



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



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Delhi Policy Group

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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

West Asia (Middle East) is witnessing a striking geopolitical shift in forsaking old rivalries and building new diplomatic relations. The official signing ceremony of the 'Abraham Accords' between Israel, UAE and Bahrain took place on September 15th at 'The White House'. President Trump described this iconic moment as the "beginning of new and a brighter chapter for the Middle East". "India welcomed the Abraham accords having always supported peace and stability in West Asia, while maintaining its traditional support for the Palestinian cause and the two-state solution". India's External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar while commenting on the landmark accords mentioned, "UAE-Israel deal has opened lots of opportunities for India at a time when Delhi's relations with Abu Dhabi are also growing". With the signing of peace deals, the U.S. President is now willing to sell American F-35 Stealth Aircrafts to the UAE and other gulf countries.

On the multilateral diplomacy front, Saudi Arabia hosted G20 Finance and Health Ministers virtual meet on September 17. Dr. Harsh Vardhan, Union Minister for Health and Family Welfare addressed this meet in which G20 ministers called for "equitable and affordable access for all" to the COVID-19 vaccines. While on September 16, India strongly criticised Pakistan, Turkey and the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) for their remarks on India's internal matters such as Jammu and Kashmir in the 45th session of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) in Geneva.

The US-Iran conflict shows no signs of abating with Washington re-imposing all UN sanctions on Iran. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo made it clear that "Iran will not be allowed to buy Chinese and Russian arms". However, France, Britain and Germany are at odds with Washington about imposing the sanctions. European leaders warned the U.S. that re-imposition of sanctions is legally void. In another major development on the security front, the U.S. significantly strengthened military deployment in Northeast Syria due to the intensified tensions with Russia. President Trump also acknowledged that the U.S. wanted to assassinate Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for the use of "Chemical Weapons" in 2017. Meanwhile, a Chinese report claims that "Saudi Arabia may have sufficient uranium ore to produce nuclear fuel".

India's Minister of State for Home Affairs G Kishan Reddy informed the parliament that, "ISIS is most active in 12 Indian states. Apart from Southern states such as Kerala, Telangana, Andhra Pradesh, Karnataka and Tamil Nadu, ISIS is active in

Maharashtra, West Bengal, Rajasthan, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh and the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir". While, India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) arrested nine Al-Qaeda militants plotting attacks on several locations including New Delhi. In a parallel development, Indian security agencies started probing Turkey-linked NGO's involvement in Kashmir that have become active in the past year.

The Covid-19 induced economic crisis has led to mass exodus of Indian migrant workers from the Gulf countries. "Over 300,000 workers have returned to India since the 'Vande Bharat' repatriation drive began on May 7th. A total of 84,497 Indian workers returned from the UAE, 50,536 from Oman, 49,000 from Saudi Arabia, 44,248 from Kuwait, 30,509 from Qatar and 14,920 from Bahrain", India's Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs, V. Muraleedharan stated in the Parliament.

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

Bahrain

[President Trump Hails 'Dawn of New Middle East' With UAE-Bahrain-Israel Deals](#)

September 15, 2020, BBC News

US President Donald Trump has hailed the "dawn of a new Middle East", amid Israel's landmark deals with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain signed at The White House.

[Over 300,000 Workers Returned to India Under Vande Bharat Mission Says Union Govt](#)

September 17, 2020, Business Standard

From the GCC countries, a total of 84,497 Indian workers returned from the UAE, 50,536 from Oman, 49,000 from Saudi Arabia, 44,248 from Kuwait, 30,509 from Qatar and 14,920 from Bahrain, according to the data provided by MoS External Affairs V.Muraleedharan.

[India Welcomes Agreements for Normalization of Relations between Israel, UAE and Bahrain](#)

September 17, 2020, BW Businessworld

India on Thursday (September 17) welcomed the agreement for normalization of ties between Israel, UAE and Bahrain while also reiterating support for the Palestinian cause.

