



# 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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### 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

The OPEC Secretariat hosted 4<sup>th</sup> High-Level meeting of the OPEC-India dialogue on November 05, 2020. Discussions primarily revolved around the changing global energy landscape, overcoming energy challenges, global oil price mechanisms, measures being taken by the OPEC and its partners for balancing oil markets, and importantly on ensuring oil supply security to India. India's Minister of Petroleum and Natural Gas, Dharmendra Pradhan "urged OPEC to address the historical aberration in crude pricing for Asia by ending the 'Asian Premium' recognising the shifting oil demand to Asia."

In a significant development, Saudi Arabia's Sovereign Wealth Fund, the PIF acquired 2.04 percent (USD1.3 billion) stake in India's Reliance Retail Ventures. In another development with far reaching impact for the Indian migrant workers, Saudi Arabia announced easing of certain restrictions, beginning March 2021 in its kafala system that restrict migrant workers from changing jobs or leaving the country without employer's consent. On November 03, External Affairs Minister Dr. Jaishankar attended third annual political dialogue with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in which he urged GCC members to facilitate the return of large number of Indian workers and professionals through travel bubble arrangements. Meanwhile, India's Basmati rice export to Iran is likely to resume as it has removed prevailing ban on imports and promised to pay outstanding dues of over INR1700 crore to Indian exporters which have remained unpaid since last year.

On the investments front, India-UAE explored ways to facilitate investments during the 8<sup>th</sup> meeting of the India-UAE High Level Joint Task Force on Investments. The United Arab Emirates also overhauled their 'Islamic Personal Laws' allowing unmarried couples to cohabit, loosening alcohol restrictions and criminalising honour killings.

Israel's Ambassador to India visited the Northeast and expressed Tel Aviv's interest in sharing advanced technologies to boost the manufacturing in the region; it was also agreed that two agricultural centres of excellence will be setup in the North-eastern state of Meghalaya in collaboration with Israel.

On the regional security front, India and Greece held foreign ministerial level talks on "strengthening Greece-India relations and developments in the Eastern Mediterranean and South Asia." In a major development, Trump administration notified the U.S. Congress about its intent to sell UAE 18 MQ-9B Drones worth USD

2.9 billion. In another development, the newly elected U.S. Vice President Kamala Harris stated that, "US will reverse Trump-era policy, restore relations with Palestine and oppose annexation of territories and expansion of settlements. Israel's Settlements Minister Tzachi Hanegbi warned that, "(President-elect) Biden's stated intent of reverting back to the JCPOA could lead to confrontation between Israel and Iran." Meanwhile in a major boost to Israel's naval power, the IDF is set to receive German-made Sa'ar-6-class corvette equipped with Iron Dome to defend gas rigs from missile attacks.

The US-China 5G confrontation has reached Egypt, with the U.S. urging Egyptian government to join the 'clean network' initiative and keep Chinese companies out of the country's 5G telecommunications infrastructure. On the other hand, China State Construction Engineering Corporation has agreed to a USD2.2 billion loan to finance the Central Business district in Egypt's New Administrative Capital.

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

## Bahrain

### [UAE, Bahrain and Sudan Join Huge Majority Backing Anti-Israel Moves at UN Panel](#)

November 05, 2020, The Times of Israel

The three Arab countries with which Israel recently signed normalization agreements – the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain and Sudan – did not change their traditional voting pattern and supported all resolutions critical of Israel involving the Palestinian human rights issue and Golan heights in the UNGA.

### [Bahrain Jails 51 for Setting Up Terrorist Organisation](#)

November 03, 2020, Gulf News

Bahrain's High Criminal Court sentenced 51 defendants to jail terms ranging between five years and life imprisonment after convicting them of establishing, organising and joining a terrorist group. This Group had military backing from Iran's Revolutionary Guards and Iraqi Hezbollah.

### [Bahrain's Frontline Workers Receive Dose of Sinopharm's Covid-19 Vaccine](#)

November 04, 2020, Livemint

Bahrain is using a COVID-19 vaccine developed by the Chinese state-owned pharmaceutical firm Sinopharm, which is in Phase III trials in the UAE, Egypt, Bahrain and Jordan.

## Egypt

### [China State Construction Seals \\$2.2bn Loan for Egypt's New Capital](#)

November 05, 2020, Global Construction Review

China State Construction Engineering Corporation has agreed a \$2.2bn loan to finance the central business district in Egypt's New Administrative Capital.

