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Geopolitical Dimensions of Indian Orientations Towards the United Arab Emirates

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Abstract

India has strong relations with the United Arab Emirates. These relations are of great importance due to the geographical neighbourhood and the volume of mutual economic, political, and cultural relations between the two countries. The present study tackles the geopolitical dimensions of India's relations with the United Arab Emirates by focusing on the importance of the geographical location of India and The United Arab Emirates, especially in terms of economic, political, and cultural relation between the two countries.

Problem Statement

The current study tries to answer the following questions

What is the importance of the geographical location of India and the United Arab Emirates?

What are the geopolitical dimensions of the Indian trend towards the United Arab Emirates?

The Hypothesis

The hypothesis of the present study is centred around answering the questions raised in the problem statement, which can be answered as follows:

- India has a strategic geographical location in the continent of Asia, especially in South Asia, which helped it to adopt an important position among the countries of the Asian continent. As for the UAE, despite its small area, its location overlooking the Arabian Gulf made it the focus of attention of many great countries.

- The geographical dimension is due to the proximity of the distance and ease of access between the two countries.

- The economic dimension is the basis for India's orientation towards the United Arab Emirates because of the huge trade volume between the two countries and the Indian investment volume that crossed all sectors in the Emirates.

- The political dimension made India and the United Arab Emirates have good political relations.

- The security dimension appears in India's approach to the United Arab Emirates through the conclusion of security agreements between the two countries.

- The cultural dimension has a clear influence on UAE as a result of the presence of more than three million Indians in the United Arab Emirates.

Objectives of the Study

The present study aims to identify the geographical importance of the countries of India and the United Arab Emirates, the volume of the relations between India and the UAE, and their importance to both parties, as well as the most important future expectations of these relations, and whether they can continue in the future or decline.

The Methodology

The present study adopts the power analysis approach and the regional approach.

Significance of the Study

The geographical location of India and the United Arab Emirates is of great importance. The significance of the present study is due to this location, as well as the volume of the relations between the two countries, especially the economic relations.

Introduction

India is located in the south of the Asian continent and is characterized by its rich topography and abundant human resources, as well as its important geostrategic location (Diya et al., 2010). India's possession of a set of natural and human components and the optimum exploitation of them constituted the elements of the driving power for its rise and the escalation of its economic growth. This growth brought about a major change in the world in the field of power distribution (Ibrahim, 2021; Adeyemi & Aigbavboa, 2013). India is located between latitudes (8.04°) and (37.6°) in the north and between longitudes (18.07°) and (97.25°) in the east, as the Tropic of Cancer extends approximately in central India (Abdulwahab, 2014). India is between (29) latitudes, which makes it a diverse agricultural and climatic region (Al-Samarrai, 2020) as shown in map (1).

India is bordered on the north by China, Nepal, and Bhutan, on the northwest by Pakistan, on the east by Myanmar and Bangladesh, and its shortest border with Afghanistan is about (106) km as shown in Table (1).

