



**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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## DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW Volume 2, Issue 30

### ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

### 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](mailto:sanket@dpg.org.in).

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## Abstract

A report submitted to the UNSC on July 23, 2020, warns about a significant rise in ISIS attacks in Iraq and Syria claiming that the ISIS has exploited the security gaps in Iraq during the Covid-19 pandemic. The UN report on terrorism also sheds light on the presence of ISIS terrorists in the Southern Indian states of Karnataka and Kerala. It warns about possible attacks by Al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS) to avenge the death of their leader Asim Umar.

Iran's Chabahar rail project has been in the news over the past few weeks. On July 20, Iran denied speculative reports that it has dropped India from the Chabahar railway project. The Islamic republic confirmed that "vested interests" were behind such reports. In another major development, Iran accused the U.S. military of harassing its civilian airliner over the Syrian airspace. According to reports, several passengers on Mahan Air flight from Tehran (Iran) to Beirut (Lebanon) on July 23, were injured after the pilot rapidly changed altitude to avoid collision with a U.S. jet.

In a major boost to the growing partnership between India and Israel, the Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs announced that India and Israel will partner to fight Covid-19 pandemic. As part of this, the Israeli delegation led by the Directorate of Defence Research and Development (Ministry of Defence) will conduct a series of tests in India to determine the effectiveness of rapid diagnostic solutions developed by Israel. Defence cooperation between the two nations is also showing positive signs during the ongoing standoff with China.

Israel Defence Forces have stepped up defences in the Golan Heights with growing concerns about Hezbollah attacks against military targets as retaliation for the killing of Hezbollah fighters in alleged Israeli airstrikes in Syria. Meanwhile, former Mossad Chief, Shabtai Shavit has said, "Israel cannot stop Iran from acquiring nuclear weapons; however, it can deter Iran from using the bomb." In major development on the defence technology front, after removal of Turkey from the F-35 program, US Air Force will now buy the F-35s designed for Turkey.

Saudi Arabia hosted the G-20 digital minister's virtual conference. In this conference, Union Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad highlighted that data must belong to sovereign nations to protect privacy and digital concerns of the people. On the economic front, the Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Sezad) will host Oman-India investment webinar on July 28, 2020.

In light of the Covid-19 induced economic crisis, Kuwait's state owned oil company announced 25 per cent reduction in budget for the next five years. While, Saudi Arabia is also mulling plans to introduce income tax and sale state assets to boost the economy.

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

## Bahrain

### [Bahrain and Qatar Have The World's Highest Per Capita Rates of Coronavirus Infections](#)

July 23, 2020, Livemint

The small, neighbouring sheikhdoms of Bahrain and Qatar have the world's highest per capita rates of coronavirus infections. Epidemic initially went undetected in the two Mideast countries; however the spread in large numbers has begun to show as it spreads through camps housing healthy and young foreign labourers.

## Egypt

### [Egypt Conducts Joint Military Exercises With France in The Mediterranean](#)

July 25, 2020, Egypt Today

The Egyptian Military Spokesperson said Saturday (July 25) that the Egyptian Navy executed joint military drills with the French navy in the Mediterranean Sea.

### [Egypt's Parliament Approves Troop Deployment To Libya](#)

July 21, 2020, Al Jazeera

Egypt's Parliament authorised the deployment of troops outside the country on Monday (July 20) after the President threatened military action against Turkish-backed forces in neighbouring Libya.

## Iraq

### [ISIS Exploiting Coronavirus Security Gaps To Re-launch Insurgency, UN Report Warns](#)

July 23, 2020, CNN International

There has been a significant rise in ISIS attacks in Iraq and Syria, with the group exploiting security gaps in Iraq caused by the coronavirus pandemic to re-launch and invigorate its rural insurgency in the country, according to a report submitted to the UN Security Council on Thursday (July 23).

### [US and Spain Hand Over Base To Iraq as Allied Retreat Continues](#)

July 25, 2020, Euronews

The US and its allies are continuing their retreat back to Baghdad, 17 years after invading Iraq and overthrowing President Saddam Hussein's regime.

