



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



Volume II, Issue 33 | August 17, 2020

Delhi Policy Group

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

www.delhipolicygroup.org



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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

In a historic milestone in the Arab-Israeli relations, on August 13, the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel normalized full diplomatic relations with Israel "suspending" annexation of the parts of West Bank. Egypt (1979) and Jordan (1994) had previously signed similar peace agreements with Israel. Bahrain, Oman and Egypt welcomed the peace deal known as the 'Abraham Accord'; while, Turkey and Iran severely criticised the same. Turkey threatened to suspend diplomatic relations, while Iran termed it as "strategic act of idiocy by Tel Aviv and Abu Dhabi". Saudi Arabia maintained cautious silence, however, Jared Kushner – Senior Advisor to the U.S. President believes even Saudi Arabia will "inevitably" normalise diplomatic relations with Israel. India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) welcomed the peace agreement and called for resumption of direct talks between Israel and Palestine towards a peaceful "Two State Solution".

On August 14, the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) rejected a resolution to extend arms embargo on Iran. Thus, President Trump is likely to re-impose unilateral "snapback" sanctions on Iran. The U.S. also seized Iranian fuel shipments heading towards Venezuela. In the light of growing US-Iran confrontation, Russia called for an urgent virtual summit of countries party to the JCPOA i.e. five permanent members of the UNSC, Germany and Iran.

On the economic front, India-Egypt trade reached USD4.53 billion in Fy20 despite COVID-19 induced economic crisis. India signed air-bubble agreement with Qatar to facilitate flights between the two countries beginning August 18. On August 10, India's Ambassador to the UAE informed that, "India and UAE's airlines can now carry any Indian national holding any type of valid UAE visa from India to UAE."

Pakistan-Saudi Arabia relations have been strained by Islamabad's threats to split the OIC (Organization of Islamic Cooperation) on Kashmir issue. Reportedly, Pakistan's Army Chief will visit Saudi Arabia to smoothen the strained relations between the two nations. On the regional security front, U.S. CENTCOM Chief Gen. Kenneth McKenzie warned about growing threat of ISIS in West Syria.

The anti-government protests in Beirut (Lebanon) show no signs of abating. As a result, Lebanon's Prime Minister Hassan Diab resigned on August 10. Meanwhile, India delivered 58 metric tonnes of emergency humanitarian aid, including medical and food supplies to Lebanon.

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

Bahrain

[Mossad Head Talks to Bahrain's PM Amid Signs It Could Ink Peace Deal with Israel](#)

August 15, 2020, Times of Israel

Mossad chief Yossi Cohen spoke by phone in the past few days with Bahrain's Prime Minister, Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa amidst speculations of the Gulf state could follow the United Arab Emirates in normalizing relations with Israel.

[Bahrain's Budget Deficit Doubles amid Coronavirus Crisis and Low Oil Prices](#)

August 11, 2020, Forbes

Bahrain's budget deficit has almost doubled in the first half of the year, as a result of the twin blows of the Covid-19 pandemic and low crude oil prices.

[Bahrain Welcomes UAE-Israel Peace Deal](#)

August 13, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Bahrain said on Thursday (August 13) a deal between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel to normalize ties is "a step to enhance opportunities to achieve peace in the Middle East."

Egypt

[Egyptian President Welcomes UAE-Israel Deal on Freezing Israeli Annexation of Palestinian Territories](#)

August 13, 2020, Khaleej Times

Egyptian President Al Sisi wrote on his twitter account, "I followed with great interest the joint statement of the brotherly UAE, the United States, and the State of Israel on the agreement to halt Israeli annexation of Palestinian territories and on taking steps to achieve peace in the Middle East."

[Egypt Reaches Out to Maghreb Countries to Resolve Libyan Crisis](#)

August 14, 2020, Al-Monitor

Egypt has been reaching out to the forces active in the Libyan crisis, especially the neighbouring Maghreb countries of Tunisia, Algeria and Morocco for the resolution of Libyan crisis.

[Egypt-India Trade Reaches \\$4.53bn in Fy20 Despite Covid-19: India's Ambassador to Egypt](#)

August 11, 2020, MENAFN

According to Indian Ambassador to Egypt, India-Egypt trade exchange totalled \$4.53bn during India's fiscal year (FY) 2019/20, despite the disruptions in February and March 2020 owing to the novel coronavirus (COVID-19).