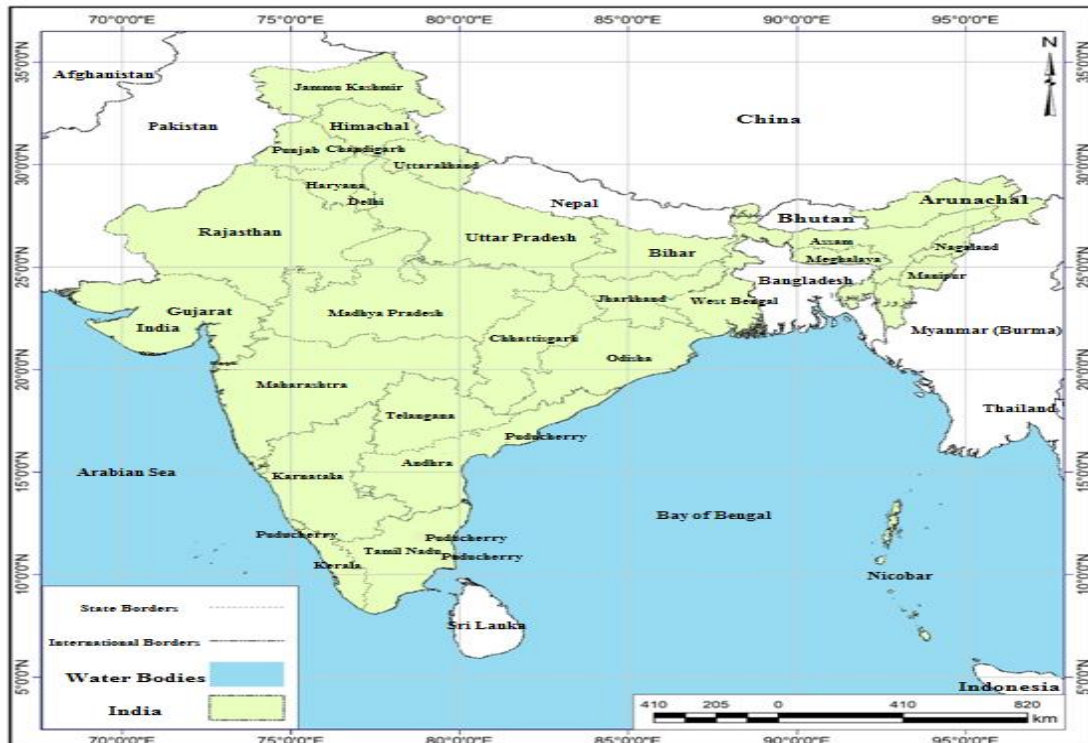
Table (1) India's Neighbouring Countries, Length and Ratio of Dividing Borders

No.	Neighboring Country	Border length
1	Bangladesh	4096,7km
-2	China	3488km
-3	Pakistan	3323km
-4	Nepal	1751km
-5	Myanmar	1643km
-6	Bhutan	699km
-7	Afghanistan	106km
Total		15,106,7

Source; ministry of home affairs: annual report (2020-2021).

India has a land border with a length of (15106 km) and a maritime border of (7516,6) km. It is bordered on the south by the Indian Ocean, on the west by the Arabian Sea and the Bay of Bengal on the east (ministry of home affairs, (2020-2021).

The area of India is (3,287,263 km²) which makes it rank seventh in the world (<https://www.worldatlas.com>) as shown in Table (3). With this area, India is described as a semi-continent in view of its vast area of (6.88%) of the continent of Asia that ranks it second only to China in Asia (Al-Samarrai, 2021). Its length from north to south is (3143) and its width from east to west is (9332) (Salih, 2021; Cherian, Munuswamy, & Jasim, 2021).



Map (1) The geographical location of India

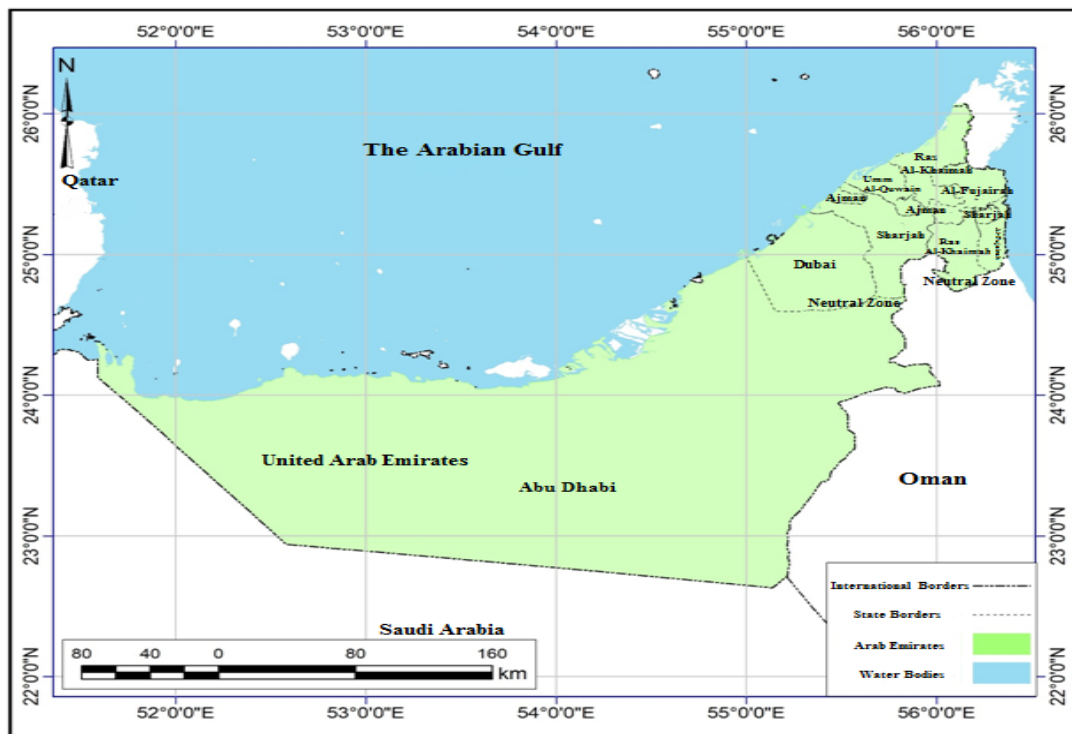
Source; The researcher based on Fahad Mizban Khazar, The Geostrategic Dimensions of India's Relations with the Gulf Cooperation Council Countries and Their Future Prospects, The Arabian Gulf Journal, Volume 42, Issue 1-2, 2014.

