



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



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Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

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ABOUT US

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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](#).

Your comments and feedback can be addressed to Sanket Joshi at sanket@dpg.org.in.

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Abstract

The internal security situation in Iran deteriorated considerably in July 2020. A series of blasts rocked the capital Tehran, while fire damaged at least seven vessels at a shipyard in Bushehr. In the light of these incidents, for which Iran holds Israel responsible, the U.S. Central Command Chief General Kenneth McKenzie has warned Israel, that Iran will respond to the explosions and fires at its nuclear and industrial facilities.

The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) of India has described reports of Iran dropping India from the project to build a railway line connecting Chabahar port to Zahedan as 'speculative'. However, India is set to lose the opportunity to develop Farzad-B gas field as Iran has inducted a new operator replacing ONGC.

The Covid-19 pandemic has shown the vulnerability of critical infrastructures to cyber-attacks. In light of this, on July 15, 2020 India and Israel signed MoU for operational collaboration in the field of Cyber Security, an important pillar in partnership between the two countries.

In a major development the United States (Lockheed Martin) removed Turkey from F-35 global participants list. This is primarily on account of America's opposition to Turkey's purchase of Russian S-400 missile defence system.

On July 14, 2020, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) rejected an appeal by Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, UAE and Egypt, questioning the authority of the International Civil Aviation Authority (ICAO) to hear the case about air blockade of Qatar. The ICJ judges ruled that ICAO is a competent authority to hear this case.

On July 18, 2020, Saudi Arabia hosted a virtual meeting of G20 where bankers and minister's agreed to consider a possible extension of the debt to certain countries in the second half of 2020. Thus far, 42 countries have asked for their debt to be deferred totalling around USD5.3 billion. In a major boost to its space program, on July 19, 2020 the United Arab Emirates successfully launched spacecraft bound for Mars. This is the Arab world's first mission to Mars.

Syrian Arab Republic on July 19, 2020 held parliamentary elections in the territory controlled by President Bashar al-Assad. With this, Assad marks 20 years in power amid civil war and Covid-19 pandemic. In other major news, the United Nations once again warned about oil spill from abandoned tanker off the coast of Yemen in Red Sea. This could spark a major environmental catastrophe.

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

Bahrain

[Bahrain Sets Up a New Strategic Security Agency](#)

July 06, 2020, Gulf News

Bahrain's King Hamad Bin Isa Al Khalifa has decreed the establishment of a new security body, officially named the Strategic Security Agency.

Egypt

[Greece Announces Agreement To Demarcate Maritime Borders With Egypt](#)

July 18, 2020, Arab News

Greece's Ambassador to Egypt Nikolaos Garilidis has said that Athens and Cairo are on the verge of signing an agreement on maritime borders.

[NTPC Leverages Its Solar Power Skills To Secure Africa Foothold](#)

July 16, 2020, Livemint

India is leveraging its solar power expertise as it ventures into African nations such as Egypt, Gambia, Malawi, etc. under the aegis of the International Solar Alliance (ISA).

Iraq

[US Lauds Deal To Connect Iraq To GCC Electric Grid](#)

July 17, 2020, Middle East Eye

A deal between Washington, Baghdad and six Gulf states to connect Iraq's electricity grids to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) grid is moving forward, almost a year after the plan's inception.

[Iran's Zarif in Iraq on His First Visit Since Soleimani's Killing](#)

July 19, 2020, Al Jazeera

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif is visiting Iraq, for the first time since the killing of Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps commander Qassem Soleimani in January, 2020.

[Iraq Slashes Oil Exports To Comply With OPEC Cuts](#)

July 16, 2020, Oilprice.com

Iraq is cutting its oil exports as it seeks to achieve full compliance with its oil production quota under the OPEC+ agreement, Bloomberg has reported, citing unnamed sources from SOMO, Iraq's state oil marketing company.

[French FM in Baghdad To Support Iraq, Boost Bilateral Ties](#)

July 17, 2020, China.org.in

French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian on Thursday (July 16) paid an official visit to Iraq to discuss bilateral relations and confirm France's support to Iraq in its fight against Islamic State (IS).

[Iran Aims To Build Up Syria and Iraq's Air Defenses To Thwart Israeli Airstrikes](#)

July 16, 2020, Forbes

Iran has recently taken a notable interest in helping Iraq and Syria build up their limited air defence capability, aiming to give them the ability to counter Israeli airstrikes.

