India’s Relationship with Saudi Arabia: Forging a Strategic Partnership

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Abstract: Trade has been the dominant factor in India’s relationship with Saudi Arabia, with the import of oil being a major component. India views Saudi Arabia as a country with which it can forge security ties in order to deal with terrorism, piracy and criminal elements. Diplomatically, it could be a gateway for India into the wider Arab and Islamic world. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has reciprocated India’s initiatives relating to issues of mutual interest. Although some hurdles remain, it is time for both countries to work towards building a strong strategic partnership.

Introduction

The India–Saudi Arabia relationship has been inhibited by a number of factors including the legacy of the Cold War, the regional political dynamics and divergent interests of both countries. Saudi Arabia has maintained a close relationship with the US and Pakistan; India has remained non-aligned while maintaining strong ties with the former Soviet Union. Similarly, India’s recognition of Israel in 1950 and its support for the secular Arab nationalist regimes in Egypt, Iraq and Syria have kept India away from Riyadh. The Kashmir issue, the Bangladesh liberation war and the Saudi perception of the treatment of Muslims in India are other factors that have fuelled further misunderstanding between the two countries. The 1979 Islamic revolution in Iran led by Ayatollah Khomeini and the Iran–Iraq war the very next year heightened Saudi insecurity in the region, thus leading to further reliance on the US and Pakistan. India’s muted response to the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan further increased the political and diplomatic distance between the two. Similarly, while Saudi Arabia declared war on Iraq after the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in 1990, India’s soft stand upset the Saudis. Thus, with such major political hurdles in the way for decades, the relationship was confined to trade and business—mainly the export and import of oil.

But the situation changed after the 9/11 attacks on the USA in which 15 Saudi nationals were found to be involved. This led to strong criticism of the Saudi policy towards terrorism and allegations relating to Saudi support for extremists—both ideologically and financially. Saudi Arabia began to realise the need for and importance of looking beyond its traditional allies and engaging with the other major Asian powers such as India. This was a welcome move for India. The geopolitical changes in the region, the emergence of India and Saudi Arabia as major regional powers, growing economies and the emergence of common security challenges are some of the reasons the two countries have drawn together. Although both countries have achieved

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substantial success in bilateral trade and business, the relationship has a long way to go. Against this background, this article intends to study India’s relationship with Saudi Arabia and argues that it is time for India to look beyond oil and trade and engage Saudi Arabia to strengthen their strategic partnership. While initiatives have been taken in the form of the visits of King Abdullah in 2006 and the return visit by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in 2010, they need to be followed up and stabilised. The article also attempts to explore India’s interests in cultivating strategic ties with Saudi Arabia by ending the antipathy of the past, and to identify the hurdles in the way of building a strategic partnership.

**Dominance of trade and business**

An important feature of the Indo-Saudi relationship is the dominance of trade and business. While India’s population, labour force and expanding economy are the major attractions for the Kingdom, Saudi Arabia’s petroleum reserves, the lucrative market for Indian goods, and Indian workers in the Kingdom have been the main elements in the cooperation between the two countries. At present Saudi Arabia is the fourth largest trading partner of India, with bilateral total trade of US$36.7 billion in 2011–2012, with imports accounting for US$31 billion and exports for US$5.6 billion. The trade balance is profoundly in favour of Saudi Arabia because of the huge imports of crude oil by India. In 2010–2011, India imported crude oil worth US$26 billion from Saudi Arabia. Saudi Arabia is the 46th biggest foreign direct investor in India. According to Department of Industrial Policy and Promotion (DIPP), Saudi Arabia invested US$33.12 million in India between April 2000 and September 2011. There are more than 50 Saudi companies or joint ventures operational in India. Similarly, more than 200 Indian companies with an investment exceeding US$1 billion are active in Saudi Arabia. A number of joint venture companies have also been set up by India and Saudi Arabia. Bilateral visits both by businessmen and government functionaries are also taking place regularly. To facilitate business, both countries signed the Bilateral Investment Protection and Promotion Agreement (BIPPA) and Double Taxation Avoidance Agreement (DTAA) during the visit of King Abdullah to India in 2006.