### [Egypt, China Sign Protocol to Build Industrial Projects in Ain Sokhna](#)

November 04, 2020, Zawya

The President of the Suez Canal Authority, Osama Rabea, and the Chairman of the Egyptian-Chinese J.V. Company for Investment, Mohamed Adel Fathy, witnessed the signing of a protocol of cooperation to utilise and market a land plot owned by the authority in Ain Sokhna.

### [Egypt and Saudi Arabia's Business Activity Improves as UAE Dealt Setback](#)

November 03, 2020, Bloomberg

Business activity in Egypt grew at its fastest pace in almost six years, buoyed by an increase in new orders, while Saudi Arabia saw a second month of milder improvements. In the United Arab Emirates, meanwhile, non-oil private sector activity fell below the threshold of 50 that separates growth from contraction for the first time since August 2020.

### [U.S. Calls on Egypt to Not Use China Telecoms Infrastructure](#)

October 26, 2020, Middle East Monitor

The United States has called on the Egyptian government not to allow Chinese companies to help establish the country's 5G telecommunications infrastructure. In an official statement, the American embassy in Egypt urged Cairo to join the U.S. "Clean Network" programme to obtain 5G from what it described as "reliable partners".

## Iraq

### [Hundreds in Baghdad Demand Ouster of US Troops from Iraq](#)

November 07, 2020, Arab News

Several hundred protesters gathered in the Iraqi capital on Saturday (November 07) afternoon to demand US troops leave the country in accordance with a parliament vote earlier this year. Protestors carried signs bearing the logo of Hashed Al-Shaabi, a state-sponsored network of armed groups including many supported by Iran.

### [Iraqi Forces Kill Protester, Wound 40 in Southern Basra](#)

November 06, 2020, US News & World Report

Iraqi security forces killed at least one anti-government protester using live gunfire and wounded at least 40 others in the southern city of Basra on Friday (November 06).

### [Iraq Ratifies New Election Law, Paving Way for Early Vote](#)

November 05, 2020, The Washington Post

Iraq's President ratified on Thursday (November 05) a new election law aimed at giving political independents a better chance of winning seats in parliament, paving the way for early elections next year.

### [Islamic State \(IS\) Resurfaces with Attacks on Shias in Iraq's Diyala Province](#)

November 04, 2020, AL-Monitor

Another recent uptick in attacks attributed to the Islamic State (IS) in the Diyala region northeast of Baghdad near the Iranian border has raised questions about security in the region, while many warn of worsening sectarian tension there and elsewhere.



## Iran

### [Indian Govt Extends 40 Percent Discount on Cargo Movement Between India and Chabahar Port in Iran](#)

October 16, 2020, Livemint

India's Union Shipping Ministry on Friday (October 16) said it has extended the current 40 percent discount for movement of cargo between India and Chabahar port in Iran for one more year to encourage trade.

### [India's Basmati Exports to Iran to Resume Soon](#)

November 05, 2020, The Economic Times

Basmati rice exports to Iran are likely to resume as the country has lifted its ban on imports from India and indicated that it will make payments of over Rs 1,700 crore to Indian exporters which have been due since last year.

### [Iran Unveils New Ballistic Missile Facility with 'Missile Train'](#)

November 05, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Iran unveiled a new ballistic-missile facility this week. Key military officials, including Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps head Hossein Salami, showed off the new site and its apparently unique train-mounted ballistic-missile launcher.

### [Khamenei Says Iran's U.S. Policy Not Affected by Who Wins Presidential Election](#)

November 03, 2020, Reuters

Iranian Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei said on Tuesday (November 03) the U.S. presidential election's result will not impact Tehran's policy towards Washington.

### [Iran's Khamenei Condemns French 'Support' of Prophet Muhammad's Caricatures](#)

November 03, 2020, AL Jazeera

Iran's Supreme Leader Khamenei has condemned France and other European governments for supporting the publication of caricatures of the Prophet Muhammad and has rejected their claims of defending freedom of expression.

## Israel

### [Vice President Elect Kamala Harris: US Will Reverse Trump-era Policy, Restore Relation with Palestine](#)

November 03, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Kamala Harris said: "We are committed to a two-state solution, and we will oppose any unilateral steps that undermine that goal. We will also oppose annexation and settlement expansion."

### [India-Israel Agriculture Project to Benefit Meghalaya Farmers: Chief Minister Conrad K Sangma](#)

November 04, 2020, The Economic Times

Meghalaya, in collaboration with Israel, will set up two centres of excellence in the state, as part of a project between India and Israel -- aimed at equipping farmers with technology to help increase their income.

