



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

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

Massive explosion caused by "Ammonium Nitrate" stored at the city's port has devastated Lebanon's capital Beirut. Since then, violent clashes have erupted against the government's corruption; Lebanese news agency LBCI boycotted press conferences of politicians including one by Iran-backed Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah. Reportedly, Hezbollah denied claims of Israeli involvement in this massive blast. Israel's Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi described the blast in Beirut as an "accident". In another major disaster, Air India flight repatriating 190 Indians from Dubai skidded from the runway in Kozhikode (Kerala), killing at least 18 including both pilots.

On the regional security front, the UNSC will vote on extending an international arms embargo on Iran this week. The United States, Israel and GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries are in favour of extending the arms embargo; while, Russia and China are opposed. In another major development, Elliot Abrams will replace Brian Hook as the US Special Envoy for Iran. The US has claimed that China's partnership with Iran will further destabilize the Middle East.

Iraqi PM Mustafa Al-Kadhimi will visit Washington on August 20, 2020 to hold talks with US President Donald Trump. Meanwhile, the UK's Defence Secretary described ISIS as the "Most Significant Threat" to the country, adding that the, "RAF has struck 40 ISIS terrorist targets in the past 12 months."

Frustrated by OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) declining to hold a special session on Kashmir, Pakistan has threatened the OIC to hold Islamic Conference on Kashmir on its own even if the Saudi-led organization fails to do so. Saudi Arabia has retaliated to Pakistan's threats by halting the delivery of oil on loan to the Imran Khan led Pakistan government. In another development on the energy front, Saudi Arabia has reportedly expanded its nuclear program with China's assistance. Concerned by the development, the US intelligence agencies are scrutinizing Saudi Arabia's ability to produce nuclear fuel that will eventually put the kingdom on the path of developing nuclear weapons.

In light of the on-going Covid-19 pandemic, Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz informed that human trials of Israeli coronavirus vaccine will start in mid-October. Towards this the Israeli delegation reportedly collected close to 20,000 swabs in India which will help Israel build coronavirus tests that can provide instant results.

Tensions in East Mediterranean show no signs of abating. Egypt and Greece signed a deal that sets maritime boundary between the two countries and demarcates exclusive economic zone for oil and natural gas exploration. This deal is in response to the earlier maritime agreement signed between Turkey and Libya's UN backed government. The UAE and Bahrain have welcomed maritime agreement between Egypt and Greece.

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

Bahrain

[Bahrain's Economy To Post 3.5% Growth Next Year Says Report](#)

August 06, 2020, Zawya

Bahrain's economy is likely to recover by next year to register growth of 3.5 per cent, according to a report by Mitsubishi UFJ Financial Group (MUFG).

Egypt

[Egypt Sidelines Rafale Jets For SU-35s; Claims Only Russian Jets Can Match US/Israeli War Planes](#)

August 06, 2020, Eurasian Times

After procuring 24 Rafale fighter aircraft from France, Egypt has received the first order of Russian Sukhoi Su-35 fighters. According to reports, the key objective behind Egypt acquiring Su-35s over Rafale is that the Russian heavy-weight jets can outperform both Israeli and US warplanes in the Middle-East region.

[Arab Countries Welcome Maritime Border Agreement Between Egypt and Greece](#)

August 08, 2020, Egypt Independent

UAE and Bahrain on Friday (August 07) welcomed an agreement to demarcate the maritime borders between Egypt and Greece and establish an exclusive economic zone.

[Egypt, Greece Sign Maritime Deal To Counter Libya-Turkey](#)

August 07, 2020, The Economic Times

Egypt and Greece on Thursday (August 06) signed a maritime deal that sets the sea boundary between the two countries and demarcates an exclusive economic zone for oil and gas drilling rights. The deal is a response to a similar agreement between Turkey and Libya's Tripoli-based government last year that has spiked tensions in the East Mediterranean region.

Iraq

[Iraqi PM to Visit Washington, Meet President Trump on August 20: White House](#)

August 08, 2020, Livemint

Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi will visit Washington on August 20, where he will hold talks with US President Donald Trump, the White House said.

