Concerns on India-Iran relations

What is the issue?

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There are growing concerns that India is tilting more towards Iran than rest of the countries in the Arab world.

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What are the recent incidents?

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- India regularly hold an annual engagement at the UN with the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council, whose members are Bahrain, Kuwait, Oman, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.
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- But the absence of a meeting with the GCC this year stands out as a major omission, especially when spent much time discussing the Gulf situation with Iran recently.
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- The confrontation between the Gulf Arabs and Iran is one of the top international security issues on the table at the UN this year.
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- It is also the most important emerging regional security challenge for India.
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What are the global developments?

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- Arab countries of the Gulf have welcomed Trump’s decision to discard the nuclear deal between US and Iran.
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- The Arabs had always worried about Tehran’s support to Shia minorities in other states, or the construction of the so-called Shia Crescent.
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- The need to counter Iran’s “Shi’ite geopolitics” became a pressing

preoccupation for the Arabs since the middle of the last decade.
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- There was a meeting on the side-lines of UN between the US and ministers from eight Arab nations, including the six countries of the GCC as well as those of Egypt and Jordan.
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- All participants agreed on the need to confront threats from Iran directed at the region and the United States.
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- They have also had productive discussions on setting up the Middle East Strategic Alliance to promote security and stability in the region.
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- Critics have billed the putative alliance as the “Arab NATO” and as the “Sunni challenge” to confront the fears about the emergence of a “Shiite Crescent” in the Middle East, backed by Iran.
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- This new organisation is expected to reinforce the expansive new regime of US sanctions against Iran that are to go into effect in the future.
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- But the Alliance will be hard to build and harder to sustain, given the divisions within the Arab Gulf.
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- However, US hopes that the regional Arab alliance coupled with the financial squeeze, will compel the Islamic Republic of Iran to alter its behaviour.
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What are the concerns raised against India?

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- The foreign policy question is about how Delhi must deal with the rapidly changing situation in the Gulf region, whose economic and political salience for India is not matched by any other sub-region in the world.
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- Over the last two decades, India has had to manage the Iran factor in its quest to build a closer partnership with the US.
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- India’s approach to Iran’s nuclear proliferation had become a major issue between Delhi and Washington.
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- Traditionalists in Delhi argued that India must stand up for Iran against the US.
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- The small group of realists prevailed by insisting that India must take care of its own nuclear interests rather than those of Iran.
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- Despite recent sanctions by US, Delhi is practical enough to find ways to avoid the effect of America's Iran sanctions on the Indian economy.
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- But India's approach appears bereft of realism when it comes to dealing with the conflict between Gulf Arabs and Iran.
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- Many in the Middle East worried about its tilt towards Tehran, when so many of India's interests, including trade, energy, expatriate remittances and counter-terror cooperation, are so heavily to tied to the Gulf Arabs.
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- They are also frustrated that Delhi never utters a word about Iran's effort to undermine the regional political order in the Arab world.
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- Delhi also holds strange duality in the Gulf, wherein it increases trade relations when it comes to the Arabs and also maintains grand strategies in dealing with Iran.
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- Thus, Delhi can't afford to ignore the deepening Arab fears about Iran and their expectations for a measure of political understanding from India.
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Source: Indian Express

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