with it more or less at the same time from early 1986 and established formal diplomatic relations with it within a short span of 8 days from 10th November, 1987 to 18th November, 1987. However, there was no collective decision ever taken by the GCC (at least no such decision was ever announced publicly) as to how this body would like its relations with Egypt to grow and develop. No reference to the policy which the GCC countries aspired to adopt vis-a-vis Egypt was ever made in the communiques issued by their Heads of State or by their Foreign Ministers.

In press statements following some of the meetings of the GCC Foreign Ministers, it was clarified that the decision to re-establish diplomatic relations with Egypt will have to be taken by the Arab League and the GCC did not wish to comment on that matter. For example, GCC Secretary General, Abdulla Bishara, said in the aftermath of the meeting of Foreign Ministers in February, 1987 that the return of Egypt to the Arab League should be discussed within the framework of the Arab League itself and not by the GCC. He merely expressed his appreciation of the role and weight of Egypt in Arab arena.115

It was only after the GCC Foreign Ministers' meeting held in September, 1987 that press reports appeared quoting reliable sources to the effect that all the GCC members were to establish diplomatic relations with Egypt following the Amman summit if no decision in this regard was taken by it.116

The GCC members did not even announce establishment of diplomatic relations with Egypt simultaneously; it was the UAE who did it first\textsuperscript{117} which was followed by Kuwait\textsuperscript{118} which in turn was followed by Saudi Arabia and Bahrain,\textsuperscript{119} and in the end there was Qatar.\textsuperscript{120} If the GCC countries had desired to highlight the spirit of solidarity between them, they could have easily announced their collective decision to restore diplomatic ties with Egypt simultaneously.

During 1988 there were repeated media reports about possible defence cooperation between the GCC and Egypt both bilaterally\textsuperscript{121} and within the framework of the AIO.\textsuperscript{122} Kuwaiti Defence Minister said in January, 1989 that Kuwait sought to "encourage and develop military production in Egypt because it is an Arab nation."\textsuperscript{123} There was, however, no joint effort by the GCC to promote military ties with Egypt.

During 1988 there was also much speculation about Egypt's rejoining the Arab League. The GCC took no stand on

\begin{itemize}
  \item \textsuperscript{117} Khaleej Times, 12.11.1987.
  \item \textsuperscript{118} Kuwait Times, 15.11.1987.
  \item \textsuperscript{119} Arab News, 17.11.1987.
  \item \textsuperscript{120} Gulf News, 19.11.1987.
  \item \textsuperscript{121} APS Diplomat, 4.4.1988 had reported that Saudi-Egyptian army manoeuvres may be held.
  \item \textsuperscript{122} See the section on growth of intra-GCC defence cooperation in Part II.
  \item \textsuperscript{123} Arab News, 8th January, 1989.
\end{itemize}
this issue\textsuperscript{124} and the ninth summit communique issued in that December 1988 merely said on this subject the GCC supported steps "to enable Egypt to undertake its Arab responsibilities within an Arab framework."\textsuperscript{125}

Thus relations of the GCC members (barring Oman) with Egypt evolved along parallel lines during the eighties. This was an ideal opportunity for them to adopt a joint strategy for strengthening relations with Egypt in the political, military and economic fields in concert especially after 1985. It is very significant that they did not do so. It is also noteworthy that the Casablanca Emergency Summit of May 1989 when Egypt was readmitted into the Arab League was not attended by the Amir of Kuwait.

GCC and the West

Though the GCC countries have been regarded traditionally as a pro-Western bloc, their policies vis-a-vis the Western nations and especially the USA were far from identical when this body was formed. Saudi Arabia had extremely close relations with the USA, especially in the military field, and these ties go back to the late 1940s when the USA began to grant military assistance to Saudi Arabia. The Saudi-US relations continued to strengthen during the following decades; a joint committee for economic cooperation between the USA and Saudi Arabia was formed in 1975 and the US exports to Saudi Arabia grew at the

\textsuperscript{124} This was evidently to avoid displeasing Syria.

