



# 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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### Volume 2, Issue 42

#### 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

Saudi Arabia hosted virtual 'G20 Finance Ministers and Central Bank Governors' meeting through video conferencing on October 14. India's Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman participated in this meeting. At the meeting it was agreed to extend the G20 'Debt Service Suspension Initiative (DSSI)' for a further period of six months till June 2021. In other major development of significance, India is set to lose 'Farzad B-gas field' in the Persian Gulf discovered by ONGC Videsh Ltd. (the overseas investment arm of India's state owned Oil and Natural Gas Corporation). Iran conveyed its preference for domestic firms over foreign companies to develop this gas field after sitting on the decision for eleven long years.

The COVID-19 pandemic has shown the need for deeper engagement between health systems around the world. In light of this, Embassy of India, Abu Dhabi will host the virtual 'UAE-India Healthcare Conference – 2020' on October 19. Policymakers, CEO's and leaders from healthcare industry, from both countries will explore new avenues for partnership as the two countries work towards delivering world class healthcare to their people.

On the regional security front, the UN arms embargo on Iran came to an end on October 18 as part of Resolution 2231 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA 2015). The U.S. strongly opposed this with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo reiterating that "any arms sales to Iran would result in sanctions." On the other hand, the U.S. and Saudi Arabia held their 'strategic dialogue' in Washington on October 14; both countries agreed to counter and deter Iran's malign behaviour in the Middle East, while expanding bilateral defence and energy cooperation. In another development, Pompeo showed satisfaction over the Iraqi governments' efforts to protect the U.S. embassy in Baghdad from attacks by Iran-backed Shiite militias, while refraining from a commitment to close the U.S. embassy. In a related development, 'Kataib Hezbollah' suspended attacks on the U.S. forces in Iraq on condition that the Iraqi government presents a timetable for their withdrawal.

Israel and Bahrain on October 18 signed an agreement establishing full diplomatic relations in a ceremony attended by the U.S. Secretary of Treasury Steven Mnuchin in Manama. In a parallel development, Israel's Knesset (Parliament) approved the 'Abraham Accord' normalising diplomatic relations with the UAE. In the ongoing conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh, besides the Turkish drones, Israeli arms have played a significant role in Azerbaijan's military offensives. Experts

believe Israelis are unlikely to stop lucrative arms sales to Azerbaijan despite sympathy towards Armenia.

Reportedly, Turkey tested Russian S-400 missile defence system a development that could further stoke tensions between Ankara and Washington as the United States opposes Turkish purchase of S-400s on the ground that it compromises NATO defence systems. In a significant development, President Erdogan in a meeting with Ukraine's President Volodymyr Zelensky, declared that, "Turkey will never recognize illegal annexation of Crimea."

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

## Bahrain

### [Israel, Bahrain Sign Deal Establishing Formal Ties](#)

October 18, 2020, Associated Press

Israel and Bahrain on Sunday (October 18) agreed to establish formal diplomatic relations, making the small Gulf country the fourth Arab state to normalize ties with Israel. The U.S.-brokered agreement capped a one-day visit by a high-level delegation of American and Israeli officials to Bahrain.

### [Bahrain to Establish Maritime Line with Israel](#)

October 13, 2020, Anadolu Agency

"The first Bahraini cargo ship will arrive soon from Khalifa bin Salman Port in Bahrain to Haifa Port," the official Israeli Broadcasting Corporation said on Tuesday (October 13). Tel Aviv is also discussing with the UAE, Saudi Arabia, and Jordan establishing a railway line to connect the port of Haifa with the UAE.

## Egypt

### [Turkey Announces Willingness to Cooperate With Egypt](#)

October 15, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Spokesman for the Turkish presidency Ibrahim Kalin has announced: "If Egypt reveals a willingness to act with a positive agenda on regional issues, Turkey would not leave it unanswered."