[Conspiracy To Create Iraq, Syria Like Situation in Pakistan Thwarted: Pir Noor Ul Haq](#)

August 08, 2020, The Nation

Pakistan's Minister for religious affairs Pir Noor ul Haq Qadri has said conspiracies hatched for creating Iraq, Syria and Libya like situation in Pakistan have been thwarted.

[ISIS Remains the 'Most Significant' Threat to The UK: Defence Secretary](#)

July 22, 2020, Daily Mail

ISIS remains the 'most significant' threat to the UK, the Defence Secretary has warned. He further added that, 'Conflict, economic collapse and inequality is creating new opportunities that ISIS will continue to exploit, to grow and recruit.'

[Iraq Will Make Additional Oil Cuts in August 2020](#)

August 06, 2020, The Economic Times

Iraq said on Thursday (August 06) it would make an additional cut in its oil production of about 400,000 barrels per day in August to compensate for its overproduction as per the OPEC+ agreement.

[Pro-Iran Militias Continue Hitting Military Bases in Iraq](#)

August 05, 2020, Al-Monitor

Armed groups linked to Iran continue to call for revenge for the January killing of their former leaders Qasem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis vowing to continue hitting military bases in Baghdad and other areas, .

Iran

[Russia, China and Iran Seeking To Influence US Ahead of Elections, Top Intelligence Official Says](#)

August 08, 2020, The Guardian

Russia is backing Donald Trump, China is supporting Joe Biden and Iran is seeking to sow chaos in the US Presidential election, a top intelligence official has warned in a sobering assessment of foreign meddling in US elections.

[GCC Urges UN To Extend Iran Arms Embargo](#)

August 09, 2020, Arab News

The Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) has asked the UN to extend an international arms embargo on Iran. Letter from head of GCC says an extension is imperative to "ensure and preserve peace" in the Middle East.

[China's Entry Into Iran Will Destabilize The Middle East: US State Dept.](#)

August 09, 2020, AMN Al-Masdar News

U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo launched a new attack against China and Iran, in which he accused the two regional powers of destabilizing the Middle East, while blasting Iran as the biggest sponsor of terrorism in the world.

[Pompeo Says U.N. Security Council To Vote Next Week on Extending Iran Arms Embargo](#)

August 06, 2020, Reuters

The United Nations Security Council will vote next week on a U.S. bid to extend an international arms embargo on Iran, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday (August 05), despite the warnings that the measure lacks support.

[US Iran Envoy Brian Hook Steps Down as UN Arms Embargo Vote Looms](#)

August 06, 2020, Al Jazeera

Top United States envoy for Iran Brian Hook is leaving his post - and Elliott Abrams, the US special representative for Venezuela, will add Iran to his role "following a transition period" with Hook, US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Thursday (August 06).

[Iran's Khamenei Creates Twitter Account in Hindi](#)

August 09, 2020, Moneycontrol

Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Sayyid Ali Khamenei has created an official Twitter account in Hindi language. His account has his bio written in Hindi and is also using it to put out tweets in the Hindi language.

Israel

[Israeli Involvement in Massive Beirut Port Blast Ruled Out By Both Sides](#)

August 04, 2020, Times of Israel

Massive blasts that struck Beirut were not caused by Israeli activity, sources in Lebanon and Jerusalem said Tuesday (August 04) afternoon, as officials attempted to determine what sparked the huge explosions in Lebanon.

[Vote on Anti-Netanyahu Bill Set For Wednesday \(August 12\)](#)

August 09, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

The Knesset will vote on Wednesday (August 12) on a bill that would prevent a prime minister indicted for serious crimes from forming a government.

[Israeli Jets Strike Syrian Military Targets After Golan Heights Attack](#)

August 03, 2020, The Guardian

Israeli fighter jets and attack helicopters have struck Syrian military targets, hours after thwarting an infiltration attempt from Syria by suspected militants who were trying to plant explosives, the Israeli military said.

[Human Trials of Israeli-made Coronavirus Vaccine To Begin in Mid-October: Benny Gantz](#)

August 06, 2020, Times of Israel

An Israeli national laboratory will begin testing its coronavirus vaccine on human subjects in mid-October, Defence Minister Benny Gantz announced Thursday (August 06).

[Determined To Build Covid Tests of Future, Israel Collects 20,000 Swabs in India](#)

August 05, 2020, Times of Israel

Israel is a step closer to developing coronavirus tests that work in 'tens of seconds,' officer says, after finding the large population of virus-positive patients needed – in Delhi.