Iran

[Secret Trump Order Gives CIA More Powers To Launch Cyber-Attacks](#)

July 15, 2020, Yahoo News

The Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) has conducted a series of covert cyber operations against Iran and other targets since winning a secret victory in 2018 when President Trump signed what amounts to a sweeping authorization for such activities, according to former U.S. officials with direct knowledge of the matter.

[Fire Spreads To Seven Ships at Iranian Port, State Media Reports](#)

July 16, 2020, CNN International

A fire has damaged at least seven vessels at a shipyard in the southern Iranian port city of Bushehr, despite the efforts of firefighters, according to the Iranian state media.

[Iran Reports 2.5 Crore Coronavirus Cases Since Outbreak](#)

July 19, 2020, Mumbai Mirror

Iran's president on Saturday (July 18) estimated as many as 25 million Iranians could have been infected with the coronavirus since the outbreak.

[Iran-China Relations Are Strong](#)

July 17, 2020, Tehran Times

Iran and China plan to sign a 25-year comprehensive cooperation agreement. The document has not been finalized yet. "Relations between Iran and China are relations between independent countries and have many ill-wishers. This document is a roadmap... our view on this document is long-term," Iranian Foreign Ministry's spokesperson told a press conference in Ardabil, northwest Iran.

[India Faces Blow in Natural Gas Project](#)

July 16, 2020, Anadolu Agency

India's Ministry of External Affairs in a statement on Thursday (July 16) said Tehran would develop the Farzad-B gas field in the Persian Gulf region "on its own" and might engage India "appropriately at a later stage." Masoud Karbasian, managing director of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), told reporters that a new operator had been roped in to develop the gas field, replacing India's ONGC.

[Reports That Iran Dropped India From Chabahar Port Railway Project Are Speculative: MEA](#)

July 16, 2020, Livemint

India on Thursday (July 16) described as "speculative" recent news reports that said Tehran had dropped India from a project to build a railway line connecting the Chabahar port on the Iranian coast to Zahedan, the provincial capital of Sistan Baluchistan province adjoining Afghanistan.

[Iranian Air Defence on High Alert Amid Explosions - Report](#)

July 17, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

The US has several intelligence indications that Iran has put some of its air defence systems on high alert in recent days in light of a series of blasts in Tehran and Natanz.

[Iran Will 'Show It Has Upper Hand' If Israel Continues Syria Bombings](#)

July 17, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Iran threatened military action against Israel if the state continues its alleged bombing campaign in Syria.

Israel

[Netanyahu Corruption Trial Resumes as Israeli Leader Faces Protests](#)

July 19, 2020, The Guardian

Witnesses at Benjamin Netanyahu's corruption trial will give testimony up to three times a week starting in January, a judge has ruled, opening a high-profile case in which the Israeli leader is accused of bribery, fraud and breach of trust.

[Iran 'Will Respond' To Explosions Blamed on Israel: US Central Command Chief Says](#)

July 17, 2020, Middle East Eye

The leader of the US Central Command General Kenneth McKenzie, which oversees Washington's military operations in the Middle East, said Iran "will respond" to a recent spate of explosions and fires at its nuclear and industrial facilities that have been blamed on Israel.

[India and Israel Sign Agreement To Expand Collaboration in Dealing With Cyber Threats](#)

July 16, 2020, The Economic Times

India and Israel have signed an agreement to further expand collaboration in dealing with cyber threats amid rapid digitisation due to the coronavirus pandemic that exposed the vulnerabilities of the virtual world.

[In Fresh Coronavirus Lockdown, Restaurants, Gyms To Close In Israel](#)

July 17, 2020, Times of Israel

Cabinet ministers decided in the early hours of Friday (July 17) morning to impose new lockdown measures as virus cases in Israel surged to record highs.

[Israel Keeps Blowing Up Military Targets In Iran, Hoping To Force A Confrontation Before Trump Could Be Voted Out In November, Sources Say](#)

July 16, 2020, Business Insider

Israel is involved in an extended campaign to pressure or damage Iran before President Trump could be voted out in November election, a former Israeli defence official and a current EU intelligence official have said.

[Democratic Party Platform Expected to Express Strong Support for Israel](#)

July 17, 2020, Haaretz

The Democratic Party's policy platform for the 2020 fall elections will include a statement of strong support for the U.S.-Israel relationship, including the continuation of U.S. military aid to Israel and recognition of Jerusalem as Israel's capital.