\textsuperscript{125} \textit{Al Qaba\textsuperscript{s}}, 22.12.1988. The GCC was split on Egypt's readmission to the Arab League. During the Algiers Summit only Saudi Arabia had advocated such a step. \textit{Arab News}, 8.2.1989.
annual rate of 30 per cent during the period 1970-83.126

During the 1970s, Saudi Arabia consistently tried to keep down the level of oil prices and this policy pursued by the Kingdom within the OPEC was generally regarded as an important indication of its pro-USA inclination.

One of the most significant aspects of the Saudi-US relationship of course related to the field of defence; the USA not only had been the most important supplier of military equipment to Saudi Arabia during the 1960s and 1970s but also trained its defence forces, advised it on long-term defence strategy and supervised construction on a mammoth scale of military infrastructure consisting of airfields, radar stations, military cities, etc. 127

The USA has regarded Saudi Arabia as the linchpin of its policy vis-a-vis the Middle East since the late sixties and quoting from Joseph J. Sisco, former Under Secretary of State of USA in the late 1960s, "our whole policy has been based on the major premise that the two key countries in this area are Saudi Arabia and Iran and that to the degree to which the US could promote cooperation between these major countries, you would be contributing to stability in the area. ..... We believe that the arms policy that we have pursued in relationship to Iran and Saudi Arabia in particular has contributed not only to this greater regional co-

127 Nadav Saffran, n.2.
operation but helped to meet what they considered and perceived to be their security concern in the area.²²⁸

During the seventies close political rapport existed between the Kingdom and the USA and even when they differed on certain issues such as the Middle East problem, Saudi Arabia took care to keep its criticism of the USA muted.

Turning to Kuwait, Kuwait-US relations have been far less amicable than the US-Saudi ties and on many occasions during the 1970s, Kuwait had sharply castigated the US policy especially vis-a-vis the Middle East issue. Kuwait, which was regarded as a radical country among the conservative Gulf states had no special links with the USA,²²⁹ whether in the field of defence or commerce or economic relations. The US military personnel were never deputed to Kuwait nor did the US corps of Engineers build a single military facility in that country (in Saudi Arabia, the total value of construction contracts awarded to the US Corps of Engineers has been estimated at 16 million dollars.²³⁰

Kuwait during the 1970s endorsed the demand of countries like Iran, Iraq, Algeria, etc. for higher oil prices and thus its policy on the oil issue was often directly contrary to the US interests.²³¹ The Kuwaiti press and the

129 A. Yadfat and M. Abir, n. 31, 83.
130 See the section dealing with growth of intra-GCC defence cooperation in Part II.
131 In December, 1976 in an OPEC meeting in Doha Kuwait voted along with Iraq, Iran proposing 10 per cent in-
members of the Kuwaiti National Assembly often strongly censured the support extended by the USA to Israel and during the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict, members of Kuwaiti National Assembly demanded withdrawal of Kuwaiti investments from the USA.\textsuperscript{132}

A statement was issued by 37 out of 50 Kuwaiti deputies in the National Assembly on 10th October, 1973 condemning the continued US backing of Israel and proposing a reconsideration of the export of Kuwaiti oil to the US and the withdrawal of Kuwaiti funds from the US.\textsuperscript{133}

It has already been observed that Kuwait had good relations with the communist nations during the 1970s; it followed a genuinely non-aligned policy, distancing itself from the USA especially in the political field. The Kuwaiti policy was undoubtedly influenced by the presence of a small, vocal, coterie of radical deputies in the National Assembly who routinely railed against US imperialism.

