



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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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

In a significant development, the Indian Army Chief General MM Naravane is set to visit Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) beginning December 06 in a push to expand defence and security cooperation with the two important Gulf nations. According to reports, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar are interested in purchasing the Indo-Russian 'BrahMos' supersonic cruise missile systems, the talks for same are in the early stages.

In another development, Ministry of Defence which had earlier banned the import of artillery guns from December 2020, backtracked from its ban, and allowed the imports of artillery guns for another year, clearing the decks for importing up to 1,580 guns from the Israeli company, Elbit Systems.

India which had stopped oil imports from Iran to comply with the U.S. sanctions believes that following the victory of Joe Biden in the U.S. Presidential election, oil imports from Iran and Venezuela could restart, allowing India to diversify its crude supplies. Further, India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations reiterated "steadfast support" for the "just Palestinian cause" at the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA).

On the economic front, India and the UAE will hold 'Food Security Summit' in Dubai on December 8 and 9. While, Kuwait announced its decision to allow return of the foreign domestic workers beginning December 07; in the initial phase, workers only from India and the Philippines will be allowed back in Kuwait. Oman also announced the establishment of 'Oman-India Friendship Association'.

On the regional security front, in a significant development, Turkey is sending Syrian mercenaries who had earlier fought in Libya and Azerbaijan to reinforce and fight in Kashmir. In another regional development, Egypt, Greece and Cyprus held "Medusa 10" naval exercise in the Mediterranean Sea, with participation from France and the UAE sending a strong strategic signal to Turkey. On the other hand there are signs that in a move brokered by the Americans, Saudi Arabia and its gulf allies could soon end their four year blockade of Qatar.

In light of the growing tensions with Iran amid recent targeted killing of the nuclear scientist and the earlier killing of IRGC Quds Force Commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the United States is "withdrawing some of its Baghdad (Iraq) embassy staff." In another major development, America's top naval officer for the Middle-East, Vice Adm. Sam Paparo the Commander of US Fifth Fleet speaking at

Manama Dialogue, mentioned that the US has reached an uneasy deterrence with Iran, while endorsing healthy respect for both Iran's regular navy and the naval forces of its Revolutionary Guard, which is blacklisted by the United States as a terror group. On the other hand, Iran strung by the assassination of its top nuclear scientist responded by enacting a law ordering an immediate ramping up of its enrichment of uranium to levels closer to weapons-grade fuel.

U.S. President-elect Joe Biden once again re-iterated his commitment to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) which would serve as a "starting point to follow-on negotiations" with Iran. In a reaction to this statement, the Iranian Government underlined that these must be without any pre conditions. In a related development, the UN Security Council announced that it will hold a session on the JCPOA in December before the Christmas break. In another development, the Trump administration is considering designating Yemen's Houthi rebels as terrorist organisation.

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

Bahrain

[Bahrain Now 2nd Country to Approve Pfizer/BioNtech Covid-19 Vaccine Use](#)

December 04, 2020, Arab News

Bahrain said it has granted emergency use authorization for the Pfizer/BioNTech COVID-19 vaccine, becoming the second country after Britain to approve it.

[Israel Expects \\$220 Million in Non-defence Trade with Bahrain in 2021](#)

December 02, 2020, Reuters

Israel foresees \$220 million in non-defence trade with Bahrain in 2021, the Economic Ministry said on Wednesday (December 02) as it hosted a delegation from the Gulf state to cement newly established ties.

[In Backtrack, Bahrain Won't Import Settlement and Golan Goods as Made in Israel](#)

December 05, 2020, The Times of Israel

Bahrain will distinguish between Israeli goods from disputed territories and those made in Israel proper, the country's foreign minister said on Saturday (December 05), in a comment that walked back a statement made earlier in the week by the Gulf kingdom's trade minister.

Egypt

[Egypt, Greece, Cyprus Hold Military Drill in Mediterranean](#)

December 06, 2020, Asharaq AL-Awsat

Egypt, Greece, and Cyprus began the main stage of "Medusa 10" joint naval and aerial training on the shores of the Mediterranean Sea along with the participation of French and Emirati Navy, Aerial and Special Forces. The drill is part of the coordinated efforts and joint work to confront the challenges in the Mediterranean region.

Iraq

[U.S. 'Withdrawing Some Baghdad Embassy Staff' Amid Regional Tension](#)

December 03, 2020, AL Jazeera

The United States embassy in Baghdad is withdrawing some of its staff ahead of the first anniversary of the US killing of top Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in the Iraqi capital.

[Muqtada al-Sadr May be Preparing a Bid to be Iraq's Next Prime Minister](#)

December 04, 2020, AL-Monitor

The populist Shiite cleric appears to be gearing up for the upcoming parliamentary elections slated for June 2021 in a bid to win the premiership of Iraq.

Iran

[India Hopes to Restart Oil Imports from Iran, Venezuela under President Biden](#)

December 02, 2020, Oilprice.com

India would like to have more opportunities to work for diversifying its sources of crude, including by resuming oil imports from Venezuela and Iran under President Biden, according to India's Oil Minister Dharmendra Pradhan.

