



Delhi Policy Group

DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



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ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group is among India's oldest independent think tanks with its primary focus on international and strategic issues of critical national interest. Over the past decades, the Delhi Policy Group has established itself in both domestic and international circles, particularly in the area of national security.

In keeping with India's increasing global profile as a leading power and the accompanying dynamism of India's foreign and security policy, the Delhi Policy Group has expanded its focus areas to include India's broader regional and global role; India's initiatives to strengthen its strategic periphery; India's political, security and connectivity challenges and policies across the Indo-Pacific; and the strategic partnerships that advance India's rise. To support these goals, the DPG undertakes research, publishes policy reports and organises conferences on strategic and geo-political, geo-economic, and defence and security issues.

DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW

DPG West Asia Review contains major developments in West Asia of strategic relevance to India, compiled from open source media. To subscribe please [click here](#).

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Abstract

The COVID-19 pandemic and falling oil prices are wreaking havoc in West Asia. The OPEC+ agreement signed in April and the additional oil output cut announced by Saudi Arabia earlier in May is likely to widen the fiscal deficits of GCC countries. The Gulf economies will also witness a recession in non-oil economic activity.

Iran-United States relations are deteriorating further with the US threatening to trigger reimposition of all UN sanctions on Iran which are due to expire in October later this year. However China has stood by Iran and voiced serious concerns against extending an arms embargo. The US and Iran are also involved in heated exchanges over the latter's fuel shipments to Venezuela.

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo visited Israel on May 13, 2020. One of the important issues on his agenda was warning Israel about the "risks" of doing business with China. Pompeo also spoke about President Trump's Vision for Peace plan to settle the Israel-Palestine conflict.

After a year long political deadlock, Benjamin Netanyahu finally presented his unity government on May 14, 2020 to the Israeli parliament. However, Netanyahu continues to face a trial for corruption which is due to begin shortly.

China's Ambassador to Israel, Du Wei was found dead in his residence in Herzliya on May 17, 2020. The initial investigation by the Israeli police has found no evidence of foul play.

On May 13, 2020 Indian expatriates from Gulf countries have registered a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission asking the Union Government to increase the number of repatriation flights for stranded Indians. The Government of India has already repatriated thousands of Indians stranded abroad, especially from the Gulf, as part of the Vande Bharat Mission.

India has permitted 835 health professionals to travel to Saudi Arabia to help the kingdom fight the COVID-19 pandemic. The first batch of doctors and nurses departed Kerala on May 13, 2020.

The coronavirus has reached war-torn Yemen; the number of people dying of COVID-19 symptoms has dramatically spiked in the past week.

Links to major developments in West Asia of strategic relevance to India, compiled from open source media, can be found below.

Bahrain

[Oil Production Cut to Deepen GCC Fiscal Deficits](#)

May 13, 2020, Gulf News

The OPEC+ agreement and the additional oil output cuts announced this week will push GCC budgets even deeper into deficit, according to Fitch Ratings.

[UAE, Bahrain Unlikely to Follow Saudi in Hiking VAT: Experts](#)

May 11, 2020, Khaleej Times

The UAE and Bahrain are unlikely to follow Saudi Arabia in increasing value-added tax (VAT), says tax experts. Saudi Arabia has increased VAT threefold to 15 per cent and also suspended the cost of living allowance to increase revenues.

Egypt

['Brutal Campaign', Says Press Group as Egypt Arrests Journalist](#)

May 16, 2020, Al Jazeera

Egyptian officials have arrested a journalist of a major newspaper on charges of "terrorism" leading to global press advocacy group calling it a "brutal campaign" against journalists in the country.

Iraq

[6 ISIS Militants, Policeman Killed in Twin Attacks in Iraq](#)

May 17, 2020, The Statesman

At least six Islamic State (IS) militants and a policeman were killed in two attacks in the provinces of Salahudin and Diyala, according to the security sources.

[Russia official: Terrorists are intensifying activities in Middle East, especially Iraq, Syria](#)

May 16, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Oleg Syromolotov stated that terrorists are intensifying their activities in the Middle East, especially in Syria and Iraq, taking advantage of the spread of the coronavirus pandemic, and that the idle cells of terrorist groups have not disappeared from European countries, despite imposed social distancing and the absence of large crowds.

Iran

[President Rouhani Says Iranians to Mark Quds Day against Israel in Vehicles, Not Marches](#)

May 16, 2020, Al Jazeera

Rallies next week in Tehran to mark the annual Quds Day against Israel will see Iranians driving in vehicles rather than marching through the streets to avoid spreading the coronavirus, Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has said.

