



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



Volume II, Issue 52 | December 28, 2020

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org



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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

India's strategic partnership with the Gulf countries has strengthened significantly in the past few years. To further deepen the Qatar-India bilateral cooperation, Indian External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar embarked on a visit to Qatar on December 27. The EAM is scheduled to hold talks with Qatar's Deputy Prime Minister and Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani on bilateral, regional and international issues of mutual interest. In another development, India has invited Afghanistan to the next trilateral, India, Iran, and Uzbekistan meeting on the joint use of the strategically important 'Chabahar Port'. The date for the meeting is yet to be announced.

In a security related development, Israeli firm 'Rafael Advanced Defense Systems' announced it has been awarded a contract worth USD200 million by an "Asian Country" (presumably India) for provision of SPICE 2000 air-to-surface systems, Spike ATGMs, tactical electro-optically guided missiles, and advanced communication systems.

In another major security development, the Trump administration plans to sell Saudi Arabia arms worth USD500 million, including precision-guided, air-to-ground munitions, at an estimated cost of USD478 million. This agreement also includes the sale of a USD97 million internal security communication systems. On the other hand, President Trump slammed the U.S. Congress for granting USD1.3 billion military aid to Egypt whom it accused of using American aid to buy Russian weapons.

Myanmar's air force is buying two Airbus CASA C295 aircraft worth USD38.6 million from the Royal Jordanian Air Force to reduce dependence on the Chinese defence equipment.

On the regional security front, India welcomed the formation of new government in Yemen backed by Saudi Arabia. Earlier in the week, the Southern Yemeni separatists had agreed to join a new cabinet with the internationally recognised Yemeni government led by President Abdrabbuh Mansur Hadi. Meanwhile India's Ambassador to Turkey stated that, "Turkey-India bilateral relations need a course correction for the larger interests of the two G20 members." India's Ambassador further added, "Two countries of the stature of India and Turkey, somehow, have missed the larger picture, [and are] caught in certain issues, not looking at this bilateral relation as standalone relation, which should stand on its own merit."

The U.S.-Iran relations have further deteriorated in the past few weeks with major rocket attacks on the U.S. Embassy in Baghdad, for which President Trump has held Iran as responsible and warned Tehran of retaliation. In a related development, the Israeli Defence Forces (IDF) deployed a submarine in the gulf region in order to deter Iran. Meanwhile President Trump pardoned four 'Blackwater' (private American military firm) contractors convicted of massacre in Baghdad in 2007 that had left a dozen Iraqi civilians dead. The UN Human Rights Office warned the United States that, these pardons would embolden others to commit similar crimes. The United States is also considering granting immunity to Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman from a federal lawsuit that accuses the Saudi prince of assassination attempt on Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi.

On the regional economy front, Saudi Arabia granted 20 percent more foreign investment licenses in the third quarter of this year compared to the same period last year, with India and Egypt mainly beneficiaries of this increase. In another development, India and Israel signed an agreement on sharing expertise on climate resilient infrastructure as well as expediting cooperation in exchange and training of medical doctors and other health professionals, to assist in development of human resources and setting up green health-care facilities.

Israel is set to hold its fourth election for the Knesset (Israeli parliament) in just over two years. The unity government collapsed after the two main political parties, Likud led by Benjamin Netanyahu and Blue and White alliance led by Benny Gantz failed to meet the deadline in a row over the state budget. In another development, Israel launched rocket attacks on the Masyaf area of Syria; this area is significant for the Syrian President Bashar al-Assad's regime that includes a military academy and a scientific research center.

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

Bahrain

[Saudi Crown Prince: Our Relationship with Bahrain is 'Deep and Solid'](#)

December 24, 2020, Arab News

Saudi Arabia's relationship with Bahrain is "deep and solid," and ties between the two countries have spanned many years, Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman said on Thursday (December 24). The crown prince was speaking at the first meeting of the Saudi-Bahraini Coordinating Council.

[Bahrain Calls for End to Regional Conflicts as Gulf Summit Looms](#)

December 24, 2020, TRT World

Manama's Supreme Defence Council calls for a need "to end regional conflicts and disputes by peaceful means" as GCC nations prepare for a crucial January 5 summit in Saudi Arabia.

