



# 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

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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.

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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](#).

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Contents

Abstract .....	i
Bahrain.....	1
Egypt .....	2
Iraq .....	3
Iran.....	5
Israel.....	7
Jordan.....	9
Kuwait.....	10
Lebanon.....	11
Oman .....	12
Qatar .....	13
Saudi Arabia.....	14
Syria.....	15
Turkey.....	16
UAE .....	17
Yemen.....	18

## Abstract

In a major development that could spark wider conflict in the Middle East, Iranian nuclear scientist 'Mohsen Fakhrizadeh' was assassinated in an ambush near Tehran on November 27, 2020. It is important to note that, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had specifically mentioned Fakhrizadeh's name in the unveiling of Iran's secret nuclear archive obtained by the 'Mossad' in 2018. Iran's President Hassan Rouhani "held Zionist regime (Israel) responsible for the attack and vowed to respond to the martyrdom of the Iranian scientist at a proper time." There was support for Iran from some countries in the region, Qatar described assassination as "violation of human rights" while Turkey labelled it as an "act of terrorism." In a related development, U.S. sanctioned Chinese (New Materials and Zibo Elim Trade) and Russian companies (Nilco Group and Joint Stock Company Elecon) accused of "transferring sensitive technology for Iran's missile program".

India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar visited Bahrain and UAE on November 25 and 26 respectively, where he held meetings with his Bahraini counterpart Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani and Abu Dhabi's Crown Prince H.H. Mohammed Bin Zayed. In UAE, EAM "discussed ways to advance strategic cooperation in the post-COVID-19 era"; while in Bahrain he conveyed India's condolences on the passing away of former PM H.R.H Prince Khalifa bin Salman Al Khalifa and agreed to increase defence and maritime cooperation. India also thanked UAE and Bahrain for taking special care of the Indian diaspora during the on-going pandemic. India-Bahrain healthcare trade is also likely to grow in the near future.

In another development, during his address to the India-led International Solar Alliance (ISA), the Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu underlined India and Israel as partners in quest for low carbon future and green economy. Meanwhile the UAE has temporarily stopped issuing new visas to 13 mostly Muslim states including Pakistan. This visa ban comes in the aftermath of explosion in Jeddah targeting commemoration of World War I and UAE's normalisation of relations with Israel.

Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has snubbed Pakistan's proposal to hold a special session on 'Kashmir' at its 47<sup>th</sup> Session of the Council of Foreign Minister's (CFM) held in Niger. However, the OIC did adopt a resolution that referred to matters such as the scrapping of the special status of the erstwhile state of Jammu and Kashmir and alleged human rights abuses in the region. India's Ministry of External Affairs categorically rejected the factually incorrect,

gratuitous and unwarranted references to India in resolutions adopted by the Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC).

In a security related development, Pakistan is reportedly buying 'mini drones' from Turkey to bolster its surveillance capability against India. Meanwhile, 14 Indian nationals held in detention in Yemen have been released. In another development, the Houthi rebels have given permission to the United Nations to visit and assess the ecological damage that can be caused by deteriorating oil tanker off Yemen's coast that could potentially spill 1.1 million barrels of crude oil into the Red Sea.

On the regional security front, Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu held a meeting with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman Al-Saud. Saudi Prince is reluctant to normalise relations with Israel in the aftermath of Joe Biden's victory in the U.S. Presidential election and Saudi Arabia's strong desire to build ties with the incoming Biden administration. This meeting could also be seen as a signal to the Biden administration that it should not revert back to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (Iran nuclear deal).

In a major development, the European Parliament adopted a non-binding resolution in support of EU member Cyprus urging EU leaders to "take action and impose sanctions on Turkey for Ankara's illegal gas exploration in the Eastern Mediterranean." The resolution is also likely to bolster support for France's push for EU sanctions on Turkey.

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

## Bahrain

### [India, Bahrain Agree to Increase Defence and Maritime Security Cooperation](#)

November 26, 2020, Outlook

India and Bahrain on Wednesday (November 25) agreed to further strengthen their historic ties, including in areas of defence and maritime security, as External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Bahraini counterpart discussed bilateral issues as well as regional and global matters of mutual interest.

