



Delhi Policy Group

# DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



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## Volume 2, Issue 21

### 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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#### Delhi Policy Group

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## Abstract

The COVID-19 induced economic crisis is showing little signs of abating in West Asia. The United Nations has warned that Health System of Yemen has already collapsed due to the community spread of COVID-19. Similarly the Iraqi parliament also fears collapse of the country's health system within the next 10 days. Meanwhile according to a survey conducted by the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry, 70 per cent of the companies operating in Dubai are likely to suspend their activities within next six months owing to the lack of demand as a result of Covid-19 spread.

The deep discount on crude oil has resulted in Saudi Arabia piping Iraq as the top oil supplier to India. In Apr 2020, India imported 4.63 million barrels of oil per day, an increase of five percent from March. On the other hand despite the United States and Iran exchanging heated words on the latter's fuel shipments to Venezuela, the first of five Iranian tankers reached Venezuela without any incident. Much needed fuel supply is expected to ease the South American nation's fuel crunch.

As a part of President Trump's maximum pressure campaign against Iran, the United States on May 20, 2020 sanctioned Iran's Interior Minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli for human rights abuses.

Iraqi intelligence agency on May 20, 2020 announced the capture of Abdul Nasser Qardash, a top ISIS commander and a possible successor of deceased leader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi. The Iraqi sources have not revealed where and when this capture took place. Meanwhile the Iraqi militia Kataib Hezbollah has called for Jihadi operations inside Saudi Arabia. The remarks of an official from Kataib Hezbollah stressed on the importance of such attacks against the Saudis with a view to remove the Al-Saud family from power.

The cyber conflict between Israel and Iran escalated dramatically in the past few weeks. As a reaction to the Iranian attack on critical water infrastructure in April, Israel carried out a sophisticated cyber-attack on Iran's Shahid Rajaei port causing widespread chaos and confusion.

The European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell has stated that the EU will use its diplomatic clout to prevent unilateral annexation of the parts of West Bank by the Israeli government. The process of annexing West Bank could begin as early as July 2020. Besides the EU, Saudi Arabia has also rejected such plans.

In a much needed relief to expats, Kuwaiti government has granted three months visa extension from June 01, 2020 to August 31, 2020.

Syria has imposed a temporary travel ban on President Bashar al-Assad's tycoon cousin Rami Makhlouf. The Syrian government says company owned by Makhlouf, Syriatel owes 134 billion Syrian pounds, around \$77 million to the government.

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

## Bahrain

### [Bahrain Deploys Robots to Combat Coronavirus](#)

May 20, 2020, The National

Bahrain's latest addition to the fight against Covid-19 is a pair of multilingual, multi-talented robots. The assistant robots can speak 12 languages, check body temperatures, administer medicines, serve meals and sterilise treatment rooms with beams of ultraviolet light.

### [Vande Bharat Mission: First Flight from Bahrain Lands at Rajiv Gandhi International Airport in Hyderabad](#)

May 20, 2020, Times of India

The first special evacuation flight from Bahrain landed in Hyderabad with 175 passengers on May 19 as part of Government of India's Vande Bharat Mission.

### [127 Indian Prisoners Deported by Bahrain Quarantined in Kochi, One Has Covid-19 Symptoms](#)

May 18, 2020, The New Indian Express

A group of 127 Indian prisoners deported from Bahrain under a general amnesty were brought to Kochi by a special Gulf Air flight on Sunday night (May 17). One of the passengers was admitted to the Ernakulam Medical College due to suspected symptoms of COVID-19.

## Egypt

### [Egyptian Forces Kill 21 Militants in North Sinai](#)

May 23, 2020, Arab News

Egyptian security forces killed 21 suspected militants in North Sinai, part of a group that the interior ministry said was planning attacks over the Eid holiday that marks the end of Ramadan.

## Iraq

### [Iraqi Parliament: 'Healthcare System May Collapse in 10 Days'](#)

May 23, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Due to increasing coronavirus cases, the Iraqi parliament warned on Thursday (May 23) that the healthcare system in the country may collapse in ten days.

