



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

Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah who played a crucial role in shaping the strong India - Kuwait bilateral relations, passed away at the age of 91 on September 29th. Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah has been sworn in as Kuwait's new ruling Emir. Meanwhile, India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi held a telephonic conversation with Saudi Arabia's King Salman; the two leaders discussed "joint opportunities to develop bilateral relations within the Saudi-Indian Strategic Partnership Council." India also signed an air-bubble agreement with Oman effective from October 1 to November 30.

On the energy front, India's Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Dharmendra Pradhan mentioned that "Covid-19 pandemic eroded 1/3rd global energy demand but improved India's ability to source crude oil and gas." The low oil prices have led to 7 percent contraction in Saudi Arabia's economy in the second quarter of this year.

The presence of Islamic State (IS) and its offshoots in South India continue to pose a major national security threat for India. According to a charge sheet filed by India's National Investigation Agency (NIA), Al-Hind module, an offshoot of IS was planning to establish ISIS dominated area inside the dense forests surrounding South Indian states of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala.

On the regional security front, head of Israel's Mossad, Yossi Cohen, visited the Kingdom of Bahrain on September 30th to discuss areas of mutual cooperation with the Bahraini security establishment. Cohen has been a key figure in normalisation of diplomatic relations between Israel and Bahrain. In another major development, Israel delivered first set of 'Iron Dome Missile Defence System' to the United States. Following the Abraham peace accord, Israel, UAE and the United States announced agreement to work towards "establishing a joint strategic vision for energy partnership" that could pave way for "a more stable, integrated and prosperous Middle East." Lebanon and Israel also agreed to the US-mediated talks to end long running dispute over sea and land borders. First meeting is scheduled to take place on Oct. 14th.

The U.S. sanctions continue to wreak havoc on Iran's economy. Iranian Rial dropped to its lowest value ever at 300,000 Rials per US Dollar. Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh admitted the fact that "Iran is forging documents to hide cargoes to

evade the U.S. sanctions and boost oil exports." Meanwhile, President Rouhani lauded the 'China-Iran Strategic Partnership' as a "major step towards advancing mutual interests, international peace and countering unilateralism" in a message to China's President Xi Jinping on the 71st anniversary of the establishment of People's Republic China. The 25-year strategic agreement between the two nations has yet not been finalised.

On the multilateral diplomacy front, United Nations Security Council (UNSC) President informed that, "contrary to the U.S. claims, snapback sanctions mechanism has not been triggered against Tehran." While, the UAE announced its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the UNSC for 2022-23 term.

Armenia-Azerbaijan conflict in south Caucasus shows no signs of abating. Turkey has backed Azerbaijan while rebuffing Russia, the United States and France over a ceasefire in the on-going conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh. Turkey believes the three big powers have no role in peace moves between Armenia and Azerbaijan. French President Emmanuel Macron condemned Turkey's "reckless and dangerous" statements backing Azerbaijan; While, Armenia's Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan accused Turkey of taking "genocidal path" in Nagorno-Karabakh.

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

Bahrain

[Mossad Chief Openly Visits Bahrain for First Time, Meets With Security Chiefs](#)

October 01, 2020, Times of Israel

Yossi Cohen, head of Israel's Mossad intelligence agency, visited the Kingdom of Bahrain on Wednesday (September 30th). Cohen met with Bahraini security chiefs Lieutenant General Adel bin Khalifa Al-Fadil and Sheikh Ahmed bin Abdulaziz Al Khalifa to discuss areas of mutual cooperation.

Egypt

[Egypt Issues First Green Bond in the Middle East-North Africa Region](#)

September 29, 2020, Arab News

Egypt on Tuesday (September 29) issued its first-ever green sovereign bonds, the first in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), as part of its efforts to implement renewable energy projects to combat pollution.

[Russia to Supply Egypt With Covid-19 Vaccine in Expansion Push](#)

September 30, 2020, The Economic Times

Russia has clinched a deal with Egypt to supply 25 million doses of its Sputnik V coronavirus vaccine, as Moscow seeks to take a leading global role in fighting the pandemic.

Iraq

[Islamic State Group Al-Hind Plotted to Build Province in forests of South India: NIA Charge Sheet](#)

October 03, 2020, Hindustan Times

An offshoot of Islamic State (IS) operating in South India, known as the Al-Hind module planned to establish ISIS Daishwilayah (province) in the forest areas of Karnataka, Tamil Nadu, Andhra Pradesh and Kerala as recently as in late 2019 according to a charge sheet filed against 17 members of the module by the National Investigation Agency (NIA).