### [Israel Wishes to Share Technology with North-East India to Boost Manufacturing, Says Ambassador Ron Malka](#)

November 05, 2020, The Indian Express

During the two-day visit to Tripura, Israeli Ambassador met Assam Chief Minister Biplab Kumar Deb. Malka said Israel wishes to share advanced technologies with the North-Eastern states to develop manufacturing capabilities in the region.

### [Pakistanis Oppose Countries' Normalization with Israel](#)

October 25, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Pakistani politicians, organizations and citizens have voiced their disapproval of steps in recent months by some Arab and African Muslim-majority countries to normalize diplomatic relations with Israel. Mushtaq Ahmad Khan, a member of the Senate from Jamaat-e-Islami Pakistan political party said: "I think this is not normalisation, this is an occupation."

### [Israel Set to Receive New Warship to Defend Gas Rigs from Missile Attack](#)

November 05, 2020, The Times of Israel

German-made Sa'ar-6-class corvette to come equipped with Iron Domes as the IDF warns that direct strike on operating platform is among the largest threats facing the country.

[Biden Win Means War With Iran, Warns Israeli Minister](#)

November 05, 2020, AL-Monitor

Joe Biden has said openly for a long time that he will go back to the nuclear agreement," Hanegbi said. "I see that as something that will lead to a confrontation between Israel and Iran."

[Israel Razes Most of Palestinian Bedouin Village in Largest Demolition in Years](#)

November 06, 2020, NBC News

Israel has demolished most of a Bedouin village in the West Bank, displacing 73 Palestinians - including 41 children - in the largest such demolition in years, residents and a United Nations official said.

## Jordan

### [Jordan's Queen Noor Criticises Israel's Demolition of Palestinian Homes](#)

November 07, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Jordanian Queen Noor Al-Hussein has slammed the Israeli demolition of Palestinian homes in the occupied West Bank and Jerusalem as “disgusting” behaviour.

## Kuwait

### [Kuwaiti Citizens Account for 99 Percent in Kuwait Oil Corporation](#)

November 06, 2020, Gulf News

Kuwaiti citizens account for 99 per cent of employment in the Kuwait Oil Corporation, Oil Minister Khaled Al Fadel has disclosed. There are 681 Kuwaiti employees against 26 expatriates working on contracts in technical jobs that require expertise not yet available at the local market

## Lebanon

### [US Sanctions Lebanon's Hezbollah Ally Gebran Bassil, Citing Corruption](#)

November 07, 2020, AL Jazeera

The United States has sanctioned top Lebanese politician and Hezbollah ally Gebran Bassil over alleged corruption, marking the highest-profile sanctions to date levelled against an ally of the Iran-backed group in Lebanon.

## Oman

### [Indian Private Carriers Asked to Suspend Operations to Oman](#)

November 08, 2020, Times of Oman

Starting from Monday (November 09), Indian private airlines like Indigo, SpiceJet and GoAir will not be allowed to operate flights between Oman and India as part of the air bubble agreement, according to travel agents based in Oman.

## Qatar

### [Qatar Bases Budget on \\$40 Oil to Withstand Volatility](#)

November 03, 2020, Oilprice.com

Oil and gas producer Qatar will base its budget on an oil price of \$40 a barrel—lower than the actual expected price—in order to protect its finances from volatility in oil prices, the Emir of Qatar, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, said.



## Saudi Arabia

### [Arab Leaders Congratulate Joe Biden on Election Win](#)

November 08, 2020, Arab News

Arab leaders swiftly congratulated Joe Biden for his election victory on Saturday (November 07) and expressed hope that the new White House will work with Middle Eastern countries to strengthen US-Arab relations.

### [India's EAM Jaishankar Urges Gulf Countries to Facilitate Return to Work for Indian Workers, Professionals](#)

November 03, 2020, BW Business World

India on Tuesday (November 03) urged the members of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) to facilitate the return of a large number of Indian workers and professionals through sustainable travel bubble arrangements. External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar raised the issue at the annual political dialogue with the GCC Troika, which was held in virtual mode.

### [Saudi Arabia to Remove Key Restrictions on Foreign Workers](#)

November 05, 2020, The Week

The restrictions from the kafala system that gives employers control over the lives of 10 million migrant workers will be eased by Saudi Arabia. The contractual restrictions that currently prevent private-sector workers from changing jobs or leaving the country without the employer's consent will be eased beginning March 2021.