Turning to the UAE, it avoided the kind of rhetorical attacks which the Kuwaitis used to launch against the USA nor were they required to live up to the radical image which the Kuwaitis had cultivated. But at the same time, the kind of close understanding which existed between Saudi Arabia

\textsuperscript{131} Cont'd.. f.n. 131


\textsuperscript{133} Ibid.
and the USA was absent in their bilateral links with the USA. In the field of defence procurement, for example, it was France which supplied the UAE with most of its requirements of sophisticated weapons. Similarly, the US Corps of Engineers did not execute a single contract in the UAE.\footnote{See the section dealing with growth of intra-GCC defence cooperation, Part II.}

Turning now to the crucial field of oil, one finds that the UAE during the seventies had often aligned itself with the radical OPEC states like Libya and Algeria, whether the issue related to imposition of an oil embargo or raising of oil prices and thus the UAE often adopted a position directly contrary to the US policy objectives. In the aftermath of the 1967 Arab-Israeli conflict, the UAE had demanded suspension of oil supplies to countries supporting Israel and was in the forefront of the OPEC members which had called for imposition of an oil embargo on the USA and Holland in 1973.\footnote{Hossein Amiradeghizadeh (ed.), \\textit{Middle East.} 132, pp. 184-85.} Even in the political field, the UAE had raised its voice against US moves to expand its military presence in the Gulf region following the announcement of the Carter doctrine in early 1980 in the wake of the entry of Soviet troops into Afghanistan in December, 1979.\footnote{\textit{MEED}, 7.3.1980.} Sheikh Zayed, President of the UAE, commented inter alia:

"All is well in the Gulf and it has no need of US or any other forces. The presence of US forces in the area is not something we expect from a friendly country like the US."
The people of the world would cooperate and live in peace if it were not for the intervention of the big powers, so these powers must work to keep the Gulf region clear of their rivalry." 137

Turning to Oman, it was perhaps the most vocal and strident critic of the Soviet Union among the GCC members in the 1970s and condemned it on numerous occasions for its hegemonistic ambitions. 138 Oman had a close military relationship with Great Britain and higher echelons of the Omani armed forces, especially the air force and navy, were manned by British personnel. The Omani-US ties especially in the military field began to grow towards the end of the 1970s when Oman agreed to grant base facilities to the US forces at certain strategic places such as the Musandam Peninsula, Thumbret in the Salalah region in southern Oman, etc. 139

Bahrain and Qatar had a good relationship with the USA; however, their ties were not marked by the warmth and bonhomie which characterised the Saudi-US ties. It is also worth noting that between these two countries, Bahrain's links with the USA were especially strong in the defence field. Certain port facilities were given by Bahrain to the US navy during the seventies which used to station a small

137 Ibid.
As far as Qatar was concerned, it mainly depended on France to procure advanced weapons. In the field of trade, commerce and investment, both Bahrain and Qatar had excellent relations with the western block.

Having thus reviewed the relationship and ties as they existed between the GCC members and the western world especially the USA during the 1970s, in the following perhaps changes brought over by the GCC during the last eight years will be examined.

Saudi-US relations have remained as cordial and warm as before, whether in the field of defence, investment, trade or any other area. Despite some attempts made by Saudi Arabia to diversify its sources of arms supply, the USA remains its pre-eminent partner in the defence field and after the deployment of US-manned AWACS in the kingdom from 1980 and the construction of a highly sophisticated integrated radar system there by the US companies under the Peace Shield Programme, the US commitment to the Saudi security has become stronger than ever.

Quoting now from a speech delivered by Faud Al Farsy, Saudi Arabia's Deputy Minister for Information, during a conference on 'US-Arab relations in a changing world' held at Houston, Texas on 16-17 October, 1986: 141

"We have never believed that our friendship with the USA was simply a function of mutual economic interests. We

141 Arab Times, 18.10.1986.
have nurtured that friendship because we believe that the US has always been one of the major forces for peace in our region and the world. We have believed that our countries shared the same goals for the Middle East - stability based on an understanding of the needs of all the people in the region."

While welcoming the Saudi Crown Prince to the USA in October, 1987, George Bush, then the US Vice President, said. "My country is proud of its close and enduring friendship with Saudi Arabia. Our ties are based on a firm foundation of common interests in peace and stability."