[Egypt Denounces Turkey's Hagia Sophia Move, Develops Egypt's Christian Sites](#)

August 07, 2020, Al-Monitor

Days after Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan declared Istanbul's historic Hagia Sophia a mosque, Egypt announced ambitious restoration plans for South Sinai's Saint Catherine area.

Iraq

[Fear and Fury as Turkish Air-Strikes Devastate Farmland in Iraq's Kurdish Region](#)

August 14, 2020, Arab News

Turkish bombardment killed three Kurdish fighters in northern Iraq, a local official said Friday (August 14), as Baghdad seeks to rally support to end Ankara's offensive on its soil.

[Blasts Hit US Army in Iraq, Pro-Iran Militias Suspected](#)

August 11, 2020, The Arab Weekly

At least two explosions have hit convoys supplying US-led coalition forces in Iraq in the last 24 hours, security sources said, the first on Monday evening (August 10) near the southern border with Kuwait and the second on Tuesday (August 11) north of Baghdad.

Iran

[Iran Condemns UAE's Act of Establishing Ties with the Zionist Regime](#)

August 14, 2020, Islamic Republic News Agency

In a statement early Friday (August 14), Iran's foreign ministry voiced strong condemnation to the UAE's decision to set up diplomatic relations with the Zionist regime of Israel and termed it as a "strategic act of idiocy by Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv" which will undoubtedly result in the further invigoration of the axis of resistance in the region.

[Iran is Our Top Priority, Says Senior US Commander in Middle East](#)

August 12, 2020, Defence One

Countering the threat from Iran is the U.S. military's top priority in the Middle East, America's top commander in the region Gen. Kenneth McKenzie said Wednesday (August 12), blaming rocket attacks from Shiite militia groups in Iraq for hampering U.S. efforts to defeat ISIS in the region.

[UN Security Council Rejects US Bid to Extend Arms Embargo on Iran](#)

August 15, 2020, Al Jazeera

The United Nations Security Council has resoundingly rejected a bid by the United States to extend a global arms embargo on Iran.

[Donald Trump Vows 'snapback' Over Humiliating UN Defeat on Iran Arms Embargo](#)

August 16, 2020, The Guardian

President Trump says the US will unilaterally reinstate sanctions on Iran a day after only two countries voted for prolonging the embargo.

[Russia Calls 'Urgent' Summit on Iran to Avoid UN 'Confrontation'](#)

August 14, 2020, Al Jazeera

President Putin proposes seven-way online summit of UNSC permanent members, Germany and Iran, as US plans to extend arms embargo.

[China Welcomes Russia's Proposed Video Summit on Iran Nuclear Deal: Foreign Ministry](#)

August 15, 2020, CGTN

China welcomes Russia's proposal of a video summit with the United States and the remaining parties to the nuclear deal – China, Britain, France, Germany and

Iran – to try to avoid further "confrontation and escalation" at the United Nations over Iran, according to the Chinese Foreign Ministry.

[U.S. Seizes Multimillion-dollar Iranian Fuel Shipment Bound for Venezuela, Largest Ever of Its Kind, Dept. of Justice Says](#)

August 14, 2020, CNBC

The U.S., with the assistance of foreign partners, confiscated a total of 1.1 million barrels of petroleum from four foreign-flagged oil tankers, as Tehran and Caracas attempted to sidestep U.S. sanctions.

Israel

[Israel, UAE Reach Historic Peace Deal](#)

August 13, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Israel and the UAE agreed to full normalization of relations in a phone call with US President Donald Trump on Thursday (August 13), marking the first peace treaty between Israel and an Arab country in 25 years.

[Israel Thanks Egypt, Oman, Bahrain for Supporting Peace Deal with UAE](#)

August 14, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu Friday (August 14) thanked the Egyptian President el-Sisi and the governments of Oman and Bahrain for their support to the normalization of relations between Abu Dhabi and Tel Aviv.

[India Welcomes Full Normalisation of Ties between UAE and Israel: MEA](#)

August 14, 2020, The Economic Times

India on Friday (August 13) welcomed the full normalisation of ties between the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Israel, both key allies in West Asia, and called for early resumption of direct talks between the Israeli and Palestinian leadership for a "two-state solution".