### [Saudi Arabia's PIF takes US\\$1.3 billion stake in India's Reliance Retail Ventures](#)

November 05, 2020, Arab News

Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund has taken a \$1.3 billion stake in India's biggest retailer. The PIF acquired 2.04 percent stake in Reliance Retail Ventures (RRVL).

### [India Wants OPEC to Fix Asian Oil Pricing Anomaly](#)

November 05, 2020, Oilprice.com

India wants OPEC to review its pricing policies for the Asian market and end the premium it puts on its crude for Asia, India's Oil and Natural Gas Minister Dharmendra Pradhan said at the virtual OPEC-India Dialogue meeting with OPEC Secretary General Mohammad Barkindo on Thursday (November 05).

[Pakistan May Return \\$2 Billion Saudi Arabian Loan](#)

November 07, 2020, The Economic Times

Pakistan might return the \$2 billion Saudi Arabian loan and is looking for various options to secure more lending aimed at retaining gross official foreign exchange reserves at their current level of over \$12 billion.

## Syria

### [No Justification for Chemical Weapon use 'Under Any Circumstances' – UN Disarmament Chief](#)

November 05, 2020, UN News

The top UN disarmament official on Thursday (November 05) briefed the Security Council on progress made by Syria towards eliminating its chemicals weapons programme, complicated by the coronavirus pandemic.

### [President Bashar al-Assad Blames Syria's Economic Turmoil on Lebanon, Not Sanctions](#)

November 05, 2020, AL-Monitor

Syrian President Bashar al-Assad said his country's deteriorating economy can be explained by the billions of dollars of Syrian deposits (between \$20 billion and \$40 billion) he said are tied up in cash-strapped Lebanese bank accounts.

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## Turkey

### [Greece Rushes to Establish Military Alliance with India As Turkey, Pakistan Develop Close Defence Collaboration](#)

November 01, 2020, Eurasian Times

India and Greece recently had a security briefing about the current situation in the Eastern Mediterranean region. The Foreign Ministers of the two countries held virtual talks on October 29 about a range of regional and multilateral issues.

### [President Erdogan Ousts Central Bank Governor after Steep Lira Slide](#)

November 07, 2020, Reuters

Turkish President Erdogan fired central bank governor Murat Uysal on Saturday (November 07) and replaced him with ex-finance minister Naci Agbal, acting after a 30 percent plunge in the lira currency's value to record low this year.

### [Erdogan Tells Putin that Armenia Must Negotiate Over Nagorno-Karabakh](#)

November 08, 2020, Reuters

In a statement, the presidency said Erdogan told Putin in a phone call that Armenia must withdraw from Azeri lands it is occupying and "stated the Armenian leadership must be convinced to sit down at the negotiating table."

### [France Condemns Erdogan over Islam Row, Threatens Sanctions](#)

November 05, 2020, AL Jazeera

France on Thursday (November 05) condemned what it said were "declarations of violence" by Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, and raised the possibility of new sanctions against Ankara.

## UAE

### [Trump Administration to Sell UAE 18 MQ-9B Drones in \\$2.9 Billion Deal: Report](#)

November 06, 2020, The Defence Post

The US State Department has notified Congress it plans to sell 18 battle-ready MQ-9B drones to the United Arab Emirates (UAE). The deal could be worth as much as \$2.9 billion.

### [UAE Relaxes Islamic Laws, Allows Cohabitation of Unmarried Couples](#)

November 07, 2020, Business Standard

The United Arab Emirates announced on Saturday (November 07) a major overhaul of the country's Islamic personal laws, allowing unmarried couples to cohabit, loosening alcohol restrictions and criminalising so-called honour killings.

### [India, UAE Agree to Explore Ways to Facilitate Investments](#)

November 03, 2020, The Financial Express

India and the UAE agreed that the recent challenging circumstances of COVID-19 made it even more important to encourage investment and cooperation in areas of mutual interest with the purpose of stimulating economic activity. The discussions were held during the eighth meeting of the India-UAE High Level Joint Task Force on Investments.

## Yemen

### [Plea to Rescue Indians Held Hostage in Yemen](#)

November 07, 2020, The Hindu

The Indian Supreme Court has sought government's response on an urgent plea from a 33-year-old Tirunelveli resident to rescue her husband and other Indian workers held "captive" by Houthi rebels in Yemen. M. Velmathi from Tamil Nadu said there had been no response from officials despite repeated entreaties.



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