### [Egypt's President El-Sisi Rules out Reconciliation with Muslim Brotherhood](#)

October 12, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah El-Sisi renewed his warning that there are "hostile" entities attempting to destroy Egypt, referring to the Muslim Brotherhood. During a meeting with the Egyptian army, El-Sisi stressed that he rejects "any reconciliation" with them.

## Iraq

### [Pro-Iranian Militias Accused of Attack on Kurdish Party, Civilians in Iraq](#)

October 18, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

An attack on a Kurdish political party in Baghdad on Saturday (October 17), followed by the murder of civilians in Balad in Iraq, has led to concerns that pro-Iranian militias are out of control. The militias, often called Hashd al-Sha'abi or Popular Mobilization Units, are actually part of an official government paramilitary force.

### [Iraq's Shia Parties Escalate Sectarian Tensions, Pressure Kurds](#)

October 16, 2020, The Arab Weekly

Statements made by Kurdish politician Hoshyar Zebari questioning the deployment of the Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) in the Green Zone, where government offices and major international missions are located, and at Baghdad Airport have sparked a storm of controversy in Iraq.

### [Iraqi Militias Say They Have Halted Anti-U.S. Attacks](#)

October 11, 2020, Reuters

An array of Iran-backed Iraqi militia groups have suspended rocket attacks on the U.S. forces on condition that Iraq's government present a timetable for the withdrawal of American troops from the country.

### [Pompeo: US Pleased Iraq Doing More to Protect US Embassy in Baghdad](#)

October 14, 2020, Middle East Monitor

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Wednesday (October 14) the United States was pleased that the Iraqi government was doing more to protect the US embassy in Baghdad from Iran-backed Shiite Muslim militias, but declined to provide an update on whether Washington was still considering to shut down its embassy.



## Iran

### [India Set to Lose Farzad-B Gas Field in Iran](#)

October 18, 2020, Livemint

India has all but lost the ONGC Videsh Ltd-discovered Farzad-B gas field in the Persian Gulf after Iran decided to prefer domestic companies over foreign firms for development of the field.

### [Arms Embargo on Iran Expires Despite the US Opposition](#)

October 18, 2020, Al Jazeera

The 13-year arms embargo imposed by the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) came to an end on Sunday (October 18) as part of Resolution 2231 of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), an accord signed in 2015 that gave Iran sanctions relief in exchange for curbs on its nuclear programme.

### [Mike Pompeo Warns of Sanctions for Any Arms Sales to Iran](#)

October 18, 2020, Arab News

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Sunday (October 18) said that arms sales to Iran would breach UN resolutions and result in sanctions, after Tehran said the longstanding UN embargo on arms trade with the Islamic republic had expired.

### [Two Iranian Ports Exposed to Cyber-attacks](#)

October 17, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Two Iranian ports were exposed to massive cyber-attacks last week, a senior official at the Ports and Maritime Organisation (PMO) of Iran reported. However, the official affirmed that the two ports are operating with no disruption, although the cyber-attack targeted their electronic infrastructure.

### [Depleting Balance in Rupee-Rial Account Chokes Export of Basmati Rice, Tea to Iran](#)

October 14, 2020, The Hindu Business Line

According to estimates by industry insiders, around INR 2,000 crore, due to basmati rice exporters to Iran, is currently stuck because of a payment crisis, a consequence of the U.S. sanctions on Iran.

## Israel

### [India Becoming More Influential Player in International Arena, Says Israel's Ambassador to India](#)

October 15, 2020, The Print

Israel's deepening relation with India is having a positive impact on its ties with other countries, including in the Arab world, as the Indo-Israel collaboration in various areas is showing to them how friendship with Israel can be mutually beneficial.

### [Experts Believe Israel Unlikely to Drop Lucrative Arms Sales to Azerbaijan](#)

October 05, 2020, Times of Israel

While Israel's President spoke with his Armenian counterpart and attempted to smooth the waters, the Jewish state's weapons exports to Baku (Azerbaijan) will be difficult to give up.