[Israel Says It Beat Cyber-Attack by North Korean Lazarus Group under U.S. Sanctions](#)

August 12, 2020, The Wall Street Journal

Israel said Wednesday (August 12) that it thwarted a North Korean cyber group's attempt to steal sensitive information from leading defence companies in the country.

Jordan

[Jordan Says Israel-UAE Deal Should Prod Israel To Accept Palestinian State](#)

August 14, 2020, Reuters

Jordan said that the deal announced between Israel and the United Arab Emirates could push forward stalled peace negotiations if it succeeds in prodding Israel to accept a Palestinian state on land that Israel had occupied in the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

Kuwait

[Kuwait's Position Towards Israel Unchanged](#)

August 16, 2020, The Daily Star

Kuwait's position towards Israel is unchanged after its accord with the United Arab Emirates and it will be the last country to normalize relations.

[Kuwait May Deport 360,000 Foreigners as Gulf's Expat Exodus Continues](#)

August 11, 2020, Forbes

Kuwait is preparing to force as many as 360,000 foreign workers to leave the country, according to local press reports, in the latest sign of how the Gulf expatriate labour is bearing the brunt of economic slowdown caused by low oil prices and the coronavirus crisis.

Lebanon

[India Delivers 58 MT of Relief Material to Blast-Hit Lebanon](#)

August 15, 2020, The Indian Express

India on Friday (August 14) delivered to Lebanon 58 metric tonnes of emergency humanitarian aid, including medical and food supplies, in the wake of catastrophic explosions in the capital city of Beirut.

[Hezbollah Leader Says Israel to Pay Heavy Price If Behind Beirut Blast](#)

August 15, 2020, CGTN

Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah said on Friday (August 14) that his group would wait for results of an investigation into the Beirut port explosion, but if it turns out to be an act of sabotage by Israel then it would "pay an equal price."

[Beirut Explosion: Lebanon's Government Resigns as Public Anger Mounts](#)

August 10, 2020, BBC News

Lebanon's government has resigned amid mounting anger over the explosion that devastated parts of Beirut and left more than 200 people dead.

Oman

[Oman Says It Supports UAE-Israel Normalization of Ties](#)

August 14, 2020, Al-Monitor

Oman welcomed the historic normalization of ties between the United Arab Emirates and Israel amid growing signs the Gulf state could be eyeing a similar pact.

[Indian Expats Invited To Contribute To Atmanirbhar Bharat Abhiyan](#)

August 11, 2020, Times of Oman

Indian expats leaving Oman have been invited to apply for jobs created by the Indian government as part of its efforts towards self-sufficiency.

[Introduction of VAT to Give Oman's Economy \\$780m Boost](#)

July 26, 2020, Arabian Business

Introduction of VAT early in 2021 could be coming at the best possible time as Oman battles economic impacts of Covid-19 and low oil prices.

Qatar

[Increased Gas Supply from Qatar Can Help Lower Emissions in India, Says India's Sherpa to G20, Suresh Prabhu](#)

August 13, 2020, MENAFN

Among many opportunities which can be explored to strengthen trade between India and Qatar is the increased gas supply from Qatar. This apart it will also help lower emissions in India.

[Air Bubble to Facilitate Flights from India to Qatar from August 18](#)

August 14, 2020, Gulf Times

India's Ministry of Civil Aviation on Friday (August 14) announced creation of an air bubble with Qatar from August 18 to 31 for flights to and from either side, as agreed by the Civil Aviation Authority of Qatar.

[US Team to Qatar to Probe Its Alleged Finance of Hezbollah - Report](#)

August 13, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

A team of US government officials travelled to Qatar on Wednesday (August 12) amid intense international coverage of the monarchy's alleged role in financing Hezbollah in Lebanon.

Saudi Arabia

[Silence from Saudi Arabia as UAE Hails Israel Accord](#)

August 14, 2020, Dawn

King Salman's position as custodian of Islam's holiest sites makes it harder for the kingdom to take the same step as the UAE.