### [India Bahrain Set for Health Trade Boom amid Growing Demand](#)

November 23, 2020, The Week

Speaking at a webinar highlighting opportunities between the two countries, India's Ambassador to the Kingdom of Bahrain Piyush Srivastava said, "India's position as the 'pharmacy of the world' can be further strengthened through new Gulf partnerships."

### [EAM Jaishankar Hails Contributions of Indian Diaspora in Bahrain for Strengthening Bilateral Ties](#)

November 25, 2020, Hindustan Times

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Wednesday (November 25) virtually interacted with the members of the Indian diaspora in Bahrain via video conference and appreciated their valuable contributions to the strengthening of the bilateral ties.

### [Israeli PM Netanyahu to Make 'Historic' Visit to UAE, Bahrain](#)

November 25, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is set to make a "historic visit" to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain early next week.

## Egypt

### [Egypt's President in 1st South Sudan Visit Talks Nile, Stability](#)

November 28, 2020, Outlook

In the first visit by an Egyptian president to South Sudan, President Abdel-Fattah el-Sissi said he and President Salva Kiir discussed regional security and the usage of Nile waters, but he didn't mention the country currently at the heart of either issue, Ethiopia.

## Iraq

### [Iran Tells Iraqi Factions 'No Attacks' on U.S. Targets until Trump is Gone'](#)

November 24, 2020, Middle East Eye

Terrified that Donald Trump could launch a new Middle East war, Iran dispatched one of its top generals to Baghdad last week to order allied Iraqi factions to cease all attacks until Joe Biden is in the White House.

### [Iraq Trains United States-Sanctioned Militia Leader for Army Position: Sources](#)

November 27, 2020, The Economic Times

Making al-Lami a senior officer in the army is one of the boldest moves yet by the Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, a U.S. ally, to dilute the power of Iran-backed militias in Iraq. This aligns with Washington's stated desire to curtail Tehran's influence across the Middle East.

### [Four Dead as Shia Cleric Sadr's Followers Storm Protesters' Camp in Southern Iraq](#)

November 27, 2020, Daily Sabah

The violence erupted as tens of thousands of Sadr supporters hit the streets of Baghdad and the southern city of Nasiriyah in a show of force as preparations ramp up for June parliamentary elections in Iraq.

### [The Netherlands to Send New Troops to Iraq as Coalition Shifts to Advisory Role](#)

November 25, 2020, AL-Monitor

The Netherlands is preparing to bolster its mission in Iraq by sending up to 150 additional troops to Iraqi Kurdistan, according to a vote by the Dutch Council of Ministers. The troops will be responsible for security at the Erbil airport alongside US forces.

### [Iraq Voices Frustration with OPEC Days before Crunch Meeting](#)

November 26, 2020, Bloomberg

OPEC should take members' economic and political conditions into account when deciding production quotas rather than adopting a "one-size-fits-all" approach, according to Ali Allawi, Iraq's finance and deputy prime minister.



[Iraqi Minister: Chinese Companies Helping with Port Project](#)

November 9, 2020, Middle East Monitor

Iraqi Minister of Transport, Nasser Al-Shibli, said that Chinese companies have been providing services with regards to the implementation of the Al-Faw Grand Port project in the southern governorate of Basra.

## Iran

### [Top Iranian Nuclear Scientist Assassinated Near Tehran](#)

November 27, 2020, AL Jazeera

High-ranking Iranian nuclear physicist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, named by the West as leading the Islamic Republic's military nuclear programme until its disbanding in the early 2000s, has been assassinated in an ambush near Tehran.

### [Iran's Foreign Minister Zarif Urges EU to Stop Double Standards, Condemn Fakhrizadeh Assassination](#)

November 29, 2020, Islamic Republic News Agency (Iran)

Terrorists murdered an excellent Iranian scientist. This cowardice, in which there are serious references to Israel's role, is an expression of the desperate warmongering of the perpetrators, Zarif wrote on his Twitter account on Sunday (November 29).

### [U.S. Aircraft Carrier Deployed to Gulf, Navy Says Unrelated to 'Specific Threats'](#)

November 28, 2020, Reuters

U.S. aircraft carrier USS Nimitz was deployed to the Gulf this week, days before the killing of Iran's top nuclear scientist, although the U.S. Navy said on Saturday (November 28) the deployment was not related to any specific threat.