Jordan

[Jordan's Top Court Dissolves Country's Muslim Brotherhood](#)

July 16, 2020, Times of Israel

Jordan's top court has dissolved the country's branch of the Muslim Brotherhood, a transnational Islamist movement, an official said Thursday (July 16), citing the group's failure to "rectify its legal status."

Kuwait

[Kuwait Scrambles To Boost Coffers With Up To \\$16 Billion Debt Plan](#)

July 19, 2020, Arab News

Kuwait plans to issue between \$13 billion and \$16 billion in public debt by the end of the fiscal year ending March 2021 if parliament approves a long-debated debt law.

[Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah Undergoes Surgery](#)

July 19, 2020, Arab News

The Emir of Kuwait Sheikh Sabah Al-Sabah has undergone a surgery.

Lebanon

[Lebanon's 'Regional Neutrality' Up in The Air, Country's PM Says](#)

July 19, 2020, Israel Hayom

Lebanon's Prime Minister Hassan Diab said on Saturday (July 18) dialogue was needed over the country's stance on regional conflicts, after meeting with a top Christian cleric who has urged Lebanon to remain neutral to help it out of its crisis.

Oman

[Oman Investment Authority Restructures Boards of 15 Companies](#)

July 19, 2020, Reuters

The Oman Investment Authority has restructured the boards of 15 companies overseen by it as part of a comprehensive review of state-owned companies, the state news agency said on Sunday (July 19).

[Oman-India Trade Worth Over OMR1bn Last Year](#)

July 15, 2020, Times of Oman

The trade between Oman and India was worth more than OMR1 billion in 2019, according to the available data. Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI) yesterday organised a virtual meeting themed "Prospects for Trade Cooperation between the Sultanate and India" as part of its new initiative (OCCI Global Communication) that was recently launched.

Qatar

[ICJ Rules in Favour of Qatar in International Airspace Dispute](#)

July 14, 2020, UN News

The International Court of Justice (ICJ) rejected an appeal, brought by Bahrain, Saudi Arabia, Egypt and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), which called into question the authority of the International Civil Aviation Authority.

Saudi Arabia

[Saudi Arabia Hosts G20 Talks on Coronavirus Recovery, Debt Crisis](#)

July 19, 2020, Arab News

Saudi Arabia led the major economies of the G20 on Saturday (July 18) in pledging to use “all available policy tools” to combat the coronavirus pandemic and boost the global economy.

[Russian Coronavirus Vaccine Trials To Be Held In Saudi Arabia](#)

July 17, 2020, Arab News

Saudi Arabia is set to play a key role in the development of a Russian COVID-19 vaccine that produced promising results in the first phase of human trials.

Syria

[Syria Votes For New Parliament Amid War, Economic Woes](#)

July 19, 2020, Al Jazeera

Syria held parliamentary elections across government-controlled areas of the country on Sunday (July 19), as President Bashar al-Assad marks 20 years in power amid a continuing war and deep economic woes.

Turkey

[Blow To Erdogan as US Boots Turkey Out of F-35 Strike Fighter Program](#)

July 19, 2020, Arab News

The removal of Turkey from the list of “global participants” on the US F-35 joint strike fighter program’s official website carries political significance in terms of showing the Pentagon’s determination to push its NATO ally to make a final decision about its controversial purchase of a Russian air defence system.

[Turkey Tests Russian S-400 Missiles Against American F-16 Fighter Jets](#)

July 07, 2020, Eurasian Times

Turkey has reportedly tested the S-400 air defence systems against US-developed F-16 fighter jets. According to reports, the S-400 air defence systems deployed at the Mürted air base near Ankara were tested on the US-made F-16 Viper and F-4 Phantom II fighters.

UAE

[UAE Successfully Launches Hope Probe, Arab World's First Mission To Mars](#)

July 20, 2020, The Guardian

The first Arab space mission to Mars has blasted off aboard a rocket from Japan, with its unmanned probe – called Al-Amal, or Hope – successfully separating about an hour after lift-off.

[UAE, China To Cooperate in Digital Economy Transition](#)

July 18, 2020, Gulf Today

Bilateral trade between the UAE and China will continue to surge in the coming years due to the strong trade relations and people-to-people synergies between the two countries as they transition to the digital economy.

Yemen

[Time Running Out To Prevent Oil Spill From 'Ticking Time Bomb' Tanker in Yemen, UN Warns](#)

July 17, 2020, CNN International

Time is running out to prevent a decaying tanker off the coast of Yemen from dumping its load of 1.1 million barrels of oil into the Red Sea, sparking an environmental catastrophe, the United Nations has warned.



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