Jordan

[Lebanon's Envoy To Jordan Resigns Over Massive Blast](#)

August 07, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Lebanon's Ambassador to Jordan announced her resignation Thursday (August 06) as a reaction to the massive explosion earlier this week at the Port of Beirut which left at least 135 people dead and nearly 5,000 injured. In a televised address, Tracy Chamoun said she could not bear seeing the pain in people's eyes due to the negligence and corruption in her country.

Kuwait

[Kuwait Approves Indian Repatriation Flights](#)

August 06, 2020, Gulf News

Kuwait has approved an Indian request to operate flights to repatriate its expatriates wishing to return home amid a ban on air travel imposed by Kuwait on dozens of countries, including India.

[Kuwait 'Owes \\$677m To US Hospitals'](#)

August 08, 2020, Gulf News

Around 45 medical centres in the United States have claimed that the Kuwaiti government owes them a total of \$677 million in unpaid medical bills, the Washington Post reported.

[Kuwait Public Sector Begins Reducing Number of Foreign Workers](#)

August 05, 2020, Arab News

Kuwait's public sector will dismiss 50 percent of foreign employees, in particular those who work in non-technical fields and for subcontractors.

Lebanon

[Lebanese News Agency Boycotts Politicians' Press Conferences, Including Hezbollah's Nasrallah](#)

August 07, 2020, Arab News

The Lebanese news agency LBCI has said it will no longer provide coverage of any politician's press conference, including Hezbollah's Secretary-General Hassan Nasrallah, following the massive explosion in capital Beirut.

[Clashes Erupt in Beirut at Blast Protest as Lebanon's Anger Boils Over](#)

August 08, 2020, The New York Times

Violent clashes between demonstrators and security forces transformed much of central Beirut into a battle zone of flying rocks, swinging batons and clouds of tear gas on Saturday (August 08), as the fury over a huge explosion in Beirut's port this week led to attacks on government buildings.

[Beirut Explosion: How Ship's Deadly Cargo Ended Up At Port](#)

August 06, 2020, BBC News

Lebanon's government has blamed the huge blast that devastated parts of Beirut on the detonation of 2,750 tonnes of ammonium nitrate stored at the city's port.

[India To Extend Assistance To Lebanon After Getting Assessment From Beirut](#)

August 07, 2020, WION

The Indian government will extend assistance to Lebanon after getting an assessment of the damage from the government there. The massive blast caused by highly volatile ammonium nitrate ripped through the country's capital Beirut earlier this week killing over 150 people and injuring over 5,000.

Oman

[Oman India Joint Investment Fund II Buys 1.63% in DCB Bank](#)

August 05, 2020, Livemint

Oman India Joint Investment Fund II (OIJIF) on Wednesday (August 5) said it has acquired 5.07 million shares or 1.63% stake in Mumbai based DCB Bank through a block trade on stock exchanges.

Qatar

[Qatar Financed 'Weapons Deliveries' To Hezbollah According To New Dossier](#)

August 06, 2020, Arab News

Qatar's Ambassador to Belgium and NATO, Abdulrahman bin Mohammed Sulaiman Al-Khulaifi, sought to pay the private security contractor over \$890,000 to hush up the role of Qatar's regime in supplying money and weapons to Hezbollah.

[Alibaba and Qatar Lead Last-minute USD300 Million Financing of Chinese Electric Car Start-up Xpeng Ahead of New York IPO](#)

August 03, 2020, South China Morning Post

Alibaba Group and Qatar's sovereign wealth fund are among the last-minute investors in Chinese smart electric vehicle start-up, Xpeng Motors, ahead of its initial public offering in New York.

Saudi Arabia

[Pakistan Threatens To Hold Own Meet If OIC Does Not Discuss The Kashmir Issue](#)

August 08, 2020, The Economic Times

Pakistan has threatened to call a separate meeting of Islamic nations willing to discuss the Kashmir issue if the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) fails to do so soon.

[Saudi Arabia Holds Back Oil to Pakistan after Imran Khan Govt Threatens to Split OIC over Kashmir](#)

August 08, 2020, News18

Saudi Arabia has halted the provision of oil on loan for Pakistan after the Imran Khan government threatened to split the Organization of Islamic Countries (OIC) over Kashmir.