[Iraq May Lose USD 50bn Over OPEC+ Deal, Warns Ex-minister](#)

September 16, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Al-Ulloum said that Iraq must "review the OPEC+ agreement," warning that Baghdad could not bear the burden of other countries' interests.

[Threat to Evacuate U.S. Diplomats from Iraq Raises Fear of War](#)

September 28, 2020, Reuters

Washington has made preparations to withdraw diplomats from Iraq after warning Baghdad it could shut its embassy, a step, Iraqis fear could turn their country into a battle zone.

[The US Closing Its Embassy in Iraq is a Big Win for Iran, Says Iraq's Former UN Ambassador](#)

September 30, 2020, Business Insider

The potential US pull-out from Iraq opens the possibility of military action, with just weeks to go before an election in which President Donald Trump has campaigned on a hard-line stance toward Tehran and its proxies.

[Rockets Land in Erbil Hours after Iraqi PM Pledges to Protect Diplomats](#)

September 30, 2020, Reuters

Iran-backed militias launched rockets targeting U.S. troops that landed near Erbil airport in the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region of Iraq, a Kurdish security agency said on Wednesday (September 30), hours after Iraq's premier pledged to protect foreign missions.

[Turkey, Iran Deploy 'Game-Changing' Drones in North Iraq](#)

October 01, 2020, France 24

Turkey and Iran are increasingly adopting "game-changing" drones as their weapon of choice against Kurdish rebels in northern Iraq, prompting fears for the safety of civilians and stoking geopolitical tensions.

Iran

[President Rouhani Hails Iran-China Strategic Partnership as 'Major Step'](#)

October 02, 2020, Tehran Times

The 25-year strategic partnership plan, officially known as the 'Comprehensive Cooperation Plan between the People's Republic of China and the Islamic Republic of Iran', has yet not been finalised. Rouhani cabinet which approved the draft the plan on June 21st, has hailed it as a major step towards peace and stability in the region on the 71st anniversary of the establishment of the People's Republic of China.

[Foreign Minister Zarif: World Must Force Israel to Destroy Its Nuclear Arsenal](#)

October 03, 2020, Tehran Times

"Given its six decades of deception and clandestine development of nuclear weapons, it (Israel) must be compelled to submit to the most intrusive inspection regime that law-abiding members of the NPT observe," Iranian Foreign Minister Zarif stressed at the Virtual Meeting of the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons on Friday (October 2).

[Snapback Sanctions Mechanism 'Not Triggered' against Tehran: UN Security Council President](#)

October 02, 2020, Tehran Times

Russian Ambassador to the UN Vassily Nebenzia (UNSC President) declared that contrary to the United States' claim, the "snapback" mechanism on sanctions against Tehran has not been triggered.

[Iran: Minimum Response to Soleimani's Assassination is Pushing US out of Iraq](#)

September 28, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council, Ali Shamkhani, said that the least severe punishment for the U.S. following its assassination of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani is expelling it from Iraq.

[How Nepal is Helping China and Iran to Deceive US Sanctions](#)

September 21, 2020, Times of India

The investigative report released by International Consortium of Investigative Journalists (ICIJ) shows the involvement of Nepali companies and banks attempting to deceive U.S. sanctions on Iran and China.

[US Regulator Fines Emirates Airlines \\$400,000 for Flights Over Iran](#)

October 01, 2020, Al Jazeera

The United States Transportation Department fined Emirates airline \$400,000 on Thursday (October 01) for flights through Iranian airspace during a time of heightened political tension between the US and Iran last year.

[Iran's Rial Weakens to New Record Low against the US Dollar](#)

October 01, 2020, i24 News

Iran's currency dropped on Thursday (October 01) to its lowest value ever at 300,000 Rial per US dollar amid crippling American sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

[Iran's Oil Minister Admits Forging Export Documents to Avoid US Sanctions](#)

September 26, 2020, Asharq Al-Awsat

Iranian Oil Minister Bijan Zanganeh defended last week his efforts to boost crude exports despite US sanctions and admitted that oil documents were forged to hide the origin of Iranian cargoes.