### [UN Report Warns of ISIS Presence in Karnataka and Kerala](#)

July 26, 2020, The New Indian Express

A United Nations (UN) report on terrorism has warned that there are "significant" numbers of Islamic State of Iraq & Syria (ISIS) terrorists in Kerala and Karnataka. The report has warned that the terror organisation – al-Qaida in the Indian Subcontinent (AQIS), which reportedly has between 150 and 200 militants from India, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Myanmar, is planning attacks in the region to avenge the death of their leader Asim Umar.

### [Iraqi PM Says Won't Allow Threats To Iran From Iraqi Soil](#)

July 21, 2020, Reuters

Baghdad and Tehran sought on Tuesday (July 21) to ease bilateral political tensions, as Iraq's Prime Minister al-Kadhimi declared he would not allow any threat to Iran coming from its territory.

### [Iraq: Twin Bombings Target Support Convoy For US Forces](#)

July 22, 2020, Anadolu Agency

An Iraqi supplies convoy was targeted by two roadside bombs on Wednesday (July 22) while making its way to support US troops in southern Iraq, according to a security source from the country.



## Iran

### [Iranian Judiciary Says Passengers on 'Harassed' Airliner Can Sue the US in Iran Courts](#)

July 25, 2020, Arab News

Iran's judiciary said on Saturday (July 25) that passengers of an airliner that Tehran said were "harassed" by an American jet over Syria can sue the US military for damages in Iranian courts.

### [Iran: Foreign States May Have Carried Out Cyber-attacks](#)

July 23, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Iran's foreign ministry said on Thursday (July 23) foreign governments may have been behind recent cyber-attacks on Iranian facilities.

### [Iran Denies Dropping India From Chabahar Rail Project, Blames 'Vested Interests' For Such Reports](#)

July 21, 2020, Zee News

Iran on Monday (July 20) denied that it has dropped India from the Chabahar rail project, saying that "vested interests" were behind such reports. The Indian embassy in Iran stated that Ambassador Gaddam Dharmendra was invited by Saeed Rasouli, Deputy Minister Roads and Head of Iran Railways, to review the ongoing cooperation on Chabahar-Zahedan railway.

### [Khamenei Threatens US With 'Reciprocal Blow' Over Soleimani Strike](#)

July 21, 2020, Arab News

Iran's supreme leader told Iraq's visiting Prime Minister on Tuesday (July 21) that Tehran will not interfere in Baghdad's relations with Washington, but warned that the US presence next door to the Islamic republic was a cause of insecurity.

### [Passengers Injured as Iranian Plane Avoids US Fighter Jet](#)

July 24, 2020, Gulf News

Several passengers on an Iranian airline were injured on Thursday (July 23) over Syria after the pilot changed altitude to avoid collision with a US fighter jet, according to Iranian media, but the US military said its F-15 was at a safe distance.

## Israel

### [India-Israel Partnership is Currently Focussed on Combating Covid-19: S Jaishankar](#)

July 26, 2020, The Economic Times

The India-Israel partnership is currently focussed on combating the COVID-19 challenge and even as it does, the larger agenda of cooperation continues to move forward, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar said on Sunday (July 26). Jaishankar made the comments in a tweet after speaking to his Israeli counterpart Gabi Ashkenazi.

### [India, Israel To Deepen Military Cooperation Amid Border Row](#)

July 24, 2020, Hindustan Times

Defence Minister Rajnath Singh on Friday (July 24) spoke with his Israeli counterpart Benny Gantz over telephone with strengthening bilateral defence ties being the focus of the conversation.

### [Thousands Protest Nationwide Against PM Netanyahu as Demonstrations Ratchet Up](#)

July 25, 2020, Times of Israel

Thousands of demonstrators took to the streets across Israel on Saturday evening (July 25), in protests largely focused on demanding Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu resignation over his indictment on graft charges and castigating his government's handling of the coronavirus pandemic.

### [8 Pro-Iranian Militants Including Hezbollah Fighter Killed in Alleged Israeli Airstrikes in Syria](#)

July 26, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Eight pro-Iranian militants of non-Syrian nationalities have died so far as a result of alleged Israeli airstrikes that targeted weapons warehouses in and near Damascus, according to the Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR).