Egypt

[Egypt Raises Security Alarm Fearing Anti-Sisi Protests](#)

September 19, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Egyptian security forces have been deployed in several areas across the main Egyptian cities, preparing themselves for possible anti-regime protests called for by exiled opposition figure Mohamed Ali.

[Egyptian-Chinese Consortium Wins Bid to Construct Egypt's First Electric High-speed Rail](#)

September 05, 2020, Egypt Independent

An Egyptian-Chinese consortium between Samcrete and the Arab Organization for Industrialization has won the bid to construct a high-speed rail project between Ain Sokhna/Administrative Capital/al-Alamein covering 543 kilometers and speeds of 250 kilometers at a cost of nine billion dollars.

Iraq

[India Arrests 9 Al-Qaeda Terrorists Planning 'Attacks'](#)

September 19, 2020, The Peninsula Qatar

India's National Investigation Agency (NIA) said on Saturday (September 19) it has arrested nine al-Qaeda militants who were planning attacks in several locations including the capital New Delhi.

[Blast Targets 'American' English School in Southern Iraq](#)

September 18, 2020, Arab News

An improvised explosive device blew up outside an English-language institute in southern Iraq early Friday (September 18) without causing any casualties, Iraqi police said in a statement, amid a recent uptick in attacks targeting the American presence in Iraq.

[India Creates Air Transport Bubble with Iraq](#)

September 20, 2020, Iraq Business News

India has created an air bubble arrangement with Iraq. Indian and Iraqi carriers are now permitted to operate services between India and Iraq.

[IED Hits British Mission Convoy in Baghdad, No Casualties](#)

September 15, 2020, Rudaw

An improvised explosive device (IED) struck a British diplomatic mission convoy in Baghdad on Tuesday (September 15), a diplomatic source has confirmed to Rudaw, with no casualties reported in the attack.

[ISIS Most Active in 12 Indian States Says Union Government](#)

September 16, 2020, India TV

The Islamic State or ISIS threat continues to loom over India. With the terror group and its various manifestations spreading base in 12 Indian states in recent years, the Sunni jihadists' group is now "most active" in these states across the country.

Iran

[US Reimposes Sanctions on Iran](#)

September 20, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

The US announced on Saturday (September 19) that UN sanctions are being re-imposed on Iran. The snapback of sanctions was triggered 30 days ago, following the Security Council's vote not to extend the arms embargo on the Islamic Republic.

[Iran's Currency Hits New Record Low against the U.S. Dollar](#)

September 12, 2020, Hindustan Times

Money exchange shops traded the Iranian rial 262,000 for a dollar. The rial had traded at 256,000 to \$1 on Thursday (September 17).

[European Leaders Warn US Move to Reimpose Iran Sanctions is Legally Void](#)

September 20, 2020, The Guardian

European leaders have warned the US that its claim to have the authority to re-impose sweeping UN-mandated sanctions on Iran has no effect in law, setting up a major legal clash that could lead to Washington imposing sanctions on its European allies.

[Iran Warns US against 'Strategic Mistake' After Trump's Threat](#)

September 15, 2020, Al Jazeera

President Trump said any attack by Iran to avenge Gen. Qassem Soleimani's killing will face a response '1,000 times greater in magnitude'.

[US Will Prevent Iran from Getting Chinese, Russian Arms: Mike Pompeo](#)

September 15, 2020, Times of India

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo vowed on Tuesday (September 15) that Washington would prevent Iran from purchasing "Chinese tanks and Russian air defence systems" as the end to the UN arms embargo against Tehran approaches.

[US Indicts 2 over Pro-Iran Cyber-attacks After Gen. Soleimani's Assassination](#)

September 16, 2020, Middle East Monitor

The US Department of Justice has indicted two men for allegedly hacking more than 50 American websites as retaliation for the 3 January US assassination of Iranian commander Qassem Soleimani.