[US-Iran-Venezuela Tanker Battle Heats Up](#)

May 16, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

US officials said over the weekend they have a "high degree of certainty" that Venezuela's Maduro has been paying Iran in gold for the fuel circumventing the U.S. sanctions on Iran.

[Iranian News Agency Warns U.S. Against Any Move on Fuel Shipment to Venezuela](#)

May 16, 2020, Reuters

An Iranian news agency close to the Revolutionary Guards said on Saturday (May 16) there would be repercussions if the United States acted "just like pirates" against an Iranian fuel shipment to Venezuela.

[US Envoy Threatens to Trigger Return of all UN Sanctions on Iran](#)

May 14, 2020, Al Jazeera

The United States publicly threatened on Wednesday (May 13) to trigger a return of all United Nations sanctions on Iran if the UN Security Council does not extend an arms embargo on Tehran that is due to expire in October under the Iran nuclear deal.

[China Says U.S. Has No Right to Extend Arms Embargo on Iran](#)

May 15, 2020, CGTN

The Chinese Mission to the United Nations said on Thursday (May 14) that Washington has no right to extend a UN arms embargo on Tehran after the United States threatened to trigger a return of all sanctions on Iran at the UN Security Council.

Israel

[Israel's Netanyahu Presents New Unity Government to Parliament](#)

May 17, 2020, Reuters

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu presented his new unity government to parliament on Sunday (May 17), ending more than a year of political deadlock but still facing a trial starting in a week for alleged corruption.

[Chinese Ambassador to Israel Found Dead in Herzliya Home](#)

May 17, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

The Chinese Ambassador to Israel, Du Wei, was found dead in his Herzliya home on Sunday (May 17) morning, a Foreign Affairs Ministry official confirmed.

[Iran Media: Israel "Cancerous" and a "Virus" After Burning of Esther Tomb](#)

May 17, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Iranian media slammed Israel on "Quds Day," calling the Jewish state a "cancerous gland" and Zionism a "virus," in a clear attempt to link Israel to the pandemic and also use historic antisemitic tropes against the Jewish state.

[EU to Rally against Israel's West Bank Annexation Proposal](#)

May 15, 2020, BBC News

The EU has indicated that it will try to stop Israel's proposed annexation of parts of the occupied West Bank. Foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc would use its diplomatic clout to prevent unilateral action.

[US to Israel: No More Chinese Deals](#)

May 13, 2020, Breaking Defence

The United States delivered a clear message to Jerusalem today – avoid further involvement of China in the Israeli economy. The message was one of the main reasons for the very short visit of American Secretary of State Mike Pompeo to Jerusalem – one day before the new cabinet is sworn in.

Jordan

[King of Jordan Threatens Confrontation with Israel over Jordan Valley Annexation](#)

May 15, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

If Israel fulfills its promise to annex the Jordan Valley, it will lead to a "massive" confrontation with Jordan, King Abdullah II said in an interview with German newspaper Der Spiegel.

Kuwait

[Indian Embassy in Kuwait Temporarily Halts Online Registration for Repatriation](#)

May 17, 2020, Gulf Business

The Embassy of India in Kuwait has temporarily suspended the online registration for Indian nationals in the GCC state who wish to avail repatriation services. In an advisory, the embassy said the service would be halted from Friday, May 15 and will “resume after initial registrations have been accommodated”.

Lebanon

[Lebanon Army Arrests 16 Over 'illegal' Currency Ring](#)

May 16, 2020, Arab News

Sixteen people in Lebanon, mostly Syrians, have been arrested for money transfers and "illegal" currency exchange operations, the army said Saturday (May 16), amid a government crackdown on exchange rate manipulation.

[Lebanon Seeks Financial Lifeline from IMF](#)

May 15, 2020, Al Jazeera

Lebanon's leaders are seeking a financial lifeline from the International Monetary Fund. Talks began on Wednesday (May 13) with Lebanon seeking a multi-billion-dollar bailout to avoid bankruptcy.

Oman

[Oman Issues Statement on Liquidation of Company in which it Owns Stake](#)

May 17, 2020, Times of Oman

The State General Reserve Fund issued a statement regarding the decision to liquidate a company in which the Sultanate owns 31 per cent shares. The Fund said in a statement published by the Oman News Agency: "The liquidation of Glass Point Solar Company, in which the Sultanate owns 31 per cent of its shares, came after the sharp decline in oil and gas prices as a result of the global economic slowdown.

Qatar

[Covid-19: 3 Years Jail for Not Wearing Masks in Qatar](#)

May 17, 2020, Gulf News

Qatar on Sunday (May 17) began enforcing the world's toughest penalties of up to three years' imprisonment for failing to wear masks in public, as it battles one of the world's highest coronavirus infection rates.