### [IDF Warns Lebanon, Steps Up Defences amid Threat of Imminent Hezbollah Attack](#)

July 24, 2020, Times of Israel

The Israel Defence Forces further stepped up its defences along the country's northern borders on Friday (July 24), the army said, out of concern the Hezbollah

terror group may carry out an attack against military targets along the frontier and warned Beirut it would bear responsibility for any possible Hezbollah strike.

[Former Mossad Chief: Iran Can't Be Stopped in Nuclear Weapons Pursuit, But Can Be Deterred](#)

July 08, 2020, Times of Israel

The former head of the Israeli intelligence agency, Mossad, Shabtai Shavit, said Israel cannot prevent Iran from joining the nuclear weapons club, however it can deter it from using the bomb.

[India, Israel To Make Rapid Covid-19 Test Kit](#)

July 23, 2020, Gulf News

Israel announced it was teaming with India to lead an unprecedented anti-Covid cooperation to develop rapid testing equipment that could give results within 30 seconds. In the coming weeks, Israel's ministries of foreign affairs, defence and health will lead the cooperation project.

## Jordan

### [Jordan Could 'Look Positively' on One-State Solution if Palestinian-Israeli Rights Equal](#)

July 21, 2020, The Guardian

Jordan's Prime Minister has said his country could view positively a "one-state democratic solution" to the Israel-Palestine dispute, as he warned that Benjamin Netanyahu's plans to annex parts of the West Bank could unleash a new wave of extremism in the Middle East.

## Kuwait

### [Kuwait Shrinks Oil Budget By 25%](#)

July 13, 2020, Middle East Monitor

State-owned Kuwait Oil Company announced a 25 per cent reduction in its budget for the next five years.

### [India's Supreme Court Takes Serious View of Plea on Indians Stranded in Kuwait](#)

July 25, 2020, The Hindu

The Supreme Court has taken a serious view of a plea highlighting that Indians, mostly blue-collar job workers from Tamil Nadu and other parts of the country, are still stranded in quarantine camps and "open spaces" in Kuwait amid the COVID-19 pandemic, awaiting repatriation to their homeland.

### [Kuwait Emir, 91, Flies To US For Medical Care After Surgery](#)

July 23, 2020, Al Jazeera

Kuwait's 91-year-old ruler Emir Sheikh Sabah al-Ahmad al-Sabah left for the United States on Thursday (July 23) morning to seek further medical care after recently undergoing surgery, the state-run KUNA news agency reported.

## Lebanon

### [Lebanon: Israel Violated Air-Space 29 Times in 48 Hours](#)

July 26, 2020, The Nation

Israel violated Lebanon's air space at least 29 times in the last 48 hours, Lebanese authorities said Saturday (July 25).

### [Lebanon-Israel Tensions Escalate Amid Hezbollah Calls For 'Revenge'](#)

July 23, 2020, Arab Weekly

Tensions are flaring this week between Israel and the Iran-backed Hezbollah movement in Lebanon, with the Israeli military announcing the reinforcement of the country's northern border forces with infantry troops "in accordance with the situational assessment."

## Oman

### [Sezad To Host Oman-India Investment Webinar](#)

July 25, 2020, Times of Oman

The Special Economic Zone at Duqm (Sezad) will host on Tuesday (July 28) Oman-India Investment webinar 'Invest in Duqm', with the participation of business people and entrepreneurs from both countries.

### [Oman's Majlis Al Shura Discusses Value Added Tax Draft Law](#)

July 20, 2020, Times of Oman

In light of the Covid-19 induced economic crisis, Majlis Al Shura discussed on Monday (July 20) the Value Added Tax (VAT) Draft Law, referred by the Council of Ministers as a matter of urgency.

## Qatar

### [Qatar Airways Sues Saudi Arabia, UAE, Others Over Airspace Closure](#)

July 22, 2020, Al-Monitor

Qatar Airways is suing its neighbours in the Gulf over the closure of their airspace to the Doha-based airline. The head of the group that owns Qatar's flagship carrier said the closure by Saudi Arabia and its allies during the 2017 Qatar diplomatic crisis violated international aviation norms and caused unlawful damages.



## Saudi Arabia

### [G20 Digital Minister's Meet: Data Must Belong To Sovereign Nation, Says IT Minister Ravi Shankar Prasad](#)

July 22, 2020, India TV

The Union IT Minister highlighted that data must belong to the sovereign nation concerned to protect the privacy and digital concerns of its people. This virtual conference was hosted by Saudi Arabia.