Egypt

[President Trump Slams America's \\$1.3bn in Military Aid Due to Egypt](#)

December 23, 2020, Middle East Monitor

US President Donald Trump criticised a draft resolution approved by Congress that includes aid to foreign countries while accusing the Egyptian army of using US aid to buy military equipment from Russia.

[Trump's Veto of Massive Defence Bill Sets Up Possible Override Vote Next Week](#)

December 24, 2020, CNN

President Donald Trump on Wednesday (December 23) vetoed the sweeping defence bill that both chambers of the U.S. Congress recently passed by veto-proof majorities, setting up what could be the first veto override of his presidency, which would pit members of his own party against him.

[Saudi Arabia Sees Foreign Investment Boost from India, Egypt](#)

December 22, 2020, Mint

Saudi Arabia granted 20 percent more foreign investment licenses in the third quarter compared to the same period last year, with India and Egypt driving the increase despite efforts to attract American and European interest.

Iraq

[President Trump Warns Iran of Retaliation after Attacks on U.S. Embassy in Baghdad](#)

December 23, 2020, The New York Times

President Trump warned Iran on Wednesday (December 23) that he would hold it accountable “if one American is killed” in rocket attacks in Iraq that the Trump administration and military officials blamed on Tehran.

[US-Supplies Convoy Targeted by Explosive Device in Iraq](#)

December 26, 2020, Middle East Monitor

The Iraqi Defence Ministry announced on Friday (December 25) that an explosive device detonated on a convoy of Iraqi trucks carrying supplies for the US-led international coalition on Al-Diwaniyah highway, south of the country.

[Trump Pardons 4 Blackwater Contractors Convicted of 2007 Iraq Massacre](#)

December 22, 2020, The Times of Israel

US President Donald Trump pardoned four former government contractors convicted in a 2007 massacre in Baghdad that left more than a dozen Iraqi civilians dead and caused an international uproar over the use of private security guards in a war zone.

[UN Criticises Trump's Pardons for Blackwater Guards Jailed over Iraq Killings](#)

December 24, 2020, BBC News

The UN has sharply criticised President Donald Trump's decision to pardon four former Blackwater contractors jailed over the killing of 14 Iraqi civilians. The UN Human Rights Office warned that the pardons would serve to embolden others to commit similar crimes.

[Gen. Soleimani Thwarted U.S. Plot to Change Region's Identity, Nouri Al-Maliki Says](#)

December 27, 2020, Tasnim News Agency

The former Iraqi prime minister and current secretary-general of the Islamic Dawa Party said the main reason behind the assassination of Iran's top anti-terror commander, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani, was that he thwarted the US plots to change the identity of the region.

Iran

[India to Invite Afghanistan to Next Meet on Chabahar Port](#)

December 24, 2020, Deccan Herald

Afghanistan will be invited to the next meeting of India, Iran and Uzbekistan on joint use of strategically-located Chabahar port, the Ministry of External Affairs said on Thursday (December 24).

[Israel Open to German Efforts to Expand Iran Nuclear Deal with More Restrictions](#)

December 24, 2020, The Times of Israel

Israel's Ambassador to Germany Issacharoff says call by Germany's Foreign Minister to redraw 2015 pact so it limits ballistic missiles and Tehran's regional interference is 'step in right direction'

[China Seeks US Return to Iran Nuclear Deal \(JCPOA\) and a Lifting of Sanctions](#)

December 22, 2020, South China Morning Post

China called on the United States on Monday (December 21) to return to the Iran nuclear deal without conditions and to lift all US sanctions against Iran and related entities.

[Gulf States Wary of US-Iran Tensions Ahead of Biden's Inauguration](#)

December 23, 2020, Axios

The UAE and Saudi Arabia will be closely monitoring any moves from Washington and Tehran over a delicate few weeks leading up to the anniversary of the targeted killing of IRGC Quds Force Commander Qassem Soleimani on January 3, 2020.

Israel

[Israel's Rafael Awarded \\$200 Million Contract by an Asian Country for SPICE Air-Surface Systems, Spike Tactical Missiles and Bnet Communication](#)

December 23, 2020, Rafael Advanced Defense Systems

Rafael Advanced Defense Systems announced that it has been awarded a \$200 million contract to provide an Asian country with SPICE 2000 air-to-surface systems, Spike ATGMs, tactical, electro-optically guided missiles, and advanced communication systems.