"We share a common stake in the growth of world trade and prosperity. We have many business and investment ties in each other's countries. We share a reverence for the sanctity of the family. We share a belief in God. These are the standards of sincere and unshakable ties."

Thus, the Saudi-US relations, if anything, had further improved and strengthened since the inception of the GCC. In the field of investment, an overwhelming percentage of Saudi reserves continued to be invested in the US banks, treasury bonds etc. In the field of commerce, the quantum of bilateral trade remained high and a large number of US companies were awarded contracts in the Kingdom.

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143 See the section on intra-GCC monetary cooperation in Part III.
144 According to Saudi Gazette, 17.2.1985, there were 506 US companies operating in the Kingdom who were awarded contracts worth 25 billion dollars.
In the field of defence as already seen by us, the cooperation between the USA and Saudi Arabia further strengthened during recent years due to stationing of US-manned AWACS in the Kingdom as well as supply of sophisticated weapons like the Stinger missiles which had been denied by the USA to other GCC countries including Kuwait. Though the Saudis did not grant any bases to the USA during the Iran-Iraq conflict, it was tacitly understood that such facilities would be available in case of a real crisis. "Saudi Arabia has said, it will allow US military forces to use its bases in the event of Soviet aggression or if the US is unable to handle a Gulf crisis on its own, according to a confidential Reagan Administration Report."

In the political field, the USA and Saudi Arabia continued to share a strong distrust of communism as well as intense suspicions about long-term Soviet intentions. The two countries often cooperated closely during recent years such as in their common support for Afghan Mujahideens and Contras. Even on the Middle East issue on which the Kingdom and the USA necessarily differed, the Saudi government as before continued to adopt an accommodating stand vis-a-vis the US support for Israel.

The Kuwaiti-US ties during the first three, four years after the inception of the GCC continued to be marked by


146 There was close cooperation between the USA and Saudi Arabia as regards the Lebanese crisis in 1983-84. Arab News, 25.9.1983.
extremely trenchant Kuwaiti criticism of the USA, especially for the support being extended by it to Israel. Apart from almost ritualistic indictment of the USA in the Kuwaiti press, members of the Kuwaiti National Assembly and senior Kuwaiti Ministers did not hesitate to give vent to their utter disenchantment with the USA for backing the Zionists and thus enabling them to remain in occupation of Arab territories. 147

While criticising the US veto on a Security Council resolution in January, 1982 which proposed sanctions against Israel for annexing the Syrian Golan Heights, Kuwait's Minister for Cabinet Affairs, Abdul Aziz said, "Kuwait and all peace-loving peoples and nations of the world denounce this US attitude which is contradictory to all international laws and principles." Members of the Kuwaiti National Assembly then described the USA as an enemy of the Arabs and Islam due to the support given by it to the Zionists and gave a call for exploiting the oil weapon against the American foe. 148

In August, 1982 the Deputy Speaker of the Kuwaiti National Assembly, Al Sadoun, proclaimed in a public rally that the USA had destroyed all human doctrines and forsaken the simplest moral values when it thought that the use of force and destruction will quell the people's will." 149

Subsequently, in August, 1983, Kuwait rejected the no-

147 Al Watan, 1980 and Al Rai Al Aam, 1981.
149 Al Watan, August, 1982.
mination of Bradon Grove as US Ambassador to Kuwait on the ground that he had earlier served in Jerusalem. Condemning the US action in Granada in November, 1983, Sheikh Sabah, Kuwait's Foreign Minister, in a letter to the Security Council said, "Kuwait does not find any legal ground for the armed invasion of Granada by the US and certain Caribbean countries. This invasion like other invasions of territories of independent nations violates the letter and spirit of the UN Charter. It also represents a dangerous phenomenon in the relations among nations." During 1984 a Kuwaiti daily lambasted the USA accusing it of being responsible for Iranian and Israeli aggression.