### [Israel Approves Hundreds of New Settlement Units in the West Bank](#)

October 12, 2020, Middle East Monitor

The construction of hundreds of new settlement units has been approved by Israeli authorities to expand an illegal Jewish settlement in occupied Bethlehem, reported Wafa news agency.

### [Israel's Knesset \(Parliament\) Approves the Abraham Accord with UAE](#)

October 15, 2020, Middle East Eye

The Arab Joint List, the third largest political bloc in Israel's parliament, voted against the normalisation deal between Israel and United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the Knesset on Thursday (October 15), but the agreement was still approved in a 80-13 majority vote by the Knesset.

### [Pompeo Urges Saudi Arabia to Normalise Ties with Israel](#)

October 14, 2020, Al Jazeera

United States Secretary of State Mike Pompeo has urged Saudi Arabia to recognise Israel, in what would be a strategic boost for the Jewish state amid normalisation with two other Gulf Arab kingdoms.

## Jordan

### [Jordan's King Abdullah Swears in New Government to Speed Reforms](#)

October 12, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Jordan's King Abdullah on Monday (October 12) swore in a new government led by veteran diplomat Bisher al Khaswaneh that will seek to accelerate IMF-backed reforms as the economy faces its sharpest contraction in decades due to the coronavirus crisis.

## Kuwait

### [Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan Seeks Kuwaiti Investments in India](#)

October 12, 2020, The Economic Times

Petroleum Minister Dharmendra Pradhan on Monday (October 12) invited Kuwait to invest in India as he saw the oil-rich Gulf nation as an important and trusted partner in achieving energy security.

## Lebanon

### [Lebanon and Israel Conclude First Round of Maritime Border Demarcation Talks](#)

October 15, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Lebanon and Israel have concluded the first round of indirect talks over the demarcation of their disputed maritime borders. No details were provided about the first meeting, which was attended by US Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs David Schenker.

### [Hundreds March in Lebanon to Mark Year of Anti-Government Protests](#)

October 17, 2020, Al Jazeera

Hundreds marched in Lebanon's capital to mark the first anniversary of a non-sectarian protest movement that has rocked the political elite but has yet to achieve its goal of sweeping reform.

## Oman

### [Oman to Introduce 5 percent VAT in Six Months' Time](#)

October 13, 2020, The Economic Times

Oman's ruler has issued a decree to start levying a 5 percent value-added tax (VAT) in six months' time, as the Gulf oil producer seeks to boost revenues battered by low oil prices and the coronavirus pandemic.

### [S&P Cuts Oman's Sovereign Rating for The Second Time This Year](#)

October 16, 2020, Al Jazeera

Oman's sovereign rating was cut for the second time in 2020 by S&P Global Ratings as lower crude revenue and the virus pandemic take a heavy toll on the country's finances.

## Qatar

### [Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Sees Path toward Ending Rift with Qatar](#)

October 17, 2020, Business Standard

Saudi Arabia's foreign minister signalled progress may be underway toward resolving the three-year-old rift with its neighbour Qatar, following a meeting in Washington with Secretary of State Michael Pompeo.

## Saudi Arabia

### [Saudi Arabia and the U.S. Hold 'Strategic Dialogue', Agree to Counter Iran Threat](#)

October 14, 2020, Arab News

Saudi Arabia and the US agree that Iran's destabilizing behaviour must be countered and deterred, the Kingdom's Foreign Minister said on Wednesday (October 14) after participating in the first 'US-Saudi Strategic Dialogue' in Washington D.C.

### [G20 Finance Ministers Pledge to Do 'Whatever It Takes' to Support Global Economy](#)

October 15, 2020, Business Standard

G20 finance ministers and central bank governors agreed in principle for the first time on a "Common Framework" to deal on a case-by-case basis with the rising number of low-income countries facing debt distress.