[Indian Rice Exporters Raise Concerns after Iran Starts Placing Orders for Basmati from Pakistan](#)

September 16, 2020, The Economic Times

Iran has started placing orders with Pakistan for basmati rice, raising concerns of Indian basmati rice exporters who have stalled exports to the Gulf nation due to non-payment of their dues worth INR 1,700 crore. However, exporters see this merely as a temporary blip.

[President Trump Plans Executive Order to Punish Arms Trade with Iran](#)

September 18, 2020, Reuters

U.S. President Donald Trump plans to issue an executive order allowing him to impose U.S. sanctions on anyone who violates a conventional arms embargo against Iran, four sources familiar with the matter said on Thursday (September 17).

[President Rouhani: UAE, Bahrain Will Bear 'Consequences' of Israel Deals](#)

September 16, 2020, Al Jazeera

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani has said the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain would be responsible for any "consequences" resulting from their normalisation of relations with Tehran's arch-rival, Israel.

Israel

[Saudi Royal Family Divides over Potential Embrace of Israel](#)

September 18, 2020, The Wall Street Journal

King Salman and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman have been at odds over whether to ease relations with the Jewish state.

[Italian MP Nominates Israeli PM Netanyahu for Nobel Peace Prize](#)

September 16, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Paolo Grimoldi says Israeli PM deserves Nobel award for Israel's normalization deals with UAE, Bahrain; Finnish lawmaker also put forward names of U.S. President Donald Trump and Bahrain's King for the Nobel Peace Prize.

Jordan

[Jordan Orders Youth Army Conscription in Bid to Tackle Unemployment](#)

September 10, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Jordan has announced plans to conscript 25-29-year-olds into the army for a one-year period in an attempt to tackle rising unemployment in the country.

Kuwait

[Trump Says Kuwait May Soon Normalize Ties with Israel](#)

September 19, 2020, Times of Israel

US President Donald Trump said Friday (September 18), after meeting with the son of Kuwait's ruling emir, that the country will likely normalize relations with Israel in the near future, following the diplomatic move made by the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain.

Lebanon

[US Imposes Sanctions on Businesses in Lebanon with Links to Hezbollah](#)

September 17, 2020, Arab News

US authorities have imposed sanctions on two businesses in Lebanon they say are under the control of Hezbollah and profit from corruption.

Oman

[Fearing Iran, Oman Hesitant in Normalise Relations with Israel](#)

September 15, 2020, Middle East Monitor

The Sultanate of Oman is willing to normalise ties with Israel but is hesitant that its relationship with Iran would be severely harmed if it made the move.

Qatar

[US Hopes To Name Qatar as Major Non-Nato Ally: Official](#)

September 18, 2020, Al Jazeera

The United States hopes to move ahead with plans to name Qatar as a major, non-NATO ally, a status that provides foreign nations with benefits in defence trade and security cooperation with Washington, a senior US official said on Thursday (September 17).

[Qatar Rules Out Normalising Relations With Israel](#)

September 15, 2020, Al Jazeera

Normalising relations with Israel "can't be the answer" to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, a Qatari official has said, adding that Doha will not join other Gulf Arab states in establishing diplomatic ties with Israel.

Saudi Arabia

[President Trump Believes Saudi Arabia Will Normalize Israeli Ties](#)

September 16, 2020, Anadolu Agency

US President Donald Trump said Tuesday (September 15) he believes Saudi Arabia will follow Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in fully normalizing relations with Israel.

[G20 Health Ministers Call For Equal Covid-19 Vaccines Access](#)

September 17, 2020, Arab News

Ensuring “equitable and affordable” access to vaccines for all was the key to overcoming the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic and supporting global economic recovery, G20 finance and health ministers said in a joint statement on Thursday (September 17).