[Iranian President Accuses US of 'Savagery' After New Sanctions](#)

September 26, 2020, Al Jazeera

"Americans have inflicted \$150bn of damage on the people of Iran with sanctions, President Rouhani said."

[Iran Strikes Defiant Tone at UN Under Crushing US Sanctions](#)

September 23, 2020, Associated Press

President Rouhani compared his country's plight with that of George Floyd, the Black American man who died in May after a white police officer in Minneapolis pinned him to the ground by pressing a knee into his neck. Floyd's death set off nationwide protests in support of Black lives.

Israel

[Israel Ties Will Help Remove Sudan From US Terrorism List: Dagalo](#)

October 03, 2020, Al Jazeera

The Vice President of the sovereign council that governs Sudan, Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, has announced his country will continue to strive towards building relations with Israel.

[Sudan & Oman Postpone Normalising Ties with Israel Until After US Elections](#)

October 03, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Sudan and Oman have postponed normalising ties with Israel until after the US Presidential elections.

[Israel Delivers First Iron Dome Battery for the US Army](#)

September 30, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

A year after the Israeli Defence Ministry and the US Army signed a deal for two Iron Dome missile defence batteries, the first battery has been delivered to the United States.

[Armenia Withdraws Ambassador from Israel over Azerbaijan Arms Deal](#)

October 02, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Armenia said on Thursday (October 01) it had recalled its ambassador to Israel for consultations over Israeli arms sales to Azerbaijan. Azerbaijan has acknowledged using Israeli-made weapons in its fighting with ethnic Armenian forces around Nagorno-Karabakh.

[Lebanon and Israel Agree to Talks to End Sea Border Dispute](#)

October 01, 2020, Reuters

Lebanon and Israel have agreed to a framework for U.S.- mediated talks aimed at ending a long-running dispute along the border between the two nations that have clashed on several occasions in the past.

[US, Israel and UAE to Cooperate in Oil, Gas, Renewable Energy](#)

October 02, 2020, S&P Global

Following the signing of a peace agreement between Israel and the UAE in September, the US, Israel and the UAE have agreed to cooperate in the fields of oil, gas and renewables among other energy sectors.

[Israel, Italy Swap Helicopters and Missiles in New Arms Deal](#)

September 24, 2020, Defence News

Israel's Ministry of Defence announced a reciprocal procurement agreement with Italy's defence ministry that will see Israel acquire 12 training helicopters and Italy receive Rafael Advanced Defence Systems Spike missiles and Elbit Systems simulators.

Jordan

[Jordan's King Abdullah Accepts Prime Minister's Resignation](#)

October 03, 2020, Al Jazeera

Jordan's King Abdullah II has accepted the resignation of Prime Minister Omar al-Razzaz but asked him to stay on in a caretaker capacity until he designates a successor to oversee parliamentary elections to be held on November 10.

Kuwait

[Kuwait's Emir Sheikh Sabah Al-Ahmad Al-Sabah Passes Away at Age 91](#)

September 29, 2020, The Economic Times

Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah, the ruler of Kuwait who pushed for closer ties with Iraq after the 1990 Gulf War together with solutions to other regional crises, died Tuesday (September 29).

[Kuwait Has New Ruling Emir: Sheikh Nawaf](#)

September 30, 2020, Hindustan Times

At age 83, Sheikh Nawaf has been appointed as the successor of the late Sheikh Sabah Al Ahmad Al Sabah. His accession has touched off speculation about who will become the next crown prince of Kuwait.

Lebanon

[Lebanon Pins Economic Hopes on Talks with Israel](#)

October 03, 2020, Arab News

The first session of US-mediated Lebanese-Israeli talks under UN auspices will take place on Oct. 14th in the Lebanese border town of Naqoura. The negotiations aim to demarcate the disputed maritime border and, subsequently, the land border. Lebanon is hoping that successful talks will provide an appropriate security environment for oil and gas companies for off shore prospecting.

Oman

[Air Bubble Arrangement Now in Place for Flights between India and Oman](#)

October 01, 2020, Gulf News

The Indian Embassy in Oman announced that an air bubble between Oman and India has been established. This will be effective from October 01 until November 30 this year.

Qatar

[Qatar: Trump Retreats from Supporting Blockading States](#)

September 28, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Qatar's defence minister said that the US President Donald Trump has backed down from supporting Gulf States imposing blockade on Doha.