### [Issue Passports to Rohingya or Face 'Consequences', Says Saudi Arabia to Bangladesh](#)

October 16, 2020, WION

Saudi Arabia has asked Bangladesh to either issue passports to Rohingya or face "consequences". For Riyadh, the Rohingya refugees on the Saudi soil are still 'undesirables,' a burden to be dumped on Bangladesh.

### [Saudi Arabia Believes in 'Eventual Normalisation' with Israel](#)

October 17, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal Bin Farhan Al-Saud announced on Thursday (October 15) that his country believes in "eventual normalisation" of ties with Israel.



## Syria

### [Syrian Kurds Free Hundreds of Daesh Militants as Part of Amnesty](#)

October 16, 2020, Arab News

Kurdish-led authorities released on Thursday (October 15) hundreds of militants from Daesh imprisoned in northern Syria, as part of a general amnesty in the region controlled by the US-backed fighters.

### [Russia Records 38 Ceasefire Violations in Syria over Past 24 Hours: Russian Defence Ministry](#)

October 17, 2020, The New Indian Express

The Russian side of the Russian-Turkish commission monitoring the implementation of the Syrian truce has registered 38 ceasefire violations in the country over the past 24 hours, while the Turkish side has recorded 23 truce breaches, the Russian Defence Ministry said on Saturday (October 17).

## Turkey

### [New Clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh; Pompeo Says Turkey Makes Situation Worse](#)

October 18, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Armenian and Azeri forces fought new clashes on Friday (October 16), defying hopes of ending nearly three weeks of fighting over the Nagorno-Karabakh enclave, and US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo blamed Turkey for inflaming the situation by arming the Azeris.

### [Turkey Tests Russian S-400 Defence System: Reports](#)

October 16, 2020, Al Jazeera

Tests of the Russian S-400s could stoke tensions between Turkey and the United States, which sharply opposed Ankara's purchase of the weapons from Moscow on grounds they compromise shared NATO defence systems.

### [Turkey Will Never Recognize Illegal Annexation of Crimea, President Erdogan Says](#)

October 16, 2020, Daily Sabah

"We have and always will support Ukraine's sovereignty and territorial integrity, including over Crimea," Erdogan said during a joint press conference with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelenskiy in the capital Ankara.

### [Carrot-and-Stick Approach to Turkey Failing, EU Envoys Say](#)

October 14, 2020, Reuters

Despite an EU summit deal in the early hours of Oct. 2 aimed at persuading Ankara to stop exploring for natural gas in waters disputed by Greece and Cyprus, Turkey said on Wednesday (October 14) it was restarting operations of a survey ship.

## UAE

### [UAE, India to Discuss Healthcare Collaboration Advances in Virtual Conference](#)

October 17, 2020, Gulf News

The Embassy of India in Abu Dhabi and the Consulate General of India in Dubai will host the virtual UAE-India Healthcare Conference on Monday, October 19. It will be a platform for deliberations on collaboration and exploring ways and means for the two health systems to engage more deeply.

### [UAE Says OPEC+ Set to Ease Oil Production Cuts as Planned](#)

October 13, 2020, Oilprice.com

The OPEC+ plans to taper the ongoing oil production cuts as of January 2021, as initially agreed, the energy minister of OPEC's third-largest producer, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), said on Tuesday (October 13).

### [US warned Nevada not to use Chinese COVID-19 tests from UAE](#)

October 15, 2020, Associated Press

U.S. diplomats and security officials privately warned the state of Nevada not to use Chinese-made coronavirus test kits donated by the United Arab Emirates over concerns about patient privacy, test accuracy and Chinese government involvement.

## Yemen

### [Hundreds Freed on Day 2 of Yemen Prisoner Swap](#)

October 16, 2020, Al Jazeera

Planes carrying prisoners to be exchanged by Yemen's warring parties took off on Friday (October 16) on the second day of an operation to return about 1,000 men home and help build momentum for a new push to end a catastrophic war.



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