**Forging strategic ties with Saudi Arabia**

**Growing Saudi regional profile**

Saudi Arabia is an important regional player in West Asia. Its geographical size, large population, strong economy, huge petroleum reserves, growing military power, and the presence of the two holy mosques are some of the reasons for Saudi influence in the region. On the foreign policy front, it has substantial influence over other Gulf sheikhdoms, plays an active role in the Israel–Palestine peace process and has steadily cultivated ties with big powers like the USA, Russia, China and the EU. Saudi Arabia’s ‘special relationship’ with the USA gives it a further dominating position in the region. The relationship is one of the major determinants of the strategic and security situation in the region. Since the 1991 Gulf War, American military forces have been stationed in Saudi Arabia and other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries. Importantly, the USA does not have any issues with the improving Indo-Saudi relations, as it did in the case of India’s attempts to engage with Iran.
The rising Saudi profile in the region is a call for India to engage with the country and move beyond bilateral trade and energy supply. Both countries can cooperate on broader political and strategic issues of common interest, both short term and long term. Both countries enjoy a position of superiority in their respective regions. Just as India is the major power in the South Asian region, Saudi Arabia is the major player in the Gulf region. Thus, both have the advantage of being able to cooperate without being restrained by their immediate neighbourhood.

Saudi Arabia: a gateway to the Arab/Islamic world

Saudi Arabia can provide a gateway for India into the wider Arab/Islamic world. Saudi Arabia exercises great political clout in the Arab/Islamic world because of its huge oil wealth and the two holy places of Islam. It is also a major power in the Gulf region with influence in organisations like the GCC, the Arab League and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). The visit of King Abdullah to India sent a signal to other Arab and Muslim leaders that India is a friend with whom more intensive and extensive contacts should be established. Thus, cultivating ties with Saudi Arabia would augment India’s credibility and image in the region and serve India’s purpose of engaging the Arab/Islamic world. India has been able to build up and strengthen its relationship with a number of Muslim countries but it needs to work towards changing the perception of the leaders and the people of those countries towards India. Strong ties with Saudi Arabia would provide India a unique platform for greater access to other countries of the region and promote India’s interest.

India’s stakes in Gulf security

India believes that the Gulf region falls within its security parameter. While visiting Saudi Arabia in January 2001, External Affairs Minister Jaswant Singh stated: ‘The security of the two regions is inseparable and we must work together with the recognition of that reality’. A few years later the same sentiment was reiterated by Chinmaya Gharekhan, India’s special envoy for West Asia, who while speaking at the Gulf Security Conference in Manama, Bahrain, in December 2005 stated that security in the Gulf region is of ‘paramount concern’, and India is ready to contribute to the security and stability of the region by sharing its experience in combating terrorism, maritime security and military training. He emphasised that ‘recent events in Iraq have brought home the fact that a politically unstable area can become the spawning ground of terrorists. Linkages with illicit trafficking in narcotics as well as in small arms have enhanced the destructive potential and lethal reach of the terrorists’. Apart from the terrorists and pirates, criminals, money launderers and small arms suppliers have also created insecurity in the region, which India is determined to fight. Also, as Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has declared that the Gulf region is India’s extended neighbourhood and economic hinterland, there is a need to check these elements, which calls for greater cooperation with the regional countries, particularly Saudi Arabia. India’s energy and trade security is closely linked to the security and stability of the region. Also, the presence of 6.5 million Indian nationals in the GCC countries makes India more concerned about security in the Gulf. Evacuating such a large number of people in case of any emergency is a difficult task. India faced such challenges during the Gulf War of 1991 when Indian citizens had to be evacuated from Kuwait, and more recently from Libya and Egypt.
Cooperation against terrorism