The geographical location of the United Arab Emirates

The United Arab Emirates is located in the southwestern part of the Asian continent, between latitudes ((26.25-22.35 degrees north) and longitudes ((57.10-51.35 degrees east) (Hussein, 2022). The dry tropics extend across Asia and the north of Africa and at the same time are subject to the influences of the Indian Ocean due to their location on the two coasts of the Arabian Gulf as well as the Gulf of Oman, which is in contact with the Red Sea through the Bab al-Mandab Strait. This makes its climate hot and humid in the summer and more moderate and less humid also in the eastern mountains (Hindi, 2005; Chidambaram, Shanmugam, & Sivamani, 2021).

The location of the United Arab Emirates in the middle of the Arabian Gulf, It bordered from the north by the Arabian Gulf, to the west by Qatar and Saudi Arabia, to the south by the Sultanate of Oman and Saudi Arabia as well, to the east by the Gulf of Oman and the Sultanate of Oman, which gives it a great importance in terms of trade.

The area of the United Arab Emirates is (77,700) km² without the islands. This area reaches (83,600) km² with the islands. With this area, it is classified as a list of countries with a small area, but the small area is not an obstacle to achieving enormous economic potential that put itself on the side of the countries. In this way, it has taken away the bet on the large areas of the state, in which only the state can be of greatness and strength (<https://www.nalionshield.ae.>).



Map (2) The Geographical Location of the UAE.

Source; The researcher based on Muhammad Salih Al-Ajili, United Arab Emirates, A study in political geography, Emirates Centre for Strategic Studies and Research, 1, UAE, 2000.

Geopolitical dimensions of India-UAE relations

The Indian-Emirati relations can witness a new phase of the strategic partnership between the two countries. They are keen to develop and advance these relations in various fields.

India and the Arab Gulf region possess deep-rooted political, commercial, and cultural relations that date back thousands of years. These relations have been strengthened more than before after the establishment of the modern states in the Gulf. For India, the UAE represents the most preferred country due to the convergence of the two communities in the principles of diversity and coexistence. The aspects of cooperation between the two sides include oil, security, and defence, trade, investment, renewable energy, education, and others (www.alroeya.com).

The geopolitical dimensions of the Indian-Emirati relations are as follows:

First: The economic dimension

The economic dimension will be tackled in its various fields, namely trade and Investment because of the strong link between India and the UAE in the field of trade exchange and in the field of investment.

The Trade Dimension

The geoeconomic importance occupied by the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council is due to their strategic geographical location and their possession of important energy sources, such as oil and natural gas, as well as being a consumer and investment market, as trade and investment relations between India and the Gulf Cooperation Council countries constituted a basic pillar of economic relations.

The non-oil foreign trade between India and the UAE during (2021) recorded a remarkable increase of about (170) billion UAE dirhams (<https://www.alkhaleej.ae>).

In this context, the UAE and India signed a new agreement of economic partnership between them. Through this agreement, the two countries seek to raise the volume of bilateral trade from 60 billion dollars at the present time to 100 billion dollars during the next five years. This agreement provides many advantages in terms of improving market access and low customs tariffs (<https://www.asharqbusiness.com>) as shown in Table (2).