Saudi Arabia

[PIL in Delhi High Court for Bringing Back 56 Pregnant Nurses Stranded in Saudi Arabia](#)

May 17, 2020, Times Now

A PIL has been moved in the Delhi High Court seeking directions to the Centre to bring back 56 pregnant nurses stranded in Saudi Arabia due to the coronavirus-induced lockdown.

[Saudi Arabia Buys \\$7.7 Billion Shares in World's Best Known Companies](#)

May 17, 2020, Arab News

Saudi Arabia's sovereign wealth fund has gone bargain hunting during the current economic turmoil, snapping up about \$7.7 billion worth of shares in some of the best known companies in the world.

[Saudi Arabia Urges OPEC+ to Further Reduce Oil Production to Restore Market Balance](#)

May 14, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Saudi Arabia has called on OPEC+ countries to respect their commitment to the agreed oil production cuts and to reduce production even further to help restore balance to global oil markets.

[India Permits 835 Healthcare Professionals to Travel to Saudi Arabia for Fight against Covid-19](#)

May 14, 2020, Hindustan Times

The Indian government has facilitated the travel of 835 healthcare professionals to Saudi Arabia following a request from Riyadh, and the first batch of doctors and nurses departed from Kerala in a special flight on Wednesday, people familiar with developments said.

Syria

[Moscow Seeks Serious Reforms in Syria, Criticizes Regime's Intransigence](#)

May 17, 2020, Asharq Al-Awsat

Russian circles said Moscow has been "adjusting its positions towards President Bashar Assad," amid media campaigns showing the growing divide between Syria and Russia. The sources accused the head of the Syrian regime of intransigence by rejecting reforms and turning to more rapprochements with Iran.

[Iran Reiterates Support to Bashar al-Assad as Syria's Legitimate Leader](#)

May 17, 2020, Mehr News Agency

Iranian Parliament Speaker's Special Aide for International Affairs Hossein Amir-Abdollahian reiterated on Sunday (May 17) the Islamic Republic's support to Bashar al-Assad as the legitimate leader of Syria.

Turkey

[Over 230 Stranded Indians Wait to Get Airlifted from Turkey](#)

May 16, 2020, The Indian Express

While at least 280 Indians are currently stranded in Turkey, over 50 people have decided to wait for commercial flight operations to resume.

[Ties between Turkey and Israel May be Thawing](#)

May 17, 2020, Ahval News

There are signs of a thaw in relations between Turkey and Israel, as both countries face a common enemy in Syria and are both casting an eye over gas reserves in the eastern Mediterranean

[President Trump Says Turkey Still Making F-35 Parts, But May Be Cut From Program](#)

May 15, 2020, Ekathimerini

US President Donald Trump on Thursday (May 14) hinted that he may sever an agreement with Turkey for the F-35 program and move production for all components of the fighter jet to the United States.

UAE

[Pregnant Women Request More Repatriation Flights From UAE to India](#)

May 16, 2020, Gulf News

Stranded pregnant women from the UAE's Indian community have appealed to the Indian government to increase the number of repatriation flights. It comes as their husbands have lost jobs leaving them unable to survive on minimal resources.

[Coronavirus: Indian Expats in the Gulf Demand More Repatriation Flights](#)

May 14, 2020, Gulf News

Over 3,000 Indian expatriates from six Gulf countries, including the UAE, have registered a complaint with the National Human Rights Commission (NHRC) in India asking the central government there to increase the number of repatriation flights for stranded Indians in the wake of a pandemic situation.

[UAE to Build Post Covid-19 Economy on Digital, Announces Two-phase Recovery Plan](#)

May 12, 2020, Gulf News

The UAE has given the first indication of how it plans to shape the economy in a post-COVID-19 world - Go Big on Digital. This will mean a "more active role for governments in the national economy". The next phase will see a long-term stimulus plan to speed up recovery and encourage investments in the digital economy.

Yemen

[Clashes between Separatists, Pro-gov't Forces Kill 14 in Yemen](#)

May 17, 2020, Al Jazeera

More than a dozen people have reportedly been killed as fighting between pro-government forces and southern separatists in Yemen's Abyan province entered a sixth consecutive day.

[In Yemen, Deaths with Coronavirus-like Symptoms Spike as Hospitals Shut Down](#)

May 15, 2020, The Washington Post

The number of people dying with covid-19 symptoms has dramatically spiked in war-riven Yemen, triggering fears that coronavirus infections are considerably higher than official figures.



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