



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



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Delhi Policy Group

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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

The Middle East (West Asia) is witnessing a major spike in U.S. arms deals post the Abraham accords. On December 29, the U.S. State Department's 'Defence Security Cooperation Agency' announced its approval for multiple arms and equipment sale deals which include; 'GBU-39 small diameter bomb munitions' and related equipment to Saudi Arabia worth USD290 million, 'AH-64E Apache helicopters' worth USD4 billion to Kuwait, USD104 million in defensive equipment against missile attack for Egyptian President plane and USD65.6 million precision targeting equipment for the Egyptian air force. There are reports that, Germany approved arms deals over EUR1 billion for the Middle East in 2020.

Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar paid a two day visit to Qatar on 27-28 December 2020. He handed a personal message from Indian Prime Minister to Amir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani inviting him to visit India and thanked him for taking care of the Indian community during the Covid-19 pandemic. EAM Dr. Jaishankar also held discussions with Qatar's Deputy PM and Foreign Minister on bilateral as well as regional and international issues of mutual interest. He also interacted with business leaders, appreciating their commitment for business partnerships while highlighting new opportunities flowing from India's 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' programme.

In a significant development, China has ratified an extradition treaty with Turkey about the return of Uighurs. Uighur activists have urged Ankara not to abide by this agreement that could put tens of thousands at risk of being detained in internment camps in China.

On the security front, India condemned a deadly attack on the Aden airport in Yemen on December 30 that killed 26 people and wounded 60. This attack took place shortly after a plane carrying the cabinet ministers of the war-torn country's newly formed government landed. In another development, Morocco's Ambassador to India highlighted the possibility of India-Morocco-Israel trilateral partnership that can help achieve peace in West Asia as well as create a win-win situation in sectors like food security, agriculture business, information technology, textiles, pharmaceuticals, fertilisers, and tourism. It must be noted that, earlier Israeli Ambassador to India had also proposed the idea of India-Israel-UAE trilateral partnership.

In terms of defence cooperation, Israel's Elbit Systems which had successfully concluded price talks with India regarding sale of 1,580 artillery guns, informed Indian Defence Minister Rajnath Singh through their MoD that no contract has been signed for the guns even as the Israeli firm was declared the lowest bidder. Elbit has promised to make this weapon system in India with 70 percent indigenous components.

On the economy front, India's sugar exports to Iran are likely to be hit by Tehran's shortage of Rupee reserves. In another development, India's Export Credit Guarantee Corporation and the UAE's Etihad Credit Insurance inked deal to enhance trade cooperation between the two nations.

Oman announced its budget for 2021 with a 14 percent spending cut; Oman is expected to add USD779 million from the implementation of 5 percent value-added tax (VAT) this year. Earlier, Saudi Arabia also announced USD263.91 billion budget for 2021 with around 7 percent less than estimated spending on account of low oil prices and COVID-19 induced economic contraction.

January 3, 2021 marked anniversary of the U.S. drone-strike in Baghdad that killed Iran's Quds Force Commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Iran's state media alleged that in addition to the United States, several other countries, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Germany and Britain, played a role in the assassination of Soleimani. Meanwhile, Iran informed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) about its plans to enrich Uranium to up to 20 percent. In a related development, the United States and Israel voted against United Nation's budget for 2021 on issues concerning Israel and Iran. The UN General Assembly approved USD3.231 billion budget for the upcoming year. In another development, Jonathan Pollard, the American who served 30 years in US prison for spying for Israel in a cold-war espionage case, returned to Israel and received a hero's welcome from the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

The past week witnessed two major blasts in Syria, one of them targeted an area close to the Russian military base in Northeast Syria, while the other attributed to ISIS ambushed a bus killing at least 28 people mainly soldiers.

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

Bahrain

[Qatar Tells UN Security Council of Repeated Bahraini Violations of its Territory](#)

January 01, 2021, Middle East Eye

Qatar's Foreign Ministry informed the UN Security Council on Friday (January 01) that Bahraini naval boats had violated its territorial waters in late November, ahead of a Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) summit on 5 January. It was the second time in less than a week that Doha had approached the UN about alleged Bahraini violations of its territory.

[Israeli PM Netanyahu again Postpones Trip to UAE, Bahrain](#)

December 29, 2020, The Times of Israel

First official visit to Gulf Arab states by an Israeli PM reportedly pushed off for second time due to on-going national lockdown.