The United Arab Emirates possesses an attractive environment for investments for many reasons, including the economic and political stability that characterizes it, in addition to the fact that it can be considered an entrance to regional and international markets, in addition to its distinguished geographical location, provision of infrastructure, and ease of investment procedures (Dhiyab, 2015). The UAE is a distinguished pole for attracting foreign investments due to the commercial and legal facilities and incentives it offers, a favourable business climate, and the free movement of capital to and from it.

The United Arab Emirates occupies advanced positions in investment because of the policy it adopts in encouraging foreign direct investment through many ways, such as providing investment facilities, exemptions, and incentives to investors. The United Arab Emirates is among the first twenty countries at the global level in the field of investment. The value of foreign investments in 2015 is about (1669,160) million dollars (Waseela, 2018).

Table (2) Total Indian trade with the UAE from 1997 to 2022

Year	Incomes/million dollars	Exports/million dollars	Total Trade	Commercial Scale
1997	1,475,04	1,629,56	3,104,61	154,52
1998	1,721,24	1,867,59	3,588,83	146,35
1999	2,003,24	2,082,47	3,679,38	102,60-
2000	658,98	2,597,52	3,256,51	1,938,54
2001	915,09	2,491,79	3,279,85	1,576,70
2002	956,99	3,327,48	428,447	2,370,49
2003	2,059,84	5,125,58	7185,41	3,065,74
2004	464110	734,788	119,889,8	2,706,78
2005	4,354,08	8,591,79	12,945,87	423,771
2006	8,655,28	12,021,77	20,677,05	3,366,50
2007	13,482,61	15,636,91	29,119,52	2,154,30
2008	23,791,25	24,477,48	48,268,72	686,23
2009	19,499,10	23,970,40	43,469,50	447,130
2010	32,753,16	33,822,39	66,575,55	1,069,22
2011	36,756,32	35,925,52	72,681,84	830,80-
2012	39,138,36	36,316,65	75,455,01	2,821,72-
2013	29,019,82	30,520,42	59,540,24	1,500,60
2014	26,139,91	33,028,08	59,167,99	6,888,17
2015	19,445,68	30,316,50	49,762,18	10,870,82
2016	21,509,83	31,175,50	52,685,33	9,665,67
2017	21,739,11	28,146,12	49,885,23	6,407,01
2018	29,785,33	30,126,73	59,912,05	34,140
2019	30,256,65	28,835,59	59,110,23	1,403,06-
2020	26,633,99	16,679,54	43,302,53	9,943,45-
2021	44,833,43	28,044,88	72,878,31	16,788,55-
2022	5,107,39	2,857,18	7,964,57	2,250,21-

Source; Government of India ,ministry of commerce and industry Department of commerce; <https://commerce.gov.in>

India ranks first among the most important countries investing in the United Arab Emirates for the years (2012-2016) with an investment amount of (12,635) billion dollars, with (134) Indian projects and (127) Indian companies, such as

(sobha developers)) with an investment amount of (4348) million dollars and Apar industries with an investment amount of (2617) million dollars (Arab Foundation for Investment and Exports Accreditation, 2017) as shown in Table (3).

Table (3) The volume of Indian investment / million dollars in the United Arab Emirates in comparison to the Gulf Cooperation Council countries for the years (2019-2020)

Country	2019	2020
UAE	33,857	21,25,71
Sultanate of Oman	32,19	6,21
Saudi Arabia	8,992	1,525,12
Qatar	5,470	159,20
Bahrain	5,17	1,5
Kuwait	2,04	6,89

Source; muddasir quamar india -GCC relations; Looking beyond the pandemic, institute for defence studies and analyses, 2021.

Second: The military dimension

The location of the Arabian Gulf in relation to India’s strategy and its foreign policy is of great importance and prestige because the Arab Gulf states are the first trading partner for them and that India’s rise to become a global power depends on obtaining sufficient and guaranteed energy supplies that exist in the Arab Gulf region (Qaddoura, 2020). The UAE and India entered into defence cooperation by concluding a defence agreement held in 2003 in New Delhi that stipulated cooperation in matters related to security and defence and annual meetings related to the strategic dialogue. India trains members of the UAE defence in various institutions and specializations (Anjum, 2017).