Both Saudi Arabia and India have been victims of terrorism, particularly terrorism perpetrated by Islamist extremists. Saudi Arabia has often been accused of funding religious extremists and spreading their brand of Sunni Wahhabi Islam all over the world. It is believed by many in India that terrorist groups in Kashmir and Pakistan are being financed by Saudi sympathisers. Organisations like the Lashkar-e-Toiba have received financial support from Saudi Arabia and several charity organisations in the Gulf.\(^\text{10}\) India would like Saudi Arabia to check such financiers in its territory. After the 9/11 attacks on the USA, Saudi Arabia was subjected to great international pressure. Also following that incident, Saudi Arabia faced a number of terrorist attacks in its own territory targeting royal family members, foreigners and oil installations. Since then Saudi Arabia has taken steps to check the flow of money, cracked down on terrorist networks and appealed to them to join the national mainstream. In recent years, Saudi Arabia has been quite successful in containing terrorist attacks and the security forces have been able to smash their networks and hinder their functioning.\(^\text{11}\) Saudi Arabia has condemned extremism and has been preaching moderation even through the religious leaders. Thus the new common agenda for India and Saudi Arabia is to support political moderation and oppose religious extremism.\(^\text{12}\) India believes that the fight against terrorism has to be long term, sustained and comprehensive. It cannot be ad hoc, selective or compartmentalised in terms of region or religion. No terrorist network can sustain itself without a safe haven and without external support. Thus, the fight against terrorism must not be restricted to the perpetrators but should encompass states which support, sponsor or harbour them. India also believes that no single country can ensure security in the region and there is a need for cooperation among regional countries.\(^\text{13}\) In this regard, India was appreciative of the Saudi decision to deport Sayed Zabiuddin Ansari aka Abu Jundal, who is suspected of being involved in the 26/11 Mumbai attacks. India’s primary goal in the region has to be the security of the Gulf region, for which India has to improve its relations with Saudi Arabia along with Iran and Iraq.\(^\text{14}\) Deepening its relationship with Riyadh will give India new options to manage its own region as well as contribute to the security of the Gulf region.\(^\text{15}\) Active cooperation with Saudi Arabia in this regard would help both countries to follow each other’s best practices and, more importantly, intelligence sharing would further help both countries in fighting terrorism.

Fighting piracy

Piracy and maritime security are other areas of concern for India. Although terrorists have been attacking India mainly on land, the 26 November 2008 Mumbai attacks clearly exposed the weakness of India’s maritime security and the possibility of terrorist threats from the sea. Piracy has emerged as a major threat and both India and Saudi Arabia have been victims of pirate attacks in the recent past. Piracy remains a threat to the sea lines of communication, and thus to the security of the transhipment of goods. Saudi Arabia has expressed its deep concern over the rising piracy in the Gulf of Aden and is of the view that elimination of piracy is an international issue and thus all countries should combine to combat it in the light of the United Nations Security Council resolutions.\(^\text{16}\) India’s trade and energy security is inextricably linked to the security of the Strait of Hormuz and Bab el Mandeb.\(^\text{17}\) Although the Indian navy is patrolling the troubled Gulf of Aden to secure transhipments, cooperation with its Saudi counterpart
would strengthen the fight against pirates and other non-state actors who may create trouble in the region.

**Prospects of defence cooperation**

India and Saudi Arabia, although major players in their respective regions, have not signed any defence cooperation agreement. Similarly, there is no supply of any weapons and equipment nor are the two engaged in any joint research and development projects. In recent times, however, the two countries have been conducting joint military exercises. Indian navy ships have visited Saudi Arabia on goodwill visits and naval exercises. In March 2011, Indian naval ships visited the port of Jubail in Saudi Arabia on a goodwill visit. Both countries are planning to undertake further joint naval exercises in the future. The Indian army also plans to hold joint exercises with the Royal Saudi Land Force in the near future. A 16-member delegation from the Saudi Command and Staff College visited India in June 2010. During the same year, several Saudi defence personnel attended training courses at the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, and the National Institute of Hydrography, Goa. In an interview with Saudi journalists in February 2010, Prime Minister Mannohan Singh gave positive indications about the possibility of a defence cooperation agreement with the Kingdom when he stated: ‘We look forward to deepening our defence cooperation with Saudi Arabia’. India’s defence minister A.K. Antony visited Saudi Arabia on 13–14 February 2012, and both sides agreed to establish a joint committee to work out a defence cooperation agreement and an agreement on cooperation in hydrography. Both countries are also exploring enhanced military cooperation including training that could help the Saudis to better tackle the terrorists operating in the mountainous areas bordering Yemen.

**Energy security**

India is the fourth largest oil-consuming country in the world after the United States, China and Japan. With a growing population and economy, the demand for energy is naturally increasing. Thus, securing long-term energy supply has been one of the dominant objectives of India in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf region. India is highly dependent on the Gulf region for its energy security as it imports around two thirds of its energy requirements from the region. At present, Saudi Arabia is the largest supplier of crude oil to India, supplying 27,361 million metric tonnes (MMT) in 2010–2011. During his visit to Saudi Arabia, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh held discussions on the ‘strategic energy partnership’ between the two countries. Similarly, India’s attempts to build the ‘Strategic Petroleum Reserve’ would also mean further reliance upon Saudi Arabia and the region. India’s growing energy needs require engaging Saudi Arabia through energy interdependence rather than through the mere import and export of the commodity.