Subsequently, during 1987, the Kuwaiti attitude towards the USA underwent total transformation as it was only due to the massive presence of US warships in the Gulf that the Kuwaiti tankers could remain secure from Iranian attacks. Kuwait which always used the strongest possible language to fulminate against the hegemonistic ambitions of the USA openly welcomed the US naval armada in the Gulf waters.

The Chairman of the Kuwait Oil Tanker Company said in an interview with a local daily that "the presence of some 30 warships in or near the waterway had helped deter Iranian attacks." Earlier, the Kuwaiti Ambassador to the

151 Al Watan, November, 1983.
152 Al-Anba, 19.5.1984.
USA, Shaikh Saudi Al Sabah, said in a public meeting that a US withdrawal from the Gulf before settlement of the Iraq-Iran conflict would be "a great strategic loss to the global, political and geopolitical position of the US."\textsuperscript{154} However, this improvement in Kuwaiti-US relations was entirely the result of Iranian pressure on Kuwait and did not represent any pan-GCC move.

Turning to the UAE, one finds that no appreciable change in the UAE's relationship with the western world has come about. In the field of trade and investment, the UAE continues to be oriented towards the West though there has been some increase in its trade with East Europe and China. In the defence field, France remains the principal supplier of high-technology weapons to the UAE.\textsuperscript{155}

In the political field, it maintained good ties with the western world but opposed as before any attempt by the USA to extend its influence in the Gulf, especially through presence of its armed forces. It has been described in another section of this thesis how the UAE voiced its disapproval over presence of US naval armada in the Gulf and looked upon it as further aggravating an already tense situation.\textsuperscript{156}

\textsuperscript{154} Arab Times, 15/16 October, 1987.
\textsuperscript{155} See the section dealing with growth of intra-GCC defence cooperation in part II.
\textsuperscript{156} See the section dealing with evolution of relations between GCC and Iran in Part I.
Turning now to Oman, one again finds that Oman's relations with western countries did not undergo any major change. It was noted earlier that Oman had extremely close ties with the UK, especially in the defence field, and these links continued to be excellent. The UK carried out a major military manoeuvre with Omani forces in November, 1986 in which about 5000 troops were airlifted from the UK and about 100 warships participated. This was regarded as the largest exercise conducted by Great Britain outside Europe in recent years and demonstrated its ability to come quickly to the assistance of Oman.\textsuperscript{157}

Though Oman had given certain facilities to the USA in the late seventies, this did not give any special impetus to the Omani-US relations, whether in the military field or economic. Moreover, Oman is known to have imposed restrictions on the use of these facilities by the USA from 1984 onwards.\textsuperscript{158} As regards the smaller GCC members, Bahrain and Qatar, their ties with the West in various areas, including the field of defence, did not change. France as before remains the principle exporter of armaments to Qatar.\textsuperscript{159}

\begin{footnotes}
\item[157] *Arab Times*, 13/14 November 1986. See the section dealing with growth of intra-GCC defence cooperation in part II.

\item[158] The hardening of Omani attitude towards the USA can be attributed to improvement in its relations with Iran from 1984 onwards. Sultan Qaboos as late as 1983 referred to the possibility of turning to the USA for military assistance in an emergency. *Arab News*, 29.6.83. See also the Gulf Cooperation Council, Moderation and Stability in an interdependent world, pp. 186.

\item[159] See the section dealing with growth of intra-GCC defence cooperation in part II.
\end{footnotes}
If one reviews the manner in which the relations of different GCC members with the western world have changed during the last eight years, the overwhelming impression that one gets is of continuity. GCC members have more or less stuck to the path which they were traversing earlier and intra-GCC differences in their relations with the western world have in no way been bridged. Saudi-US relations continue to fall in a special category and the Kingdom remains the only GCC member which can be loosely described as a US ally in this group.