[Assassinated Iranian Nuclear Scientist Shot with Remote-Controlled Machine Gun](#)

November 30, 2020, CNN

The Iranian nuclear scientist assassinated east of Tehran was shot by a remote-controlled machine gun operating out of another car, the semi-official Fars News Agency said Sunday (November 29).

[Top Middle-East US Navy official Says 'Uneasy Deterrence' Reached with Iran](#)

December 06, 2020, The Times of Israel

Vice Adm. Sam Paparo the Commander of US Fifth Fleet speaking at Manma Dialogue, mentioned that the US has reached an uneasy deterrence with Iran, while endorsing healthy respect for both Iran's regular navy and the naval forces of its Revolutionary Guard, which is blacklisted by the United States as a terror group.

[UN Security Council to Hold Session on JCPOA in December](#)

December 02, 2020, Tehran Times

"Before the Christmas break, the Security Council will hear briefings on the Middle East [West Asia] peace process, including the question of Palestine, and the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action on Iran's nuclear program," the UN said in a statement on Tuesday (December 01).

[Iran Moves to Increase Uranium Enrichment and Bar Nuclear Inspectors](#)

December 02, 2020, The New York Times

Iran responded Wednesday (December 02) to the assassination of its top nuclear scientist by enacting a law ordering an immediate ramping up of its enrichment of uranium to levels closer to weapons-grade fuel. The measure also requires the expulsion of international nuclear inspectors if American sanctions are not lifted by early February, posing a direct challenge to President-elect Joseph R. Biden Jr.

[Biden: Iran Nuclear Deal Best Way to Avoid Middle East Arms Race](#)

December 02, 2020, AL Jazeera

Biden said a return to the JCPOA, which would include lifting the sanctions imposed by the administration of President Donald Trump, would serve as a “starting point to follow-on negotiations” with Iran.

[Iran Rejects Biden's Terms for Reviving Nuclear Deal](#)

December 03, 2020, BBC News

Iran will not accept pre-conditions from a new Biden administration over its nuclear programme and the US must return to a 2015 deal before talks can take place, its foreign minister said.

[Iran Sends Biggest Ever Fleet of Oil Tankers to Venezuela](#)

December 06, 2020, AL Jazeera

Iran is sending its biggest fleet yet of Oil tankers to Venezuela in defiance of U.S. sanctions to help the isolated nation weather a crippling fuel shortage.

Israel

[Artillery Import Embargo Put off, Doors Open for INR 23,700 Crore Israeli Guns](#)

November 30, 2020, Business Standard

On August 9, the Ministry of Defence (MoD) cited the Prime Minister's Atmanirbhar Bharat (self-reliant India) initiative to ban the import of artillery guns from Israel in December 2020. Twelve days later, the MoD backtracked and allowed imports for an extra year, clearing the decks for importing up to 1,580 guns from Israeli company, Elbit Systems.

[India's UN Envoy Highlights 'Steadfast Support' for the Palestinian Cause at UNGA](#)

December 03, 2020, Republic World

India's Permanent Representative to the United Nations TS Tirumurti on Wednesday (December 02) said India has been steadfast in its support for the "just Palestinian cause," and its solidarity for the people of Palestine.

[Israeli Defence Minister Calls on Palestinians to Return to Negotiations](#)

December 04, 2020, Arab News

Alternate Prime Minister and Defence Minister Benny Gantz called on the Palestinians to return to negotiations and coordination regarding the coronavirus pandemic. Israel will provide COVID-19 vaccines for the Palestinians, Israeli Defence Minister said.

[Saudi Prince: Bully Israel Steals Land, Puts Palestinians in Concentration Camps](#)

December 06, 2020, The Times of Israel

A Saudi prince and former senior government official on Sunday (December 06) launched a blistering attack against Israel, describing the Jewish state as a belligerent and apartheid-practicing occupier, and saying that peace will remain elusive until the creation of a Palestinian state along 1967 lines.

Jordan

[Jordan, Israel in Rare Meeting on Palestinian Issue](#)

December 04, 2020, AL Jazeera

Jordanian Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi has held a rare meeting with his Israeli counterpart to press for the restart of stalled negotiations between the Palestinians and the Jewish state.

Kuwait

[Kuwait to Allow Return of Foreign Domestic Workers from December 7](#)

December 02, 2020, Mathrubhumi

The Kuwait authority has announced that domestic workers from other countries will be allowed to enter the country from December 7. In the initial phase entry is limited only for workers from India and the Philippines.

[Kuwait Announces Parliamentary Election Results](#)

December 06, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Kuwait's electoral committees announced on Sunday (December 06) winners of 2020 parliamentary elections in five electoral districts.

Lebanon

[Lebanon Crisis: France's Macron Announces Fund for Sustained Aid](#)

December 02, 2020, AL Jazeera

French President Emmanuel Macron announced a World Bank-hosted humanitarian fund for crisis-hit Lebanon on Wednesday (December 02), saying relief would bypass the country's increasingly ostracised politicians and go directly to the Lebanese people and trusted NGOs.