Egypt

[Germany Approved over €1 billion in Arms Deals to Middle East in 2020](#)

January 03, 2021, Deutsche Welle

Germany, by December 17, had signed off on permissions to export weapons and military equipment worth €752 million to Egypt. Permission was also granted to German arms companies for deals worth over €305.1 million to Qatar, over €51 million to the United Arab Emirates, €23.4 million for Kuwait and around €22.9 million to Turkey.

[Sudan Joins Forces with Egypt to Crack Down on Muslim Brotherhood](#)

December 30, 2020, AL-Monitor

Egypt is seeking to join efforts with Sudan to confront the Muslim Brotherhood and extremist groups and ideas through several security and religious steps. In this context, the joint training course for imams of Egypt and Sudan kicked off in Cairo on Dec. 20 to confront extremist ideas.

Iraq

[U.S. Iraq Warn Iran against Attacks Ahead of Soleimani's Death Anniversary](#)

January 01, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

U.S. and Iraqi authorities warned Iran and Iranian-backed militias that any attacks on American diplomats or military forces here would be met with swift retaliation as the anniversary of a U.S. drone strike that killed one of Tehran's top military leaders approached.

[US Sends Dozens of Armoured Vehicles to Iraq Ahead of Soleimani Death Anniversary](#)

December 30, 2020, Middle East Eye

The United States announced on Wednesday (December 30) that it sent Iraq's army 30 armoured vehicles to secure Baghdad's Green Zone, ahead of the anniversary of the killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

[Israel Said Bracing for Possible Strikes by Iran-backed Militias in Iraq and Yemen](#)

January 02, 2021, The Times of Israel

The Israeli military is preparing for the possibility of a strike by Iran-backed militias in Iraq or Yemen. The Israeli Defense Forces held discussions last week about possible attacks, including missile and drone strikes, from the Iraqi militias and Houthi rebels in Yemen.

[Mine Found on Hull of Oil Tanker off The Coast of Iraq](#)

January 01, 2021, AL Jazeera

An oil tanker off the coast of Iraq discovered a mine attached to its hull, the latest incident highlighting the risk to ships in the waters near the Arabian peninsula.

Iran

[Larger Crop, Lack of Rupees Curb Iran's Record Indian Sugar Appetite](#)

December 22, 2020, The Times of India

India will be unable to count on Iran, one of its most important sugar customers, for its upcoming export drive as an increase in Iranian sugar production and shortage of Rupees limits buying.

[Zarif to Trump: Be careful of a Trap by Israeli Agent-Provocateurs](#)

January 03, 2021, Tehran Times

"New intelligence from Iraq indicates that Israeli agent-provocateurs are plotting attacks against Americans—putting an outgoing Trump in a bind with a fake casus belli," Zarif wrote in a tweet on Saturday (January 02).

[U.S., Iran Tensions Simmer as Thousands Protest Soleimani's Killing in Iraq](#)

January 03, 2021, NBC News

Chanting anti-American slogans, some demanded revenge for the deaths of Gen. Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi militia commander Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis who were killed by a U.S. drone strike on Jan. 3, 2020.

[Iran Blames Germany, other Countries, for Qassem Soleimani's Assassination](#)

January 03, 2021, Deutsche Welle

Iran's state media has alleged that in addition to the United States, several countries, including Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Germany and Britain, had played a role in the assassination of its senior military leader Qassem Soleimani.

[Qassem Soleimani Shattered all U.S. Calculations in the Region, Says Iran's Defence Minister Brigadier General Hatami](#)

January 03, 2021, Tehran Times

Brig. Gen. Hatami said, "the fact is that Daesh (ISIS) was not supposed to be eliminated in the region because the Americans had brought these terrorists to remain for years to come and occupy and influence other countries as well, but Martyr Soleimani and other courageous resistance leaders realized the global arrogance's plots and thwarted them".

[In Abrupt Reversal of Iran Strategy, Pentagon Orders Aircraft Carrier Home](#)

January 01, 2021, The New York Times

The Pentagon has abruptly sent the aircraft carrier Nimitz home from the Middle East and Africa over the objections of top military advisers, marking a reversal of a week-long muscle-flexing strategy aimed at deterring Iran from attacking American troops and diplomats in the Persian Gulf.

[Iran Tells IAEA It Plans to Enrich Uranium to up to 20 Percent](#)

January 01, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iran has told the United Nations nuclear watchdog it intends to enrich uranium to up to 20 percent purity, a level it achieved before its 2015 deal with major powers at its Fordow Fuel Enrichment Plant buried inside a mountain.