In addition to the presence of import and export trade between the two countries, India has sought to expand cooperation with the Arab Gulf states and the UAE, especially in the field of combating terrorism and extremism. The two countries seek to protect maritime trade and prevent organized crime. Therefore, a ten-day air combat exercise was conducted in 2016 between the UAE Air Force and the Indian forces (Ahmed and Bhathagar, 2017).

There are two important aspects in the bilateral relations between India and the UAE in the military and security fields:

First: The two countries have a common political understanding on the various security threats facing the two sides. The leaders of the two countries have expressed their fear of the growing threat from terrorism, extremism, and radicalism. Therefore, the two sides are obligated to cooperate to prevent such threats in the region.

Second: Military cooperation between India and the UAE enabled the two parties to have enhanced this aspect with great interest through mutual visits by defence officials in the two countries. In 2016, the Indian Defence Minister visited the UAE for the purpose of developing cooperation in the field of manufacturing

and trade in military equipment between them, followed by the signing of a memorandum of understanding in the field of defence technology, as well as the signing of the Maritime Security Agreement between the two countries.

Third: The political dimension

The Indian-Emirati relations began centuries ago and were initially limited to trade and economy, which was the main outlet for linking peoples at the time. After the discovery of oil, the relationship between the two parties developed and improved with the development of the oil industry. In 1972, the UAE embassy was established in Mumbai, in addition to the establishment of the Indian embassy in Abu Dhabi and the Indian Consulate in Dubai.

The political relationship between India and the UAE has been strengthened and has resulted in many mutual visits between them and strategic agreements and memoranda of understanding as shown in Table (4).

Table (4) Mutual visits between India and the UAE

No.	Year	Visit Details
-1	1975	The visit of the President of the state, Sheikh Zayed Al Nuhayyan
2-	1976	The visit of the Indian President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed
-3	1981	The visit of Andira Ghandi to the UAE
-4	1992	The visit of Sheikh Zayed Bin Sultan
-5	2011	The visit of Deputi Prime Minister Saif Bin Ali
-6	2015	The visit of the current Indian Prime Minister
-7	2017-2016	The visit of Abu Dhabi Ruler
-8	2017	The visit of the ruler to India. Through that visit, many agreements were concluded in various fields
-9	-2013-2012-2007 -2019-2018-2015 2020	Frequent visits by the UAE Ministry of Foreign Affairs
-10	2018-2014	The visits of Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs
-11	2019	The visit of the Indian Prime Minister
-12	2021	The visit of the current Indian Minister of Foreign Affairs
-13	2021	The visit of Abu Dhabi ruler

Source; <https://www.indembassyuae.gov.in>

Fourth: The cultural dimension

Arabs were interested in the Indian civilization. They took numbers from the Indians, as well as mathematical sciences such as astrology. Arabs had a great role in codifying the Indian history with regard to the stratigraphy books that record the history of people, as well as the influence of the Arabic language

on the Indian languages, which were the language of the Muslim kings on India. Culture in the Arabian Gulf was interested in getting to know its Indian counterpart, and the Kalima project of the Abu Dhabi Tourism and Culture Authority transferred many titles related to the Indian culture into Arabic within the field of translation. In addition, in 2012, a series of books issued in the Arabic language was launched in Arabic, Hindi, and Urdu at the Indo-Arab Cultural Centre in New Delhi as part of the celebrations of the International Day of the Arabic Language.

Both India and the UAE share historical cultural ties. The two sides are making real efforts to develop these ties at the official and popular levels. In 1975, a cultural agreement was signed between them. In the period between (1994-1996), the UAE Ministry of Culture and other bodies and organizations such as the Abu Dhabi Authority for Culture and Heritage sought to organize the Indian cultural events related to the Indian Film Festival. An Indian cultural centre was opened at the headquarters of the Indian Embassy in Abu Dhabi. This centre organizes many activities in the field of theatrical arts, seminars, and Indian festivals (<https://www.mea.gov.in>).

India and the UAE participate in many cultural and investment activities at the same time, such as the investment of Zee enter tainmer, which is one of the major companies in the Indian television, a television network with its base in Dubai, and operates a movie channel, an Arabic channel (Zee Aflam) as well as a channel (Zee alwan).), which opened in 2012 in Dubai with an investment value of more than a hundred million dollars, which is the largest Indian Arab television channel in Asia. The UAE is one of the largest foreign markets for founders of Indian films. It constitutes around (30%) for Indian filmmakers. Dubai is the largest host of awards and shows organized by Indian TV channels and film companies, in addition to the fact that many celebrities and stars of Indian art own many properties in Dubai and spend holidays there, so the UAE is one of the foreign markets for Bollywood after the United Kingdom and the United States.