Oman

[Oman, Indian Foreign Ministers Hold Virtual Dialogue on Bilateral, Regional and Multilateral Issues](#)

December 05, 2020, Gulf News

The Foreign Minister of Oman Sayyid Badr Hamad bin Hamoud Al Busaidi held a virtual meeting with his Indian counterpart, Dr. S Jaishankar recently. The two ministers had extensive discussions on bilateral, regional and multilateral issues.

[Oman Announces Directive to Form Friendship Association with India](#)

December 03, 2020, The Economic Times

Oman, India's oldest strategic partner in West Asia, has announced establishment of the Oman-India Friendship Association, in what would be the first such initiative in West Asia led by the Foreign Ministry.

Qatar

[Saudi-Qatar Deal to End Blockade is Close, Say Reports](#)

December 03, 2020, Middle East Eye

A deal between Saudi Arabia and Qatar to end the almost four-year blockade of Qatar could be close at hand, as US Middle East envoy Jared Kushner continued his efforts in the last days of the Trump administration.

Saudi Arabia

[India Condemns Missile Attack on Saudi Arabia's Oil Facility](#)

December 02, 2020, The Economic Times

India on Tuesday (December 01) strongly condemned the missile attack targeting a facility of Aramco oil company in Saudi Arabia's Red Sea city of Jeddah last week.

[Indian Army Chief to Visit Saudi Arabia and UAE](#)

December 03, 2020, Hindustan Times

Indian Army Chief General MM Naravane is set to make a four-day visit to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) from December 6.

[UAE, Saudi Arabia interested in BrahMos Missile](#)

December 04, 2020, Financial Express

"From the Gulf Region countries including Qatar, UAE, and Saudi Arabia have expressed interest in buying the Indo-Russian BrahMos Missile. The talks are still in the early stages and further discussions have been put on hold due to the global lockdown due to COVID-19."

[India, Saudi Arabia Hold Talks on Air Bubble Agreement to Resume Flights](#)

November 25, 2020, The New Indian Express

India and Saudi Arabia are holding talks to establish air bubble arrangement to facilitate unhindered travel between the two countries.

Syria

[Air Strike Kills Iranian Commander at Iraq-Syria Border: Officials](#)

December 01, 2020, Hindustan Times

An air-strike killed a commander of Iran's Revolutionary Guards at the Iraq-Syria border sometime between Saturday (November 28) and Sunday (November 29), Iraqi security and local militia officials said on Monday (November 30).

Turkey

[Turkey is Preparing Syrian Mercenaries to Fight in Kashmir: Report](#)

December 07, 2020, Greek City Times

Turkey, which previously sent Syrian mercenaries to Libya and Azerbaijan, is now preparing to send its fighters to Kashmir. According to ANF News, which quoted local sources in Northern Syria, Abu Emsa, the head of the Turkish-backed Suleyman Shah Brigades terrorist organization that is a part of the so-called Syrian National Army, informed his members five days ago that Ankara wanted to reinforce Kashmir.

[Turkey: France's Resolution Recognizing Nagorno-Karabakh as Independent Republic 'Biased & Unrealistic'](#)

November 26, 2020, Daily Sabah

The French Senate's adoption of a resolution urging the government to recognize Nagorno-Karabakh as an independent republic shows how biased France is toward the dispute, the Turkish Foreign Ministry recently stated.

[Turkey Soon to Launch National AI Strategy, Technology Minister Says](#)

December 02, 2020, Daily Sabah

Turkey will soon launch a national artificial intelligence (AI) strategy, jointly developed by the country's public, private and academic bodies, the country's industry and technology minister said Tuesday (December 1).

UAE

[UAE-India Food Security Summit to be Held in Dubai](#)

December 06, 2020, Gulf News

Consulate General of India, Dubai, in association with Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) and Invest India will be hosting UAE India Food Security Summit in Dubai on December 8 and 9, 2020.

['Possible' UAE F-35 Deal Can be Inked before Trump Administration Ends, Says America's Top Arms Officials](#)

December 05, 2020, Defense News

Heidi Grant, the head of the Defense Security Cooperation Agency, acknowledged that such a timeline is logistically feasible but noted it would likely require quick action from the UAE.

[UAE Pushes for Long-pending Carbine Deal Under Make in India During Jaishankar Visit](#)

November 28, 2020, The Print

The United Arab Emirates has pushed for the long-pending contract for 93,895 Close Quarter Battle (CQB) Carbines for Indian Army won by its state-owned firm, Caracal, during the recent visit of External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar.

[India Working Towards Return of Workers to UAE Post Covid-19](#)

December 01, 2020, The Economic Times

The Government of India is actively working towards the return of its workers back to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain who had lost their jobs and had to be evacuated to India during the Covid-19 pandemic earlier this year.

Yemen

[Trump Administration Debates Labelling Yemen's Houthis as Terrorists, Aid Groups Warn Thousands Face Famine](#)

December 06, 2020, NBC News

Trump administration officials are locked in an internal debate about whether to label Houthi rebels in Yemen as a terrorist organization, as aid groups and United Nations officials warn that the move could trigger a humanitarian disaster in a country that has now spent five years at war.



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