**Why India matters for Saudi Arabia**

The Saudi perception of India has also undergone a change over the years. With the end of the Cold War and the emergence of a stable India in the world scene, Saudi Arabia has realised the importance and potential of India. Saudi Arabia has expressed its faith in the Indian democratic structure and steady economic growth. Initially, Saudi foreign
policy did not accord much importance to India as it had other regional priorities. For Saudi Arabia, the most important foreign policy priority is the Gulf region followed by the Arab world and then the Islamic world, for understandable reasons. India comes in the foreign policy priorities that include non-Arab, non-Islamic countries along with other major powers of the world.  

A major shift in the Saudi approach towards India took place in the aftermath of the 9/11 attacks when the West looked upon Saudi Arabia with suspicion. The subsequent cultural backlash in the West made Saudis work on broadening its engagement with the rest of the world, particularly with the Asian countries. The 9/11 incident also stimulated the Saudi realisation that their decision to put all their eggs in the US basket was risky and that they should build bridges in the neighbourhood. Thus, countries like India, China and Japan have become the new focus for Saudi Arabia. According to Abdulaziz Sager, chairman of the Gulf Research Centre, Jeddah, there can be no doubt that India’s rapid economic growth, expanding regional and global influence, continued military modernisation and robust political system are shifting the geopolitical terrain and contributing to the reconfiguration of regional as well as international relations. Similarly, Saudi Arabia is determined in the rapidly changing global environment to play a larger role to ensure that its national interests are secured and that moderation and stability are the key elements around which a post-crisis global order is being constructed. In such circumstances, it is natural for the Kingdom and India to strive for a broad-based mutually reinforcing partnership. Although the USA is the foremost security partner of Saudi Arabia, it is also important for Saudi Arabia to diversify its security cooperation and engage with India in this regard. India’s credibility and role as a ‘neutral’ player in Asia may help Saudi Arabia in managing the emerging security and strategic objectives.

Saudi Arabia adopted a ‘Look East policy’ to focus on the Asian countries, a break from its ties with the countries of the region and the West. The visit by King Abdullah to China and India in January 2006 showed that Saudi Arabia has both economic and strategic objectives in adopting this new policy. Firstly, it would give Saudi Arabia new markets for its oil and new opportunities for trade as big energy-consuming economies like China and India are seeking more oil and new markets for their industrial output. This would also mean shifting its economic focus from the developed West to the emerging economies of Asia, primarily in the interest of long-term market stability. The US energy dependence on the Gulf in general shows a declining trend over the last few years. For instance, US crude oil imports from the Gulf region have come down to 679 million barrels in 2011 from 1,007 million barrels in 2001. Similarly, US imports from Saudi Arabia have come down from 608 million barrels in 2001 to 438 million barrels in 2011. The decision of the USA to reduce its energy dependence on the Gulf region and attain energy self-sufficiency has made Saudi Arabia look for new markets in the East and, in this regard, it sees India as a significant energy market in the longer term. Secondly, it also means diversifying its diplomatic engagement and putting Saudi Arabia on the world stage. Referring to the 2006 visit of King Abdullah to India and China, the former US ambassador to the Kingdom said: ‘It’s a very important visit . . . This is a logical move by the Saudis, not one against the United States, but a step away from overdependence on America’. In addition, rising powers like India and China are far less interested than the US in Saudi domestic affairs. The Saudi decision to look ‘East’ seems to have been driven by similar Indian overtures in the form of the ‘Look West’ policy adopted in 2005 for strengthening ties with the countries of its extended neighbourhood in the Gulf region.
From a Saudi perspective, however, certain concerns remain to be addressed. Saudi Arabia is deeply concerned about India’s relations with Iran, particularly the Indo-Iranian defence cooperation. Saudi–Iranian relations have been marked by the race for regional superiority, sectarian divide, influence and control over the world energy market, the presence of the USA in the region and the Iranian nuclear programme, among others. Both countries have a clash of interests in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan and Yemen, and have engaged in proxy wars in some places. While the Iranian nuclear programme is the foremost threat to Saudi Arabia, the presence of US troops in the Kingdom and other GCC countries heightens the Iranian threat perception. Saudi Arabia has maintained that it does not have any objection to Iran building nuclear reactors for peaceful nuclear energy, but at the same time it has appealed to Iran to come clean over its nuclear ambiguities. India has also asked Iran to remove the regional and international doubts about its nuclear programme and it also endorses the proposal for a nuclear weapons free zone in the region. However, India’s defence cooperation with Iran and India’s desire to engage Iran politically are difficult for Riyadh to accept. The Saudis would be happy to see India voting against Iran at the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

Similarly, India’s growing relations with Israel, particularly the supply of Israeli arms to India, has been a concern for Saudi Arabia. Many in Saudi Arabia tend to believe that by strengthening ties with Israel, India will soften its stand on the Palestine issue, although it has been clarified by India that India–Israel relations do not imply the dilution of India’s unwavering support for the Palestinian cause. Even so, it is difficult for Riyadh to accept India developing ties with the ‘Zionist regime’.