[Saudi Arabia, With China's Help, Expands Its Nuclear Program](#)

August 04, 2020, The Wall Street Journal

Saudi Arabia has constructed with Chinese help a facility for extracting uranium yellowcake from uranium ore, an advance in the oil-rich kingdom's drive to master nuclear technology, according to Western officials with knowledge of the site.

[U.S. Examines Whether Saudi Nuclear Program Could Lead to Bomb Effort](#)

August 05, 2020, The New York Times

American intelligence agencies are scrutinizing efforts by Saudi Arabia to build up its ability to produce nuclear fuel that could put the kingdom on a path to developing nuclear weapons.

[Trump Loosens Rules On Armed Drone Exports in the Middle East Amid Rivalry With China](#)

July 27, 2020, Al-Monitor

US President Donald Trump has loosened restrictions on Washington's ability to sell armed drones to foreign governments amid concerns about China's defence relationships in the Middle East.

[US Senators Want To Block Drone Sales To Saudi Arabia](#)

August 07, 2020, Al Jazeera

Republican and Democratic senators introduced legislation on Thursday (August 06) that would block international sales of United States-made drones to countries that are not close US allies, mentioning Saudi Arabia in particular.

[Former Saudi Official Accuses the Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman of Trying to Kill Him](#)

August 06, 2020, The New York Times

Saad Aljabri, a former top intelligence official, filed suit in Washington alleging that Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman sent a team of agents to Canada to kill him.

Syria

[Former Saudi Intelligence Chief: Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman "Encouraged" Russian Intervention in Syria](#)

August 08, 2020, TRT World

Russia intervened in the war in Syria just when the Assad regime was believed to be on the brink of collapse marking a new and even bloodier chapter for thousands of Syrians.

Turkey

[Turkey's Comments on Jammu and Kashmir Incorrect, Biased: MEA](#)

August 06, 2020, The Economic Times

India on Thursday (August 06) called as factually "incorrect, biased and unwarranted" Turkey's comments that removal of the special status of Jammu and Kashmir has not contributed to peace and stability in the region. External Affairs Ministry Spokesperson also asked Turkey to refrain from interfering in internal matters of India.

[Turkey To Impose Major Fines and Restrictions on Social Media Sites With New Law](#)

July 29, 2020, Al Jazeera

Turkey's parliament passed a bill that gives the government greater control of social media, sparking concerns about freedom of expression in the country.

[Turkey Criticizes Germany on Enforcing Libya Arms Embargo](#)

August 06, 2020, Deutsche Welle

Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu on Thursday (August 06) criticized Germany's participation in a European Union mission supervising an international weapon's embargo on Libya.

UAE

[UAE Feels The Pain of Air India Express Plane Crash in Kerala](#)

August 08, 2020, Gulf News

Kerala is passing through turbulent times. The plane crash, which claimed the lives of more than 18 people Friday (August 07) evening, is the latest in a line of tragedies that have visited the expatriate workers from the South Indian state.

[China, UAE Eye Space Ties After Launching Mars Probes: Envoy](#)

August 06, 2020, Global Times

After China and the United Arab Emirates launched probes to Mars this summer, a possible living space for mankind, the UAE Ambassador to China said Thursday (August 06) he sees great potential for cooperation, as China and the UAE have moved humanity to further levels of advancement.

[Early Decision' Expected on UAE Entry of Indians on All Visa Categories: Indian Ambassador](#)

August 05, 2020, Khaleej Times

The announcement from the ambassador comes as a respite for scores of UAE expatriates who are still stranded in India.

[After Beirut Blast, Massive Fire Breaks Out At UAE's Ajman Market; Efforts To Douse Blaze Underway](#)

August 05, 2020, The Economic Times

Just a day after a catastrophic explosion rocked the Lebanese capital of Beirut, reports of a major fire are now coming to light from Ajman in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).

Yemen

[Yemen Warns of Impending Disaster Caused By Decaying Oil Tanker in Red Sea](#)

August 06, 2020, Gulf News

The Yemeni government has urged global action over a decaying oil tanker docked at a rebel-held port, warning its impact could be far worse than an explosion that devastated the Lebanese capital Beirut.



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