Though Kuwait adopted a somewhat conciliatory attitude towards the USA in 1987 after leasing its tankers to it, this proved a short-term change. Kuwaiti media began to lambast the USA in severe terms in the aftermath of the Iraq-Iran ceasefire in August, 1988. Kuwait's Arabic press condemned in strong words certain US actions like the decision of the American Congress to impose sanctions on Iraq for use of chemical weapons against kurds in September, 1988, its refusal to grant visa to Yasser Arafat in November, 1988 and so on. Kuwaiti-US relations during the late 1988 were analogous to what they were in the seventies. Similarly, there has been no marked change in the relationship between the USA on the one hand and Oman, Bahrain and Qatar on the other.

162 Ibid., 5.1.1989.
To sum up, no impact of any pan-GCC consensus on evolution of relations of these states with the West during the eighties can be discerned.

The GCC and the Arab-Israeli Conflict

The ninth GCC summit held in December, 1988 in its communique devoted considerable space to the Palestinian issue. While praising the uprising of the Palestinians in the occupied territories, it supported the decisions taken by the Palestinian National Council in November, 1988 when it had declared establishment of an independent state of Palestine in the occupied lands. The Supreme Council also hailed the stand taken by Yasser Arafat in Geneva renouncing terrorism, accepting the resolutions No. 242 and 338, and acknowledging the right of Israel to peaceful co-existence. Earlier, the GCC states by and large have been endorsing the basic Arab demands for settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict, i.e., Israeli withdrawal from the occupied territories, right of the Palestinian people to exercise their self-determination and creation of an independent state.

All this would not mean that a consensus has been existing within the GCC vis-a-vis the various aspects of the Pales-

163 See the section dealing with the ninth summit in Part I.  
tinian question. A GCC member which had always adopted a strikingly different stand on this issue was Oman. As noted earlier, it was the only GCC country which did not break diplomatic relations with Egypt after it signed Camp David accords. It was the only GCC member where there was no PLO office and which was not visited by Yasser Arafat until the end of 1988.\(^\text{166}\)

During the 1980s, Oman was the solitary GCC member which did not hesitate to call for direct talks between Israel and the PLO.\(^\text{167}\) Quoting Omani Foreign Minister:

"We support direct negotiations between Israel and Palestinians as they are the two parties directly concerned in the Palestinian issue."\(^\text{168}\) While addressing the UN General Assembly in October, 1987, the Omani representative called for an international peace conference and Israeli participation for establishment of a durable and just peace that recognises the legitimate rights of the Palestinian people.\(^\text{169}\)


167 Sultan Qaboos earlier was much opposed to the PLO. He had called upon the moderate elements among the Palestinians to forgo the PLO and shift their loyalty to King Hussain of Jordan. Al Watan, 9.6.1983. Oman was the only GCC member which had endorsed the US Middle East Policy. Arab Times, 12.4.1983.


The other GCC members were not then willing to openly acknowledge the existence of Israel.

The Israeli-Lebanese agreement entered into on 17.5.'83 elicited strikingly differing reactions from the GCC members. The Saudi government officially announced its "respect" for the above agreement which was construed in the diplomatic parlance as conveying its acquiescence in it. The Kuwaiti media, on the other hand, was vehement in proclaiming its opposition to this agreement and denounced it in no uncertain terms. Members of the Kuwaiti National Assembly described it "as a humiliation for the Arab nation and an extension of the infamous Camp David accords." On the official level, the Kuwaiti Minister of State for Cabinet Affairs, Abdul Aziz Hussein, had expressed in guarded terms the disapproval of the Kuwaiti government of this accord by saying that "no Arab country should be permitted to conclude any agreement unilaterally with Israel without recourse to the Arab League." The Bahraini press, especially its Arabic newspapers Al Adhawaa and Al Muwakaf, denounced the above accord in vitriolic terms. Qatar, on the other hand, was much more sympathetic to it and the full text of an interview given by then President Gemeyel of Lebanon justi-

170 _Arab News_, 19.5.1983.
171 _Al Qabas/ Al Watan_, May, 1983.
172 _Al Watan_, 20.5.1983.
173 Ibid., 23 May 1983.
174 _Al Adhawaa, Al Muwakaf_, May, 1983.
fying the signing of this accord was published in Daily Gulf Times of Qatar. The fact that the media and official reactions in the GCC to the Israeli-Lebanese accord showed striking variation was evidently reflective of their differing perceptions vis-a-vis the Palestinian question.