[India, Israel to Share Know-how on Building Climate Resilient Infrastructure](#)

December 21, 2020, Business Standard

India and Israel on Monday (December 21) signed an agreement to cooperate in the fields of health and medicine, including sharing of expertise in building climate resilient infrastructure and support to 'green healthcare'.

[Israel Election: New Poll Due After Unity Government Crumbles](#)

December 23, 2020, BBC News

Israel is set to hold its fourth elections in two years after the two main parties in its unity government failed to meet a deadline in a row over state budgets. Voters will return to the polls in March, just 12 months after the last round.

[Amid Iranian Threat, US Joint Chiefs of Staff Mark Milley Visits Israel](#)

December 18, 2020, Jewish News Syndicate

Israel's Defense Minister Benny Gantz said the U.S. military presence in the Middle East was an "important element in regional stability, which must be preserved."

[Israel Deploys Submarine to Persian Gulf in Message of Deterrence to Iran](#)

December 23, 2020, The Washington Post

An Israeli submarine has embarked for the Persian Gulf in possible preparation for any Iranian retaliation over the November assassination of a senior Iranian nuclear scientist, Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, Israeli media reported.

[IDF: Our Submarines Sail Everywhere, Iran: Our Response to Attack Will be Strong](#)

December 26, 2020, The Times of Israel

Israeli Army spokesman told Saudi newspaper that, Israel is tracking Iranian movements in the region, days after Israeli submarine said to cross the Suez Canal; Iranian Revolutionary Guard said ready for any scenario.

[Iranian Hackers Strike Again, Target Israeli Cyber-Security Firm Portnox](#)

December 25, 2020, The Jerusalem Post

The Iranian hacker group Pay2Key reportedly hacked into the Israeli cyber-security firm Portnox on Thursday (December 24).

Jordan

[Myanmar Buys Military Aircraft from Jordan as Part of Efforts to Reduce Dependence on China](#)

December 26, 2020, The Economic Times

Myanmar's air force is buying two Airbus CASA C295 aircraft worth \$38.6 million from the Royal Jordanian Air Force to reduce dependence on Chinese armoury.

Kuwait

[Indian Embassy to Celebrate 60 Years of Kuwait, India Ties](#)

December 23, 2020, Gulf News

The Indian Embassy in Kuwait is planning on celebrating the 60th anniversary of diplomatic ties between the two friendly countries during 2021-2022.

Lebanon

[Pompeo Regrets Israel-Lebanon Stalemate on Maritime Border, Offers US Mediation](#)

December 22, 2020, The Times of Israel

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo on Tuesday (December 22) voiced regret over a stalemate in maritime border talks between Israel and Lebanon and offered Washington's mediation.

[French Investigators to Question Carlos Ghosn in Lebanon](#)

December 26, 2020, Hindustan Times

A team of French investigators will come to Beirut next month to participate in interrogating former Renault-Nissan boss Carlos Ghosn, a Lebanese justice ministry official said.

Oman

[Oman Launches National Covid-19 Vaccine Campaign](#)

December 27, 2020, Gulf News

Oman has launched a national COVID-19 vaccination campaign, with the sultanate's health minister receiving the first dose of the Pfizer vaccine.

Qatar

[EAM Jaishankar Begins Two-day Visit to Qatar; Bilateral Cooperation in Focus](#)

December 27, 2020, DNA

During the visit, EAM Dr. Jaishankar will meet the foreign minister of Qatar, Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al-Thani and other top political leaders.

[Qatar and the United States Sign a Naval Agreement between their Ministries of Defense](#)

December 02, 2020, Daily Sabah

According to Qatar News Agency (QNA), the deal pertains to marine activities and port calls to the nation.

Saudi Arabia

[Trump Administration Pushing USD500 Million Arms Sale to Riyadh: Reports](#)

December 24, 2020, AL Jazeera

Donald Trump's administration plans to authorise the sale of nearly \$500m in weapons to Saudi Arabia before the United States president leaves the White House, US media outlets have reported.