### [Iran's Supreme Leader Promises Retaliation for Nuclear Scientist's Killing](#)

November 28, 2020, Reuters

Iran's supreme leader Ali Khamenei promised on Saturday (November 28) to retaliate for the killing of the Islamic Republic's top nuclear scientist, raising the threat of a new confrontation with the West and Israel in the remaining weeks of Donald Trump's presidency.

### [US Sanctions Chinese, Russian Firms Over Iran Dealings](#)

November 27, 2020, Voice of America

The U.S. announced economic sanctions Friday (November 27) on Chinese and Russian companies that Washington said had supported the development of Iran's missile program.

[Iran-backed Houthis Say Missile that Hit Saudi Arabia Will Also Target Eilat in Israel](#)

November 25, 2020, The Times of Israel

Quds-2 missile fired from Yemen tore hole in an oil facility in Jiddah, 600 km away; official says it's being developed to reach Israel.

## Israel

### [Iran Accuses Israel of Killing Top Nuclear Scientist, Vows 'Revenge'](#)

November 28, 2020, The Economic Times

Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif said there were "serious indications of an Israeli role" in the assassination of Iranian nuclear scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh.

### [PM Netanyahu Says Biden Must Not Go Back to Iran Nuclear Deal](#)

November 28, 2020, Reuters

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, in an apparent message to U.S. President-elect Joe Biden, said on Sunday (November 22) there should be no return to the 2015 Iran nuclear deal abandoned by President Donald Trump.

### [Israeli Navy Commissions Its Most Advanced Warship Ever](#)

November 25, 2020, Israel Hayom

Israel is due to receive four state-of-the-art Sa'ar 6 ships by November 2021 with each platform costing USD400 million. The German government is footing one-third of the cost per ship.

### [Israelis Pay Respects to Victims of 26/11 Mumbai Attacks; Condemn 'Pakistan-Sponsored Terrorism'](#)

November 26, 2020, Hindustan Times

Israelis held ceremonies to pay respects to the victims of the 26/11 Mumbai terror attacks, demanding that the perpetrators of the carnage be brought to justice and condemning "Pakistan-sponsored terrorism".

### [Israel, India Partners in Quest for Future with Low Carbon: PM Netanyahu](#)

November 27, 2020, Business Standard

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has said that his country is India's partner in its quest for a future with low carbon and pollution levels, and exuded confidence that solar energy would constitute over 25 per cent of his country's energy supply by 2030.

[Israeli PM Netanyahu Met Saudi Crown Prince, Pompeo in Saudi Arabia](#)

November 23, 2020, Reuters

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu travelled to Saudi Arabia and met its crown prince, an Israeli official said on Monday (November 23), in what would be the first publicly confirmed visit there by an Israeli leader as they close ranks against Iran.

['Until King Salman Has Gone,' No Progress on Israel-Saudi Normalization – Report](#)

November 27, 2020, The Times of Israel

No progress toward normalized ties with Saudi Arabia will be made so long as King Salman remains in power, according to an unnamed “senior Israeli source” who is familiar with the interactions between the two countries.

## Jordan

### [Jordan Asserts Custodianship of Al-Aqsa Mosque Fearing Saudi Takeover](#)

November 27, 2020, Middle East Monitor

The Hashemite Kingdom of Jordan has affirmed its custodianship of Al-Aqsa Mosque following concerns that the fate of Jerusalem's Islamic sacred sites could be up for grabs in any future normalisation between Israel and Saudi Arabia.

## Kuwait

### [Kuwait Naval Force and Coast Guard Conduct Maritime Exercise with US Navy and Coast Guard](#)

November 8, 2020, Navy Recognition

According to information published by the U.S. Department of Defense, on November 5, 2020, the Kuwait Naval Force (KNF), Kuwait Coast Guard and U.S. Navy and Coast Guard forces assigned to U.S. Naval Forces Central Command (NAVCENT) participated in a bilateral, joint maritime security patrol exercise in the North Arabian Gulf, November 5, 2020.

## Lebanon

### [Lebanon's Hezbollah Says Iran Will Be One to Respond to the Assassination of Nuclear Scientist](#)

November 28, 2020, Deccan Herald

The deputy leader of Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah movement said on Friday (November 29) that the response for the assassination of Iranian scientist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh was in Iran's hands.



## Oman

### [Oman, China Joint Committee Explores Economic, Investment Cooperation](#)

November 24, 2020, Oman News Agency

The Oman-China Joint Committee held its ninth session via video-conferencing to discuss and promote economic and investment cooperation between the two sides.