Another interesting example of lack of intra-GCC consensus on this issue was provided by their attitudes towards holding of an international peace conference on the Middle East. The message sent by King Fahd to the UN on the occasion of international Day of solidarity with the Palestinians in November, 1987 did not allude to the necessity of holding such an international conference, while the message sent by some other GCC rulers on this occasion incorporated such a reference. A leading Arab newspaper questioned in an article published in November, 1987 the very necessity of holding an international peace conference. The first categorical statement indicating the Kingdom's acceptance of the need for holding an international peace conference came only in January, 1988 when King Fahd called upon the UN to organise such a meeting. It may be recal-

175 *Gulf Times*, 29.5.1983.


led that the eighth GCC summit held in December, 1987 had endorsed the convening of an international peace conference and this was not done by any previous GCC summits. 180

Oman was the only GCC member to officially endorse the decision taken by Jordan on 31st July, 1988 severing links with the West Bank. 181 During the second half of 1988, there was much speculation about an independent Palestinian state being established on the West Bank and the Gaza strip. Barr­ ing Qatar other GCC members refused to commit themselves in advance as to the stand they would adopt if such a state was created. While the Qatari Amir unequivocally expressed Qatar's support for such a move, 182 other GCC members contented themselves by saying that it was a matter that concerned only the Palestinians. 183 It may be observed here that the number of Palestinians in the GCC member states shows wide variation - from more than 250,000 184 in Kuwait to less than a few hundred in Oman. This was at least partly the result of the fact that some GCC members were far more sympathetic to Palestinians than others.

180 See the section dealing with GCC summits in Part I. Saudi Arabia's opposition to this idea probably arose out of its unwillingness to see greater role for the USSR in the Middle East.


During the period 1983-88, the PLO faced a number of challenges and took many crucial decisions among which mention may be made of: eruption of a civil war within the PLO in late 1983; signing of an accord between Yasser Arafat and King Hussein of Jordan in February, 1985; repeated attempts by Amal Militia in Lebanon with Syrian backing to liquidate Palestinian refugee camps in early 1987; reunion of Palestinian factions in the middle of 1987; Shultz's peace proposal presented in early 1988, etc. It is to be noted that on none of these developments was there any clear-cut policy enunciated by the GCC as a whole.

It has already been noted that the statements on Palestine incorporated in the first eight GCC summits show much variation and in many of them the basic demands of the Arabs like Israeli withdrawal, creation of an independent Palestinian state were not mentioned.\(^{185}\) It has also been observed that in many of the communiques issued by the GCC Foreign Ministers, nothing more than the support for the Palestinian uprising "Intifada" was expressed.\(^{186}\) All this again cannot but reflect existence of an intra-GCC rift on this issue.

There could be a number of reasons which prevented the GCC from adopting a unified policy vis-à-vis the Palestinian imbroglio. Basically, the GCC members desired good relations with all the three important regional countries which were directly involved in it, namely, Jordan, Egypt and Syria.

\(^{185}\) See the section dealing with GCC summits in Part I.

\(^{186}\) See the section dealing with Foreign Ministers' meeting in Part I.
While the GCC members had good relations with the Al Fatah Wing of the PLO headed by Yasser Arafat, they did not wish to antagonise the hardline PLO factions. It is well known that relations between Jordan, Egypt and Syria have been a marked by considerable hostility and animosity and they had divergent perceptions regarding settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict. It would not be wrong to say that the absence of a pan-Arab consensus on the question of Palestine stood in the way of a pan-GCC policy being evolved on this issue.