[Saudi Arabia May Have Enough Uranium for Nuclear Fuel and Weapons, Chinese Report Claims](#)

September 17, 2020, The Guardian

Saudi Arabia likely has enough mineable uranium ore reserves to pave the way for the domestic production of nuclear fuel.

Syria

[President Trump Says He Wanted To Assassinate Syria's Bashar al-Assad](#)

September 15, 2020, Defence One

President Trump on Tuesday (September 15) acknowledged that he wanted to assassinate Syrian President Bashar al-Assad for using chemical weapons in 2017.

[US Military Strengthens Deployment in Syria](#)

September 20, 2020, Arab News

The US Army announced on Friday (September 18) it was stepping up its military deployment – both troops and equipment – in northeast Syria despite a push to limit its presence there, a move that follows tensions with Russia in the region.

Turkey

[India Pulls Up Pakistan, Turkey & OIC at UNHRC Meet for Comments on Internal Matters](#)

September 16, 2020, The Economic Times

First secretary, Permanent mission of India in Geneva who delivered India's right to reply said: "We reject the reference made by the OIC to the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir which is an integral part of India.

[Intel Agencies to Probe New Turkish NGO Outreach in Kashmir: Official](#)

September 18, 2020, Hindustan Times

Indian intelligence agencies have started running security checks on Turkey-linked charities that have suddenly become active in Jammu and Kashmir over the last year after President Recep Tayyip Erdogan delivered a speech at the United Nations General Assembly last year that mirrored Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan's pitch on Kashmir.

[Rape, Ethnic Cleansing and Looting: UN Reveals Turkey's Crimes in Syria](#)

September 19, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Turkish-backed extremists have committed a litany of abuses in northern Syria after Ankara illegally occupied Afrin, Jarabulus, Idlib and Tel Abyad over the last three years. The allegations have gained exposure in recent years and are now part of a UN Human Rights Council biannual report.

[Turkey Faces Renewed Salafist Threat](#)

September 21, 2020, Arab News

Islamist cult leader Ahmet Mahmut Unlu, a pro-government figure, announced that he is ready to name at least 150 Salafi associations, along with their locations, as part of preparations to fight in Turkey.

[Turkey Open to Mediterranean Sea Talks but 'Determined': Erdogan](#)

September 17, 2020, Al Jazeera

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan said on Wednesday (September 16) Ankara was open to "constructive" talks but would remain determined in its eastern Mediterranean standoff with Greece.

UAE

[President Trump Says 'No Problem' Selling F-35 Stealth Aircraft to UAE](#)

September 15, 2020, Defence News

U.S. President Donald Trump on Tuesday (September 15) said he personally would have “no problem” selling the advanced F-35 fighter jet to the United Arab Emirates, despite objections from Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

[Israel Likely To Manufacture F-35 Wings for UAE: Report](#)

September 17, 2020, Middle East Eye

The report by Calcalist, an Israeli business daily, cited sources as saying that Washington and the US arms company Lockheed Martin are expected to discuss the sale of F-35 aircraft to the UAE, and that “there is a high chance” that the F-35 wings will be manufactured by the state-owned Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI).

[All Air India Express Flights To and From Dubai Suspended For 15 Days](#)

September 18, 2020, Gulf News

Air India Express flights to and from Dubai have been suspended for 15 days from September 18 until October 3.

Yemen

[Yemeni Government Demands Extension of Arms Embargo against Iran](#)

September 20, 2020, Gulf News

The legitimate Yemeni government urged on Saturday (September 19) the need to extend the arms embargo against Tehran after busting a Houthi cell that confessed to smuggling weapons from Iran.

[Yemen Seeks Emergency Meeting of UN Security Council to Discuss Al-Houthis Attacks on Ma'rib](#)

September 20, 2020, Gulf News

The Yemeni government has asked the UN Security Council to hold an "emergency" session to discuss the repercussions of the Al-Houthi attack in the eastern governorate of Ma'rib, while negotiations between the government and the Houthi group were advancing on Geneva.



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