## Qatar

### [Killing of Iranian Scientist a 'Violation of Human Rights': Qatar](#)

November 28, 2020, AL Jazeera

Qatar has condemned the assassination of Iranian nuclear physicist Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, calling it “a clear violation of human rights”.

## Saudi Arabia

### [Organisation of Islamic Cooperation Snubs Pakistan on Kashmir Again](#)

November 26, 2020, WION

For months, Pakistan has been demanding discussion on Kashmir and wanted the OIC to raise the issue. Islamabad wanted OIC members to join its propaganda drive against India; however, the OIC has snubbed Pakistan regarding a special session on Kashmir.

### [Regrettable that OIC Continues to Allow Itself to be used by Pakistan to Indulge in Anti-India Propaganda: MEA](#)

November 29, 2020, Times Now

Reacting strongly to a reference of Kashmir at the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) said, "OIC has no locus standi in matters strictly internal to India, including that of Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir which is an integral and inalienable part of India."

### [Saudi Arabia Prefers to Normalize Relations with Israel under Biden - Report](#)

November 28, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

Saudi Arabia appears to have delayed plans to normalize ties with Israel until after President-elect Joe Biden enters office on January 20th.

### [British Military Sent on Secret Mission to Protect Saudi Oil Fields](#)

November 27, 2020, Oilprice.com

The UK Ministry of Defence confirmed that the mission was to protect oil fields in Saudi Arabia from attacks, in the wake of the September 2019 attacks on critical Saudi oil infrastructure that affected half of Saudi Arabia's oil production, or around 5 percent of global oil supply, for weeks.

## Syria

### [Israeli Air-Strike Killed at Least 19 Pro-Iran Fighters in Syria](#)

November 26, 2020, The Times of Israel

Air-strikes likely carried out by Israel killed at least 19 pro-Iran militia fighters in war-torn Eastern Syria, a war monitor said Thursday (November 26).

### [China's UN Deputy Envoy Urges U.S. to Immediately Lift Unilateral Sanctions on Syria](#)

November 26, 2020, CGTN

China urges relevant countries including the United States to lift unilateral sanctions on Syria, said Geng Shuang, China's deputy envoy to the UN.

## Turkey

### [Pakistan Buying Mini Drones from Turkey to Bolster Its Border Offensive against India](#)

November 29, 2020, Eurasian Times

With Turkish drones gaining attention for their battle performances, as demonstrated in the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the wars in Syria and Libya, Pakistan is reportedly planning to profit from its closest ally's autonomous assets.

### [Turkey Condemns Iran Scientist Killing as 'Terrorism'](#)

November 29, 2020, Arab News

Turkey said Sunday (November 29) that the killing of a key Iranian nuclear scientist was an act of "terrorism" that "upsets peace in the region."

### [France, EU Lawmakers Push for Sanctions on Turkey Next Month](#)

November 26, 2020, Reuters

The European Parliament urged the EU on Thursday (November 26) to impose sanctions on Turkey after President Erdogan this month paid a visit to the breakaway Turkish Cypriot north of Cyprus.

## UAE

### [EAM Jaishankar Discusses Cooperation between India and UAE in Post-Covid Era with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince](#)

November 26, 2020, The Economic Times

External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar has discussed the advancement of strategic cooperation between India and the UAE in the post-COVID era with Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan during his visit to the Gulf kingdom.

### [UAE Halts New Visas to Citizens of 13 Mostly Muslim States: Document](#)

November 25, 2020, Reuters

The United Arab Emirates has stopped issuing new visas to citizens of 13 mostly Muslim-majority countries, including Iran, Syria, Afghanistan and Pakistan.

## Yemen

### [14 Indian Hostages Released from Yemen](#)

November 29, 2020, Gulf News

The 14 Indian nationals were under detention in Sana'a for over nine months. The Indian Embassy in Yemeni capital Sana'a had been in constant contact with them. Arrangements are being made for their safe return to India.

### [Houthis Give UN Permission to Inspect Stranded Oil Tanker](#)

November 25, 2020, AL Jazeera

Houthi rebels in Yemen have given a long-awaited approval to a United Nations plan to visit and assess a deteriorating oil tanker off Yemen's coast that is threatening to spill 1.1 million barrels of crude oil into the Red Sea.



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