[Germany Extends Arms Export Ban on Saudi Arabia](#)

December 10, 2020, Anadolu Agency

The German government has decided to extend the ban on exporting arms to Saudi Arabia until the end of 2021. Due to the war in Yemen and the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi, Berlin suspended arms exports to Riyadh in 2018.

[U.S. Considers Granting Immunity to Saudi Crown Prince in Suspected Assassination Attempt of Jamal Khashoggi](#)

December 22, 2020, The New York Times

The Trump administration is considering a request to grant Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman of Saudi Arabia immunity from a federal lawsuit that accuses him of trying to kill a former Saudi intelligence official Jamal Khashoggi living in Canada, legal documents related to the case show.

[Saudi King Calls Gulf Leaders to Attend GCC Summit](#)

December 26, 2020, Anadolu Agency

Saudi Arabia on Saturday (December 26) instructed the Gulf Cooperation Council's (GCC) top official to invite member countries' leaders to a summit slated for Jan. 5, 2021. The body's 41st summit is due to take place in the Saudi capital Riyadh amid hopes that it could witness an agreement to end a diplomatic crisis that has seen Qatar come under a blockade.

[Saudi Arabia Makes Four Oil and Gas Discoveries](#)

December 27, 2020, The Economic Times

Saudi Arabia's State oil producer Aramco discovered oil in the Al-Ajramiyah well, northwest of the city of Rafhaa, with tests showing a rate of 3,850 barrels per day (bpd).

Syria

[Israeli Jets Fly over Beirut, Explosions Reported in Syria](#)

December 25, 2020, Arab News

The Syrian Ministry of Defense issued a statement saying Israel "launched an aggression by directing a barrage of rockets" from the north of the Lebanese city of Tripoli toward the Masyaf area in Syria.

[Iranian President Vows to Help Syria Confront Israel 'Until Golan Liberated'](#)

December 08, 2020, The Times of Israel

Iran's President Hassan Rouhani said that, "Tehran and Damascus share a common goal of confronting Israel and will continue on that path until the Golan Heights has been returned to Syria."

Turkey

[Ties with Turkey Need 'Course Correction': Indian Envoy](#)

December 17, 2020, Anadolu Agency

The Indian ambassador to Turkey Sanjay Panda called for “course correction” in bilateral relations for “larger goals” of the two G20-member countries. Without naming anyone, Panda said: “Two countries of the stature of India and Turkey, somehow, have missed the larger picture, [and are] caught in certain issues, not looking at this bilateral relation as standalone relation, which should stand on its own merit.”

[Pakistan Left 'High & Dry' as Turkey Joins the UAE, Arab World in Boosting Ties with Israel](#)

December 26, 2020, Eurasian Times

Turkey has emerged as Pakistan's strongest ally and Israel as the common foe. However, Turkish President Erdogan recently said that he wished to improve ties with Israel putting Pakistan in an awkward position.

[Gold worth \\$6 Billion Discovered in Turkey; Mining to Start Within Two Years](#)

December 24, 2020, Business Today

Turkey has stumbled upon a huge gold deposit weighing as much as 99 tonnes, with valuation touted to be around USD6 billion.

UAE

[UAE First Country to Roll out Chinese Covid-19 Vaccine for Mass Use](#)

December 24, 2020, Global Times

The United Arab Emirates has become the world's first country to offer Chinese-developed COVID-19 vaccines to all citizens and residents for free as part of its efforts to achieve nationwide immunity against the coronavirus.

Yemen

[India Welcomes "Positive Developments" in Yemen](#)

December 25, 2020, Outlook

"India welcomes the positive developments in Yemen with the formation of the new power sharing Cabinet in the implementation of the Riyadh Agreement," External Affairs Ministry Spokesman said.

[New Yemen Gov't Sworn in After Saudi-brokered Power-sharing Deal](#)

December 26, 2020, AL Jazeera

Yemen's President Hadi has sworn in a new government that was formed thanks to a power-sharing deal brokered by Saudi Arabia last year. The 24-member cabinet, announced last week, was sworn in during a ceremony held on Saturday (December 26) in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, where Hadi is living.

[Yemen's STC Separatists Join Unity Government against Houthis](#)

December 19, 2020, Middle East Eye

Southern Yemeni separatists have agreed to join a new cabinet with the internationally recognised government, as part of Saudi-sponsored efforts to end the rift between the nominal allies.



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