Two high-level visits

King Abdullah’s visit to India in 2006 as the chief guest at the Republic Day celebrations is important for many reasons. King Abdullah is only the second Saudi king to visit India after King Saud in 1955. Apart from signing the Delhi Declaration and some other bilateral agreements, the visit was important as it seems to have given a fresh start to the relationship. As per the Delhi Declaration, both sides agreed to strengthen ties by deepening cooperation in energy, trade, science and technology, education and health, and political cooperation to promote regional and international peace. A number of ministerial visits from both sides have followed the king’s visit.

In February–March 2010, Manmohan Singh visited Riyadh, reviewed the implementation of the Delhi Declaration with King Abdullah and further consolidated ties by signing the Riyadh Declaration. In the Riyadh Declaration, the two leaders condemned terrorism and extremism, agreed to enhance cooperation for the exchange of information relating to terrorist activities, money laundering, narcotics, arms and human trafficking, and to develop joint strategies for combating these threats. They lauded the existing cooperation in defence fields and agreed to further strengthen this cooperation to realise their common interests. Both leaders also agreed to develop a broad-based economic partnership for developing infrastructure, energy and for enhancing bilateral trade. The Riyadh Declaration has been termed ‘a new era of strategic partnership’ by both countries. Manmohan Singh urged Saudi Arabia to forge a comprehensive energy partnership with India. The Saudi side assured the Indian prime minister of the Kingdom’s desire and readiness to provide India with its present and future oil needs. Undoubtedly, the two high-level visits have given a boost to the relationship and have
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helped in laying a solid foundation for the future. However, it is necessary to keep the momentum going and to continue working on issues that benefit both countries.

**Saudi Arabia and India’s foreign policy challenges in the region**

The regional political dynamics in West Asia provide an incentive for India to engage with Saudi Arabia. There are three major powers in the region: Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel. The clash of interests and the political dynamic of the region is such that none of the above three regional powers see eye to eye with each other. In such a situation, strengthening the relationship with one does not augur well for the relationship with the others. India has adopted the policy of engaging with all the powers without allying with one against the others, as India’s interests are involved with all three regional players. Iran is a major source of energy for India, second only to Saudi Arabia, and is also a potential partner for India in maritime security. The Indian interest in the Indian Ocean region and the proximate neighbourhood is based on the need for regional peace and stability, mutually beneficial relations with littoral states, accessibility of oil and gas resources, freedom of navigation through the Gulf and the Straits of Hormuz, and access to regional markets for its goods, technology, investment, labour and services. Similarly, India is interested in building ties with Iran as it would provide India with access to Central Asia and both would play an active role in Afghanistan. India, Iran and Afghanistan are discussing the development of the Chahbahar route through Melak, Zaranj and Delaram, which would facilitate regional trade and transit to Afghanistan and Central Asia.

India’s relations with Israel have been on an upswing ever since the establishment of diplomatic relations in 1992, which is being seen as a major shift in India’s West Asia policy. Arms trade has been a major component of the relationship, Israel being the second largest arms supplier for India. Both countries are also cooperating in agricultural technology, nanotechnology and medical science, among others. Bilateral trade has also been increasing steadily, reaching US$5.2 billion in 2010–2011. Similarly, the GCC is a major player in the region, in which Saudi Arabia plays a vital role. The GCC countries are important for India for energy, the presence of the 6.5 million-strong Indian diaspora, and the huge no-oil trade. Thus it is important for India to maintain ties with all three powers in the region. India’s closeness with Iran and Israel does not gel with Saudi Arabia’s interests in the region and beyond, and likewise India’s closeness to Israel does not meet with Iranian approval. The situation therefore poses a challenge to India to calibrate its policies in the region so as to maintain and manage all three powers without damaging anybody’s interests.