### [Saudi Arabia's King Salman Has Successful Gallbladder Surgery](#)

July 23, 2020, Al Jazeera

Saudi Arabia's 84-year-old ruler, King Salman bin Abdulaziz, is recovering after a successful operation to remove his gallbladder, state news agency SPA has reported, after he was admitted to hospital this week.

### [Saudi Arabia is Mulling Asset Sales and Income Tax To Survive a Double Whammy](#)

July 23, 2020, The Economic Times

Saudi Arabia is accelerating plans to sell state assets and isn't ruling out introducing income tax as the kingdom seeks to boost state coffers hit by the slump in oil prices.

## Syria

### [Israel Strikes Syrian Army Positions in Retaliatory Attack](#)

July 24, 2020, Arab News

The Israeli military on Friday (July 24) said its helicopters struck Syrian army targets in response to mortars fired toward the Golan Heights.

### [Bomb Kills Eight in Turkish-Held Syria Town: Monitor](#)

July 26, 2020, Yahoo News

A bomb in a Syria border town controlled by Turkey and its Syrian proxies killed at least eight people, including six civilians, on Sunday (July 26), a Britain-based war monitor said.

### [The War in Syria is Moving to Libya, With New Players and Shuffled Alliances](#)

July 25, 2020, Haaretz

Egypt and Turkey are the main rivals fighting for control in the North African country Libya, but the conflict is also where the strategic interests of Arab countries, the EU, and Russia clash – as the U.S. watches from the side-lines.

## Turkey

### [Greek Businesses Move to Boycott Trade with Turkey over Hagia Sophia](#)

July 26, 2020, Voice of America

Turkey's decision to convert the Hagia Sophia monument back into a mosque has sparked a war of words between Athens and Ankara. However, as Greece intensifies its diplomatic scramble to slap sanctions on Turkey, Greek businesses have launched a campaign to boycott goods and services from the neighbouring country.

### [Turkey 're-conquers' Hagia Sophia Amid International Disapproval](#)

July 25, 2020, Arab News

Istanbul's Hagia Sophia on Friday (July 24) hosted its first Islamic prayers in 85 years, despite fierce criticism of the Turkish government's campaign to revert the building to a mosque after being a museum for decades.

### [US Air Force Officially Buying Turkey's F-35s](#)

July 21, 2020, Anadolu Agency

The US Air Force is officially purchasing eight F-35 fifth-generation stealth fighter jets that were initially intended for Turkey prior to its removal from the joint strike fighter program.

### [Turkey Slams Macron Over East Mediterranean Claims](#)

July 24, 2020, Daily Sabah

Turkey on Thursday (July 23) rejected accusations by French President Emmanuel Macron that Ankara was violating the sovereignty of EU countries in the eastern Mediterranean.

## UAE

### [Vande Bharat Mission Phase 5 To Operate 105 Flights From UAE To India](#)

July 27, 2020, Khaleej Times

India's Vande Bharat Mission shall move into its fifth phase, with 105 repatriation flights set to be operated from the UAE to various cities in India, said officials at the Indian missions in the country.

### [UAE Looks To Diversify Oil-dependent Economy With Mars Mission](#)

July 23, 2020, Nikkei Asian Review

The United Arab Emirates launched the Arab world's first Mars mission on Monday (July 20), using an H2A rocket made by Japan's Mitsubishi Heavy Industries.

## Yemen

### [US Envoy Brian Hook Says Iran Backs Terrorists in Yemen, Gulf, Lebanon](#)

July 26, 2020, Gulf News

US Special Representative for Iran Brian Hook has stressed that Tehran authorities pose a threat not only to countries in the Gulf region, but also to their people. He further said, "Iran supports terrorists and rebels in Yemen, the Gulf, Lebanon and Israel."

### [Riyadh Agreement on Yemen Must Be Implemented: UN Security Council P5 Ambassadors](#)

July 26, 2020, Arab News

The ambassadors and foreign minister voiced their support for UN Envoy to Yemen Martin Griffiths' efforts in trying to find a comprehensive and sustainable solution to the conflict in Yemen.



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