Israel

[Ties with Israel, India Can Foster Peace in West Asia, Says Moroccan Ambassador](#)

January 02, 2021, The Economic Times

An India-Morocco-Israel trilateral partnership can help achieve peace in West Asia as well as create a win-win in food security, agriculture business, information technology, textiles, pharmaceuticals, fertilisers, handicrafts and tourism, Morocco's ambassador to India Mohamed Maliki said.

[Israel's Sales Pitch to India: Our Artillery Gun to Support 'Make in India'](#)

December 29, 2020, Business Standard

Highlighting how important Tel Aviv regards an Indian order for 1,580 artillery guns, worth about Rs 20,000 crore, Israel's Ministry of Defence (MoD) has written to Defence Minister Rajnath Singh, pushing the award of a contract to Elbit Systems – the Israeli firm that bid lowest in an Indian global tender for towed guns.

[US Rejects UN Budget over Israel, Iran Issues](#)

January 02, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The administration of outgoing U.S. President Donald Trump voted against the United Nations (UN) budget over issues related to Israel and Iran. Only Israel followed in the footsteps of the US regarding the vote, while 167 countries voted in favour of the General Assembly's approval of the \$3.231 billion UN budget for 2021.

[Jonathan Pollard, Spy for Israel, Gets Hero's Welcome from Israeli PM Netanyahu](#)

December 30, 2020, The New York Times

Jonathan J. Pollard, the American who served 30 years in prison for spying for Israel in a Cold War-era espionage case that had been a thorn in relations between the two allies, arrived in Israel to a carefully staged hero's welcome from Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

[Israel Vaccinates a Million against Covid-19 in Less Than Two Weeks](#)

January 02, 2021, AL Jazeera

Israel says it has vaccinated one million people – more than a tenth of its population – against COVID-19, as it rolls out one of the world's earliest and most rapid inoculation campaigns.

Jordan

[25 Percent of Jordan's Population Contracted Coronavirus, Says official](#)

December 14, 2020, Middle East Monitor

The member of Jordan's National Committee for Epidemics, Bassam Hijjawi, said that the infection rate ranged "between 20 to 25 per cent of the country's total population."

Kuwait

[US Greenlights \\$4 Billion Attack Helicopter Sale to Kuwait](#)

December 29, 2020, Defense News

The U.S. State Department has cleared a foreign military sale of AH-64E Apache attack helicopters to Kuwait worth an estimated \$4 billion.

Lebanon

[Lebanon on the Brink of a Coronavirus 'Catastrophe'](#)

January 02, 2021, Arab News

Lebanon faces a coronavirus "catastrophe," health chiefs warned after thousands of people defied health warnings and enjoyed Christmas and New Year parties.

[Hezbollah's Nasrallah Claims Saudi-Israeli Plot to Kill Him; Says Hezbollah's Precision Missiles Doubled](#)

December 28, 2020, The Times of Israel

"The number of precision missiles at Hezbollah's disposal has now doubled from what it was a year ago," Nasarallah said. "Any target across the area of occupied Palestine that we want to hit accurately – we are able to hit accurately."

Oman

[Oman Foresees \\$5.7 Billion Deficit in Pared Down 2021 Budget](#)

January 01, 2021, Arab News

Oman unveiled a 2021 budget that foresees a deficit of 2.24 billion riyals (\$5.7 billion), despite a 14 percent cut in spending.

[Oman Expected to Add \\$779 Million in Revenue from VAT This Year](#)

January 02, 2021, Bloomberg Quint

The implementation of a 5 percent value-added tax in Oman this year is seen bringing in 300 million rials (\$779 million).

Qatar

[EAM Jaishankar Meets Business Leaders in Qatar; Highlights Investment Opportunities in India](#)

December 27, 2020, The New Indian Express

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar on Sunday (December 27) met business leaders in Qatar and highlighted the investment opportunities in India while appreciating the commitment for strengthening bilateral partnerships.

Saudi Arabia

[US Approves Sale of \\$290m in Bombs to Saudi Arabia](#)

December 30, 2020, The Guardian

The US State Department has approved the sale of \$290m in bombs to Saudi Arabia as part of a flurry of arms deals in the Middle East in the last weeks of the Trump administration in the White House.

[Saudi Arabia Launches Air-raids in Sanaa after Deadly Aden Blasts](#)

December 31, 2020, AL Jazeera

The Saudi-UAE coalition fighting Houthi rebels in Yemen has reportedly carried out air raids in parts of the capital, Sanaa, hours after explosions struck the main airport in the southern city of Aden killing at least 26 people.