**The Pakistan factor**

Pakistan has been an important factor in the Indo-Saudi relationship from the very beginning. Often, Pakistan has played the Muslim card to consolidate its relationship with Saudi Arabia, and at the same time it has painted a bleak picture of India before Saudi Arabia. Pakistan has enjoyed cordial relations with Saudi Arabia, including liberal flow of aid from Riyadh and Pakistani forces guarding the Saudi royal palaces, which according to V.P. Dutt, ‘could hardly have failed to impinge on India–Saudi Arabia relations’. According to a former Pakistani foreign service officer, ‘[i]n all vicissitudes of Pakistan’s history, Saudi Arabia has been a steadfast friend. A commonality of approach to regional and international issues invests a bilateral relationship of
great value with continuity and stability’. Thus the relationship was beneficial for both: while Saudi Arabia received Pakistani defence assistance and training as well as political loyalty, Pakistan benefitted from Saudi economic aid and support. The only way India could have diluted the Saudi–Pakistan amity was to try and cultivate the Saudis on the basis of mutual interests. India attributed the close Saudi–Pakistan ties more to Islamic solidarity than to the mutual interests of the two countries. India’s undue emphasis on the religious factor made it consider Saudi Arabia a lost cause for an extended period of time. But the end of the Cold War and India’s rise as a politically stable and economically vibrant country with a rising international profile made Saudi Arabia rethink its approach to India. These developments, along with India’s endeavours to engage with Saudi Arabia, have resulted in a stronger relationship. Saudi Arabia’s historic ties with Pakistan should not prevent Indo-Saudi relations from moving forward. With the changing times, Pakistan’s attempts to hinder stronger Indo-Saudi relations will have much less impact than in the past. India should keep in mind the Saudi–Pakistan cosiness but should not overplay the Pakistan factor. Similarly, Saudi Arabia should understand India’s concerns and its own responsibilities and commitment to the relationship.

Trying to capitalise on the Saudi influence on Pakistan, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh appealed to King Abdullah to persuade Pakistan to desist from supporting terrorism on its soil against India. In recent months Saudi Arabia has deported terrorists such as Abu Jundal and Fasih Mahmood to India, which indicates the changing attitude of Riyadh towards Pakistan-sponsored terrorism. This also suggests Pakistan’s support for militant groups creates concerns, even for Saudi Arabia, its close ally. Although Saudi concerns and deportation of the terrorists to India do not significantly threaten the Saudi–Pakistan relationship, they do raise questions regarding Pakistan’s sincerity over the issue of terrorism. It thus tarnishes Pakistan’s image, which may reduce Pakistan’s influence in Riyadh and play the spoiler in the India–Saudi Arabia relationship.

Conclusion

Both countries have made satisfactory progress in the field of trade and business while cooperation in the political and strategic fields still has a long way to go. But with the changing geopolitical situation and the growing profile of both countries in their respective regions and beyond, it is imperative for both countries to move beyond trade and commerce. Manmohan Singh has categorically expressed India’s desire to move beyond the buyer–seller relationship; it is time for Riyadh to reciprocate. His visit imparted a ‘strategic’ aspect to the relationship, which was also acknowledged by King Abdullah who said: ‘Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit and the signing of a number of agreements and memorandums of understanding reflect a new era of strategic partnership between the two countries’. The recent high-level visits and agreements show trust building of a higher order. It seems that the trust deficit of the Cold War era is waning and both countries should move into the arena of mutual cooperation and open multiple fronts of engagement. Acknowledging each other’s role, power and responsibility in their respective regions and joining hands to address bilateral and regional political, security and economic issues that concern them will be the next big step. The challenge for both countries is to continue the momentum generated by two high-level visits and to translate the robust economic ties into a stronger strategic partnership.
Notes

3. Ibid.
6. Rajiv Sikri, Challenge and Strategy: Rethinking India’s Foreign Policy, Sage Publications, New Delhi, 2009, p. 133.
8. Statement by Ambassador Chinmaya Gharekhan, India’s special envoy for West Asia, at the Gulf Security Conference in Manama, Bahrain, on 4 December 2005.
9. Ibid.
22. For details of the foreign policy priorities of the Kingdom, see ‘The Foreign Policy of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia’, at http://www.mofa.gov.sa/SITES/MOFAEN/ABOUTKINGDOM/KINGDOMFOREIGNPOLICY/Pages/KingdomPolicy34643.aspx.
25. Ibid.
32. V.P. Dutt, India’s Foreign Policy, Vikas Publishing House, New Delhi, 1984, p. 333.