[Jared Kushner Says Israel-Saudi Arabia Normalization is 'Inevitability'](#)

August 15, 2020, Times of Israel

US President Donald Trump's son-in-law and senior adviser Jared Kushner said on Friday (August 14) that normalized ties between Israel and Saudi Arabia were inevitable, following the US-brokered agreement between Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

[After Tirade against Saudis for Kashmir Inaction, Pakistan Seeks To Ease Tensions](#)

August 15, 2020, The Economic Times

Pakistan's military chief Qamar Javed Bajwa will head to Saudi Arabia on Sunday (August 16) to ease tensions after his country's top diplomat blasted the kingdom for failing to condemn Kashmir.

[Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman 'encouraged' Russian Intervention in Syria, Lawsuit Claims](#)

August 16, 2020, The Guardian

In the summer of 2015 Mohammed bin Salman, then Saudi defence minister and third in line to the throne, turned his country's foreign policy on its head by giving a covert green light to Russia's intervention in Syria, according to a lawsuit by a former top Saudi intelligence official Saad Aljabri.

[India's Cardamom Exports to Saudi Arabia Stall over Chemical Residue Norms](#)

August 13, 2020, The Economic Times

India's exports of cardamom to Saudi Arabia, its largest buyer, have come to a standstill after the Western Asian nation tightened chemical residue norms in July, traders said.

Syria

[Trump Administration Eyes New Phase of Syria Sanctions](#)

August 16, 2020, The Wall Street Journal

The Trump administration is readying new rounds of sanctions against Syria, U.S. officials said, planning to expand its blacklist by focusing on financial-support networks outside the war-torn nation in a renewed effort to coerce Damascus into peace talks.

[US Commander: Islamic State Threat in West Syria Growing](#)

August 13, 2020, Associated Press

Elements of the Islamic State group are working to rebuild in western Syria, where the U.S. has little visibility or presence, the top U.S. commander for the Middle East warned on Wednesday (August 12).

[Russia Stops Joint Patrols With Turkey in Syria](#)

August 14, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Russia has suspended its participation in patrols with Turkey along the strategic M4 highway in Syria's Idlib province. Foreign Ministry spokesperson Maria Zakharova said: "Joint Russian-Turkish patrols on the Idlib highway have been stopped due to continued provocations of militants in the region."

Turkey

[Turkey Threatens To Suspend Relations with UAE over Deal with Israel](#)

August 14, 2020, The Guardian

Turkey has threatened to suspend its diplomatic relations with the United Arab Emirates and recall its envoy, a day after the Gulf state announced it would become the third Arab country to establish full ties with Israel.

[France Sends Jets and Ships to Tense East Mediterranean](#)

August 13, 2020, BBC News

France is deploying two Rafael fighter jets and a naval frigate in the eastern Mediterranean in the wake of continuing tensions between Greece and Turkey.

[Turkey Condemns Joe Biden's Criticism of 'Autocrat' Erdogan](#)

August 16, 2020, Al Jazeera

Turkey has condemned remarks made by US Democratic Presidential candidate Joe Biden criticising President Recep Tayyip Erdogan and calling for support for the Turkish leader's opponents.

[Turkey Funding Surrendered ISIS Cadres to Radicalise Indian Muslims](#)

August 13, 2020, Zee News

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has allocated huge funds to the Turkish intelligence to radicalize Indian Muslims with the help of preachers recruited from surrendered ISIS cadres.

UAE

[Iran Threatens To Attack UAE Over Israel Deal](#)

August 16, 2020, Arab News

Iran issued an explicit threat on Saturday (August 15) to launch an attack against the UAE over its agreement to normalize ties with Israel. President Hassan Rouhani said the UAE had made a “huge mistake” and condemned what he called a betrayal.

[Indian Nationals Carrying Valid Visa Can Now Travel To UAE](#)

August 11, 2020, Livemint

Indian Ambassador to UAE informed that Indian nationals carrying any type of valid UAE visa can now travel to the country.

Yemen

[UN Chief: 'Catastrophic' Consequences if Experts Cannot Access Aging Oil Tanker off Yemen](#)

August 15, 2020, Voice of America

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres urged Yemeni rebels on Friday (August 14) to allow international experts to access an old, neglected oil tanker carrying more than a million barrels of crude oil, which is at risk of leaking or completely spilling into the Red Sea.



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