Mediatory Role Played by the GCC in Settlement of Intra-Arab Disputes

It appears that the GCC could not play any significant role at the regional level either in fostering unity within the Arab world or bridging internecine differences between these countries. A review of the events during the last eight years shows that though some GCC members especially Saudi Arabia, and Kuwait from time to time acted as mediators in conflicts besetting this region, they took these initiatives entirely at the national level.

Saudi Arabia has been active in bringing about rapprochement between Jordan and Syria in early 1987. During

187 It is to be recalled that Syria had not recognised the new Palestinian state until December 1988. Syria from mid-1988 had made clear its opposition to creation of such a state. Economist, 28 January 1989, The Hindustan Times, 18 October 1988 and Hindu, 24 October 1988.

188 Arab News, 6 May 1987.
December, 1988\textsuperscript{189} the Saudis made a major bid to bring about a rapprochement between Egypt and Syria. The Saudis mediated a number of times between Bahrain and Qatar over their territorial disputes and this in fact they had been doing during the 1970s also. Kuwait played a mediatory role in the Lebanese crisis in February, 1989.\textsuperscript{190}

...It will not be wrong to say that the GCC as a body did not actively play a mediatory role in any intra-Arab disputes, even though individual members did so on numerous occasions. Significantly, the GCC did not mediate as a body even in the long-standing territorial dispute between Bahrain and Qatar though an attempt could have been made to settle this conflict by constituting a special committee consisting of a few GCC members as was provided by its constitution.

The GCC members took many initiatives at the national level concerning the Iraq-Iran war. Kuwait, for example, repeatedly approached the UN expressing its apprehensions about the likelihood of an impending Iranian attack but a combined approach to the UN on behalf of Kuwait was never made by the GCC.\textsuperscript{191}

On the eve of the Amman Emergency Summit held on 8th November, 1987, the UAE President proposed formation of a committee consisting of three impartial leaders to mediate in the Iraq-Iran conflict - this was an excellent instance

\textsuperscript{189} Khaleej Times, 15.12.1988.
\textsuperscript{190} Al Watan, February, 1989.
\textsuperscript{191} See the section on evolution of relations between Kuwait and Iran in Part I.
of how the GCC leaders acted on their own without consulting other members. Shaikh Zayed earlier in August, 1987 had undertaken a major mediatory role, again at his personal level, when he visited Damascus and two emissaries were despatched to Baghdad. 192

Barring the resolution introduced by the GCC in the UN Security Council condemning Iranian attacks on their oil tankers in June, 1984, one finds it difficult to come across an instance of these countries taking concerted action, whether in the UN or in the Arab League or in any other international organisation. 193 During the Arab League meetings held in 1987 the GCC was usually split on the issue of the Iraq-Iran conflict, with Oman and the UAE pleading for a more conciliatory and accommodating approach. 194 The GCC never nominated a single member country to represent this body as a whole in international meetings.

To sum up, therefore, it can be said that the GCC members did not speak with one voice in most international meetings nor did the GCC undertake any important political initiative on behalf of all its members.

Having examined in considerable depth how the foreign policies of GCC member states evolved vis-a-vis the communist countries, the western bloc, Egypt, etc., it appears that

193 The mediatory role played by Kuwait and the UAE between Oman and the PDRY had began before the GCC was formed.
194 See the section on evolution of relations between the GCC and Iran in Part I.
each member more or less stuck to the policy perspective which it was following during the 1970s. Moreover, even when significant changes took place in foreign policies of certain countries (e.g. transformation in the Kuwaiti policy vis-a-vis the USA), this was due to the constraints and compulsions felt by that country and was not the result of any pan-GCC decision. The GCC again did not succeed in playing any important role on a collective basis.\textsuperscript{195} What is also noteworthy, even when the GCC states pursued analogous policies vis-a-vis a particular country (say Egypt) they made no attempt to highlight the commonality of approach.

\textsuperscript{195} Abdulla Bishara, Secretary General of the GCC said in a press statement that the GCC did not wish to act like a block within the Arab framework. FBIS-MEA-V-86-075, 18 April 1986, pp.C1-C2.