### [Shell Evacuates Foreign Staff from Iraq's Basra Gas Project](#)

May 21, 2020, Al Jazeera

Royal Dutch Shell evacuated some 60 foreign staff from Iraq's Basra Gas Company (BGC) as a security measure following a protest over delayed pay, company officials said.

### [Iraq Nabs Possible Successor of Dead Daesh/ISIS Chief](#)

May 20, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Abdul Nasser Qardash, said to be among the successors of the deceased Daesh/ISIS terrorist organization's ringleader Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi, was captured in Iraq.

### [Saudi Arabia Pips Iraq as Top Oil Supplier to India in April](#)

May 20, 2020, Reuters

Saudi Arabia replaced Iraq as the top oil supplier to India in April after a gap of three months as refiners in Asia's third largest economy were drawn by deep discounts on Saudi crude.

### [Iraq's New PM Says Country's Treasury 'Almost Empty', Sovereignty 'Violated'](#)

May 20, 2020, Middle East Monitor

In an article published in the Baghdad Today newspaper, Iraq's new PM Al-Kadhimi said: "When I assumed my duties, I found nothing but an almost empty treasury and an unenviable situation after 17 years of change. Our sovereignty continued to be deficient, violated or subject to doubts".

### [Rocket Lands Near the US Embassy Inside Baghdad's Green Zone](#)

May 19, 2020, Al Jazeera

A rocket has hit an empty house in the Iraqi capital's heavily fortified Green Zone, a military statement said.



## Iran

### [First Iranian Fuel Tanker Reaches Venezuelan Waters without US Interference](#)

May 24, 2020, The Guardian

The first of five tankers loaded with gasoline sent from Iran has reached Venezuelan waters, expected to temporarily ease the South American nation's fuel crunch while defying Trump administration sanctions targeting the two US foes.

### [Rouhani Says Iran to Reopen Cultural and Religious Sites](#)

May 23, 2020, Al Jazeera

Iran is moving ahead with plans to reopen religious and cultural sites, as well as businesses, further easing restrictions rolled out to slow the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

### [Iranian President Calls for National Crypto Mining Strategy](#)

May 21, 2020, NASDAQ

Iranian President Hassan Rouhani has ordered the government to draw up a renewed national approach for the emerging crypto industry.

### [Arab League Slams Iran for Interference in Regional Issues](#)

May 22, 2020, Arab News

The Arab League has condemned Iran's continued interference in the internal affairs of Arab countries — both directly and through its proxies — which it said posed a risk to regional security and stability.

### [U.S. Targets Iran's Interior Minister in Latest Round of Sanctions](#)

May 20, 2020, CNBC

The U.S. Department of Treasury announced Wednesday (May 20) that it will sanction Iran's interior minister Abdolreza Rahmani Fazli for human rights abuses, the latest move in the Trump administration's "maximum pressure" campaign against Tehran.

### [Eyeing Iran, US Warns to Stay 100 Metres Away from its Warships](#)

May 20, 2020, Al Jazeera

In an alert that appeared aimed squarely at Iran, the United States Navy issued a warning on Tuesday (May 19) to mariners in the Gulf to stay 100 metres (109 yards) away from US warships or risk being "interpreted as a threat and subject to lawful defensive measures".

[Israel behind Cyber-attack that Caused 'Total Disarray' at Iranian Port – Report](#)

May 19, 2020, Times of Israel

Israel carried out a recent sophisticated cyber-attack on Iran's Shahid Rajaei port, causing widespread chaos, apparently in retaliation for an attempt by Tehran to target Israel's water infrastructure, the Washington Post reported Monday (May 18).

## Israel

### [Israeli Officials Reportedly Say Secret Coordination with PA Likely to Continue](#)

May 22, 2020, Times of Israel

Senior Israeli officials said Friday (May 22) that security coordination between Israel and the Palestinian Authority (PA) was expected to continue clandestinely, despite the PA's vow earlier this week to end cooperation over the new Israeli government's plans to annex portions of the West Bank.