India participates in many cultural activities that are held in the UAE. During the visit of the current Indian Prime Minister to the UAE in August of 2015, it was emphasized to intensify cultural cooperation between the two countries. In 2016, the Agreement of the Executive Cultural Program (EPCC) was signed. This program provides a wide range of activities. The cultural exchange is valid for three years and can be extended if both parties wish. In 2018, India participated in the National Festival organized by the Abu Dhabi Foundation. This program concerns music and arts. It is a festival held annually in the Emirates.

In 2019, India participated in the Abu Dhabi Book Fair. This fair is considered a major literary and cultural event that takes place annually in the country. Emiratis actively participate in the activities of the International Day of Yoga, which is held by India. There are many Indian yoga schools in the UAE.

The (Zayed-Gandhi) Digital Museum was also established, which is the first of its kind in the UAE. This museum is a new station in the march of cultural

relations between India and the UAE. This museum was opened in 2019. In addition, India participated in Expo 2020, which was held in The Emirates. India presented the history of its relations with the Emirates in its own pavilion.

Among the joint cultural activities is the selection of Yas Island in Abu Dhabi to host the 22nd edition of the 2022 International Academy of Indian Film Awards in March. This activity is among the activities of the Indian and UAE Department of Culture and Tourism.

During the Sixth World Summit of Governments in the Emirate of Dubai, India was invited as a guest of honour, during which the model of the first Hindu temple was unveiled in Abu Dhabi.

In the UAE, in addition to the field of arts and television, India participates in the field of education as well. There are many Indian universities and schools in the UAE that have existed for more than two decades and are considered among the recognized and reputable universities in the United Arab Emirates as shown in Table (44). Universities in the United Arab Emirates are divided into sections. The first two sections are owned and controlled by one of the emirates of the state or a local organization. The second section is often from outside the Emirates that may be a branch of foreign universities that have established a branch in the Emirates, such as Pune Indian University.

Conclusion

1. India is one of the largest countries in terms of natural and human components, as it has a vast area, in addition to being ranked second in terms of population.
2. Despite the natural resources that India contains, it still suffers from many problems in providing energy sources due to the population growth in it, which is not commensurate with the volume of energy in it, so it has always sought to obtain energy sources through its multiple relationships.
3. India is located in the south of the Asian continent, and its location adjacent to the Indian Ocean plays an important role, not only at the local level, but also at the regional and international levels. Which India has reached because of the spirit of permanent competition, India has always sought to become at the level of China and to obtain a role that is parallel to its role in the continent of Asia.
4. India and the Arab Gulf states have historical, commercial, civil, and cultural relations. They had a maritime trade relationship and the pearl trade, as India was able to build multiple relations with all the Arab Gulf states. This relationship continued even after obtaining political independence in 1947. After this date, it has always sought to improve Its international relations to get rid of the effects of British colonialism.
5. After the economic crisis that India experienced at the beginning of the nineties of the last century, it sought to get out of that crisis by adopting a new international policy to improve its relationship with the countries of the

- world. This policy is based on non-alignment, non-interference, and taking neutral positions in many international issues, especially Arab. Through that policy, it was able to build a good relationship with large countries, the most important of which is the United States of America.
6. India clearly followed the soft power policy and considered the Indian community to be the profitable card for this policy. Through the presence of the Indian community in many countries of the world, especially the United States of America and the United Arab Emirates, it was able to spread its soft power and maintain its relationship with these countries.
 7. The policy taken by India under its current government, which was the calculated and pragmatic policy, increased India's ability to play a more prominent regional role.
 8. After the Cold War, the fall of the former Soviet Union, and the emergence of the unipolar policy led by the United States of America, India has always sought to improve its relationship with America, especially because of the differences between America and China. It has also sought to build good relations with Arabs because of the Arab Gulf states and their controlling role in the region.
 9. The course of the United Arab Emirates occupies a distinguished geographical and strategic location due to its overlooking the Arabian Gulf. Despite its small area, it was able to become with an influential global international economic influence and build wide international relations with many countries, the most important of which are the United States of America and India.

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