[Saudi Arabia Announces \\$81m Mega-Projects in Yemen](#)

December 28, 2020, Arab News

The three Saudi megaprojects in Yemen include the establishment of a SR213 million King Salman Medical and Educational City in Mahra governorate, a SR54.4 million rehabilitation of Aden International Airport, and SR36 million to improve Al-Abr road in the city of Marib.

[Saudi Arabia 2021 Budget: Spending Cut Announced after Deficit Spike](#)

December 16, 2020, The Economic Times

Saudi Arabia announced a 990 billion riyal (\$263.91 billion) budget for 2021 around 7% less than estimated spending for this year, as the world's biggest oil exporter seeks to tame a huge deficit caused by lower petroleum revenues and the coronavirus crisis.

Syria

[Car Bomb Hits Near Russian Base in Northeast Syria](#)

January 01, 2021, Arab News

A car bomb detonated near a Russian military base in north-eastern Syria on Friday (January 01) in the first such militant attack in the area against the ally of Damascus, a war monitor said.

[Syria Attack: At least 28 Killed in Ambush on Bus](#)

December 31, 2020, BBC News

A bus was attacked in Eastern Syria, killing at least 28 people, reportedly soldiers. Syrian state media said the bus was targeted on Wednesday (December 30) in the restive Deir al-Zour province, saying it was "citizens" killed. The UK-based Syrian Observatory for Human Rights (SOHR) attributed the attack to the Islamic State (IS) jihadist group, saying 37 soldiers died.

Turkey

[Turkey Tightens Control over NGO's to 'Combat Terrorism'](#)

December 29, 2020, Deutsche Welle

The controversial legislation would allow the Interior Ministry to replace board members of associations with trustees as well as suspending their operations if members are being prosecuted on terrorism charges.

[Uighurs Fear Deportation as China Ratifies Extradition Treaty with Turkey](#)

December 30, 2020, Middle East Eye

Beijing has ratified an extradition treaty with Turkey that Uighurs fear could pave the way for tens of thousands to be deported and imprisoned in internment camps that rights group say constitute a "cultural genocide".

[Turkey Dismisses Fears that New Deal Will Result in Mass Deportation of Uighurs to China](#)

December 31, 2020, France 24

Turkey brushed aside fears that a new extradition treaty with China would result in Ankara deporting Muslim Uighurs en-masse. About 20 Uighurs with Turkish citizenship picketed China's consulate in Istanbul after the Chinese parliament ratified the 2017.

[Turkey Defence Industry Chief Says U.S. Sanctions Limited in Scope](#)

December 17, 2020, TRT World

Turkish Presidency of Defence Industries chief Ismail Demir says US sanctions only affect him, the civil institution and three other people.

UAE

[Export Credit Agencies Ink Deal to Boost UAE-India Trade Corridor](#)

January 02, 2021, Arabian Business

Etihad Credit Insurance (ECI), the UAE federal export credit company, has partnered with its Indian counterpart ECGC Limited (ECGC) to explore and bolster trade cooperation between the two countries.

[ISI Man Nabbed in Delhi after His Arrival from UAE](#)

December 31, 2020, The Shillong Times

A gangster, who is suspected to be on the payroll of Pakistan's Inter-Services Intelligence in terror activities, Sukhmeet Pal Singh alias Sukh Bhikhariwal was deported from the United Arab Emirates (UAE) to India on Thursday (December 31) for conspiring in the killing of Shaurya Chakra awardee, Indian intelligence agency said.

Yemen

[Yemen's PM Says Airport Attack Aimed to "Eliminate" Cabinet](#)

January 02, 2021, Outlook

Yemen's Prime Minister said that a missile attack on the airport in Aden was meant "to eliminate" the country's new government as it arrived in the key southern city – a daring assault which he blamed on Iran-backed rebels.

[India Condemns Deadly Attack at Aden Airport](#)

December 31, 2020, Yahoo News

India strongly condemned a deadly attack at the Aden airport in Yemen shortly after a plane carrying the cabinet ministers of the war-torn country's newly formed government landed.

[Lethal Air-Strikes in Yemen 'left off' Confidential UK Record](#)

January 03, 2021, The Guardian

The UK government is under pressure to explain why a series of air-strikes in Yemen, many involving civilian casualties, have not been recorded in its confidential log of alleged breaches of international humanitarian law (IHL).



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