### [Israeli Military Says Iran is Slowly Pulling out of Syria](#)

May 21, 2020, Arab News

Iran is slowly pulling out of Syria in response to Israeli strikes, as well as growing domestic discontent linked to the economy and its handling of the coronavirus pandemic, the Israeli military said Thursday (May 21).

### [Israeli Foreign Minister's First Call Abroad is to India Vows to Strengthen Ties](#)

May 19, 2020, The Week

Israel's newly appointed Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi on Tuesday called External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar in what is his first phone call abroad after taking charge, a day after the two leaders vowed to work together to strengthen and expand the multi-faceted bilateral relationship for a mutually beneficial partnership.

### [EU Says It Won't Recognize Unilateral Israeli Annexation in the West Bank](#)

May 19, 2020, Times of Israel

The European Union's top diplomat warned Israel against annexing parts of the West Bank, saying the bloc would not recognize any changes to the 1967 lines not agreed upon in a peace deal between Israel and the Palestinians.

### [Palestinian Authority Rejects UAE Aid Sent via Israeli Airport](#)

May 21, 2020, Al Jazeera

The Palestinian Authority (PA) has rejected an aid shipment from the United Arab Emirates, according to the Palestinian health minister.

## Jordan

### [Jordan Gets \\$396m Coronavirus Emergency Assistance from IMF](#)

May 23, 2020, Arab News

Jordan's request for emergency financial assistance amounting to about \$396 million has been approved by the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

## Kuwait

### [Covid-19: Kuwait Grants Expats Three Month Free Visa Extension](#)

May 23, 2020, Gulf News

Expats whose visas will expire by the end of this month will be given a three-month free extension by the Kuwaiti Government, from June 1 until August 31.

### [Kuwait, Saudi Arabia Halt Oil Production from Neutral Zone](#)

May 21, 2020, Deccan Herald

In the neutral zone, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia decided to shut down the offshore Khafji oilfield for one month starting June 1, acting head of Kuwait Oil Gulf Co. Abdullah al-Sumaiti told the official KUNA news agency.

## Lebanon

### [Lebanon PM Marks 100 Days in office as Protestors Storm Ministry](#)

May 22, 2020, Al Jazeera

Lebanese Prime Minister Hassan Diab on Thursday (May 21) marked 100 days in office by touting his government's achievements during a speech at the Grand Serail - the seat of government power in Beirut. But a few blocks away, the mood was decidedly non-celebratory, as protestors once again took to the streets to vent their frustrations.

## Oman

[30,000 Indians to be Evacuated from 31 Nations including Oman in Phase 2 of Vande Bharat Mission](#)

May 13, 2020, Hindustan Times

Civil Aviation Minister Hardeep Singh Puri said on Wednesday (May 13) that 30,000 Indians will return from 31 countries on 149 flights between May 16 and 22, the duration for the second phase of the Vande Bharat Mission.

## Qatar

### [Indian Embassy Announces Tentative Destinations for Next Round Flights from Qatar](#)

May 22, 2020, The Peninsula Qatar

Indian Embassy in Qatar said that there could be six non-Kerala destinations in the next round of repatriation flights from Qatar to India. These will be in addition to the Kerala destinations.

### [Qatari Energy Minister Kaabi Says 'Absolutely No Way' Qatar Would Cut LNG Production](#)

May 21, 2020, S&P Global

Qatari energy minister Saad al-Kaabi said Thursday (May 21) there was "absolutely no way" Qatar would cut its LNG production despite reduced demand and low global gas prices.



## Saudi Arabia

### [Iraqi Kataib Hezbollah Calls for Jihadi Operations inside Saudi Arabia](#)

May 24, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

An official in the Iraqi Kataib Hezbollah militia has called for Jihadi operations inside Saudi Arabia, saying that only attacks from within Saudi territory would "get rid of Al-Saud (Saudi royal family) and the remnants of the evil family."