[Qatar and China are Strategic Partners: Chinese Ambassador](#)

September 23, 2020, The Peninsula Qatar

Qatar and China are strategic partners, and the collective efforts against the pandemic will further deepen friendship between both the countries, said Chinese Ambassador to Qatar, Zhou Jian.

Saudi Arabia

[Pilgrims Return to Mecca as Saudi Arabia Eases Covid-19 Restrictions](#)

October 04, 2020, Al Jazeera

A limited number of people circled Islam's holiest site in Mecca on Sunday (October 04) after Saudi Arabia lifted coronavirus restrictions that had been in place for months.

[Saudi Arabia's Economy Hit Hard by the Oil Price Crash](#)

September 30, 2020, Oilprice.com

Saudi Arabia's economy shrank by 7 percent, with the unemployment rate hitting a record high in the second quarter as the combined effect of the oil price crash and the coronavirus pandemic hit the world's largest oil exporter hard.

[Saudi Arabia's King Salman and India's PM Modi Discuss Cooperation Prospects](#)

September 30, 2020, Gulf News

Both leaders discussed joint opportunities to develop relations between the two countries within the Saudi-Indian Strategic Partnership Council.

[India Has Sufficient Supplies of Crude Oil, LNG: Dharmendra Pradhan](#)

September 29, 2020, The Hindu Business Line

The Covid-19 pandemic led to erosion of 1/3rd of global energy demand, creating significant oil price volatility with cascading geopolitical impacts. This has also resulted in India's crude oil and natural gas sourcing ability to improve, according to Minister for Petroleum and Natural Gas, Dharmendra Pradhan.

Syria

[Turkey's New Military Deployment in Idlib Puts Spotlight on Syria](#)

October 03, 2020, Arab News

Despite claims that the South Caucasus is the new flashpoint for Turkey and Russia, the recent military reinforcements in Syria hint that the security situation in the province is still fragile and could provoke a regional crisis.

[U.S. Blacklists More Syrians in Fresh Push for Assad to End War](#)

September 30, 2020, Reuters

The United States on Wednesday (September 30) blacklisted what it called “key enablers” of Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s government, reinforcing efforts to push Damascus back to United Nations-led negotiations to end Syria’s nearly decade-long civil war.

Turkey

[Armenian PM Says Turkey Taking New Genocidal Path in Nagorno-Karabakh](#)

October 02, 2020, Reuters

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan accused Turkey of “once again advancing on a genocidal path” and said Ankara’s military was directly leading an offensive by Azeri forces against ethnic Armenian forces around Nagorno-Karabakh.

[Turkey Rebuffs Russia, France and US over Nagorno-Karabakh Ceasefire Moves](#)

October 01, 2020, The Indian Express

France, Russia and the United States are co-chairs of the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe’s (OSCE) Minsk Group, set up in 1992 to mediate in the decades-old conflict over the mountainous enclave. Turkey said the three big powers should have no role in peace moves in the conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

[French President Condemns Turkey's Involvement in Armenia-Azerbaijan Conflict, Ankara Retorts](#)

September 30, 2020, The New Indian Express

French President Emmanuel Macron on Wednesday (September 30) condemned what he called Turkey's "reckless and dangerous" statements backing Azerbaijan in its bid to take back the breakaway region of Nagorno-Karabakh.

[European Union Threatens Turkey with Sanctions over East Mediterranean Dispute](#)

October 02, 2020, Deutsche Welle

EU leaders have warned that Turkey could face sanctions if it does not cease its "provocations and pressures" in the East Mediterranean. The bloc also said it would reward Ankara for good behaviour.

UAE

[UAE Announces Candidacy for Non-permanent UN Security Council Seat](#)

September 30, 2020, Al Jazeera

The United Arab Emirates has announced its candidacy for a non-permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) for the 2022-2023 term.

Yemen

[Sudan Sending Hundreds of Troops to Yemen via Saudi Arabia](#)

October 02, 2020, Middle East Eye

1,018 Sudanese army officers and soldiers entered the Saudi Kingdom by boat on September 22, passing through passport control in the south-eastern city of Jazan, near the Yemeni border.

[UN Warns of Yemen Famine; No Aid from Saudis, UAE and Kuwait](#)

September 15, 2020, Al Jazeera

The UN's humanitarian chief warned that "the spectre of famine" has returned to war-torn Yemen and for the first time singled out Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Kuwait for giving nothing to this year's \$3.4bn appeal for desperately needed aid.



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