### [Saudi Arabia Concerned Over Growing Islamophobia](#)

May 23, 2020, Gulf News

Saudi Arabia has voiced concern over growing Islamophobia and escalating hate speech against Muslims in some parts of the world.

### [Saudi Arabia Using Electronic Bracelets to Battle Covid-19](#)

May 21, 2020, Arab News

Saudi Arabia has begun using electronic bracelets with contact-tracing and social-distancing alerts to stop the spread of COVID-19, the Health Ministry confirmed.

### [Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority to Quarantine Banknotes for up to 20 Days](#)

May 22, 2020, Arab News

The Saudi Arabian Monetary Authority (SAMA) will quarantine the banknotes and coins it receives from local and international sources as a precautionary measure to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus.

### [Saudi Arabia Rejects Israel's West Bank Annexation Plans](#)

May 21, 2020, Arab News

Saudi Arabia said on Thursday (May 21) that it rejected Israel's pledge to annex parts of the occupied Palestinian West Bank. The Foreign Ministry stressed the Kingdom's "condemnation of any unilateral decisions and any violation of legitimate international decisions."

## Syria

### [Syria Imposes Travel Ban on Assad's Tycoon Cousin Rami Makhlouf](#)

May 21, 2020, Al Jazeera

Syria's justice ministry has announced a travel ban on Rami Makhlouf, a Syrian tycoon and cousin of President Bashar al-Assad, over money it says he likely owes the state.

### [UN Envoy Calls for Russia-US Talks to Help End Syrian War](#)

May 19, 2020, Al Jazeera

The United Nations Syria mediator has urged the United States and Russia to make the most of "some calm" in the war-torn country and talk to each other about a push for peace.

## Turkey

### [Greece Cannot Unilaterally Redraw Shared Border: Turkey](#)

May 23, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Turkey will not allow Greece to unilaterally redraw the border in a fait accompli, but bilateral technical talks as proposed by Turkey could solve the issue, a Turkish official said on Saturday (May 23).

### ['Grave Consequences': Turkey Warns Libya's Haftar against Attacks](#)

May 21, 2020, Al Jazeera

Turkey has warned that attacks on its interests in Libya by renegade military commander Khalifa Haftar's forces will have "grave consequences" after advances by the country's Turkish-backed government.

### [Turkey Cuts Interest Rates amid Coronavirus Crisis in Effort to Aid Recovery](#)

May 21, 2020, CNBC

Turkey's central bank cut interest rates by 50 basis points on Thursday (May 21), in a move economists say was likely encouraged by confidence in the lira, which has strengthened modestly since hitting record lows earlier this month.

## UAE

### [70% of Companies in Dubai to Close within 6 Months Due to Covid-19](#)

May 23, 2020, Middle East Monitor

A survey conducted by the Dubai Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DCCI) revealed that 70 per cent of the companies operating in Dubai will suspend their activities within the next six months, due to the outbreak of the coronavirus pandemic and the implications of the global decrease of demand in various fields.

### ['We Are Stronger Together': UAE Welcomes 105 Medics from Kerala For Covid-19 Mission](#)

May 22, 2020, The Indian Express

A team of 105 medics from Kerala travelled to Abu Dhabi to support the nation in its fight against the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic.

### [#BoycottUAE Trends in Pakistan as Netizens Forget Country's Debts to UAE](#)

May 20, 2020, WION

#BoycottUAE was trending in Pakistan on Tuesday (May 19) because Turkey said so! Pakistan's Twitter users jumped on Turkey's bandwagon as a result the hashtag started trending.

## Yemen

[Yemen's Health System 'Has Collapsed' as Coronavirus Spreads: UN](#)

May 23, 2020, Al Jazeera

The new coronavirus is believed to be spreading throughout Yemen, where the healthcare system "has in effect collapsed", the United Nations has warned as it appealed for urgent funding.



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