



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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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 storming of US Capitol Hill has caught the attention of the world, especially the rulers in the Middle East (West Asia). Iran's President Rouhani highlighted the "fragility of western democracy", while the Turkish President Erdogan described the attack on the US Congress building by Trump's supporters a disgrace that has "shocked humankind". Some commentators even compared events in Washington to the "Arab Spring".

In a major development, Saudi Arabia, Bahrain, UAE, and Egypt, restored relations with Qatar at the Al-Ula Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) Summit held on January 5. India welcoming the development, expressed that this will give a boost to peace and stability in the region. In another significant development, the United States designated 'Ansarallah' (Houthi rebels) as 'Specially Designated Global Terrorist (SDGT)' entity, a move likely to exacerbate famine in Yemen. Washington also blacklisted Faleh al-Fayyad, leader of the Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF) in Iraq.

On the arms sales front, the United States is likely to sign a contract for the sale of F-35 stealth fighters to the UAE prior to the departure of Trump administration. In another development, India and Israel successfully tested Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) defence system jointly developed by the two countries in a boost to their air defence capabilities. Further, in order to boost defence exports, India has drawn up a list of countries to whom BrahMos and Akash missile systems can be exported. In West Asia, UAE and Saudi Arabia have shown interest in acquiring both Akash and BrahMos missile systems; while Bahrain, Egypt, and Algeria have shown interest in acquiring the Akash missile systems.

Meanwhile in a boost to the already strong India-Israel partnership, Tel Aviv appointed an honorary Consul General to India's North East, an area with great potential for cooperation in the fields of agriculture and technology.

On the energy front, India indicated that it is in no hurry to resume oil imports from Iran and Venezuela. Delhi is likely to decide its future course of action once the incoming Biden administration makes its stand clear on Iran. For the first time in 35 years, no oil flowed from Saudi Arabia to the United States in the first week of 2021, a sign that the U.S. is no longer reliant on the Middle East oil. During the past week, oil prices extended gains as Saudi Arabia announced a big voluntary

production cut. Further, the Indian Oil Corporation bought its first consignment of Iraq's newly introduced Basra Medium crude grade.

In another blow to the fast deteriorating Iranian relations with the West, Tehran banned COVID-19 vaccines from the United Kingdom and the United States. Further, the Iranian army staged its first-ever drone drill in the Semnan public area and border areas; Mohajer, Ababil, Kaman-12, Arash, Kian, Simorq, Sa'eqeh, Hazem, were some of the drones used in this drill. Meanwhile Germany, France, and Britain expressed "deep concern" at Iran's move to step up its uranium enrichment to 20 percent, warning that such a move carried "very significant" risks. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu stressed that Tehran's latest uranium enrichment announcement highlights it seeks nuclear weapons.

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

Bahrain

[India Draws up Nations' List for Akash, BrahMos Missile Export](#)

January 07, 2021, The Times of India

In its quest to emerge as a major arms exporter and bolster strategic ties with "friendly" countries, India has drawn up a list of nations to whom the Akash surface-to-air missile systems, BrahMos supersonic cruise missiles and other weapons can be sold in the years ahead.

Egypt

[Egypt Approves Chinese Sinopharm Covid-19 Vaccine, Roll-out in Late January](#)

January 03, 2021, Mint

Egypt has approved the use of a Covid-19 vaccine developed by Chinese pharma giant Sinopharm with its rollout to start later in January, the health minister said.

[German FM to Visit Egypt to Participate in Reviving Israel-Palestine Peace Talks](#)

January 09, 2021, Egypt Independent

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas began a Middle East tour which will include a Sunday (January 10) visit to Egypt in an effort to revive peace talks between Israel and Palestine, following years-long suspension of direct negotiations between the two parties.

Iraq

[Indian Oil Corporation Buys its First Cargo of Iraqi Basra Medium Oil](#)

January 07, 2021, The Economic Times

Indian Oil Corporation (IOC), the country's top refiner, has loaded its first cargo of Iraq's newly introduced Basra Medium crude grade.

[Iraq Court Issues Warrant for Trump's Arrest over Muhandis Killing](#)

January 07, 2021, Middle East Eye

An Iraqi court has issued an arrest warrant for outgoing US President Donald Trump over the killing of Iraqi militia leader Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis in a January 2020 air-strike that also killed high-ranking Iranian Commander Qassem Soleimani.

[Iraq Calls US Blacklisting of PMF Leader 'Unacceptable'](#)

January 09, 2021, Asharq Al-Awsat

Iraq denounced as “unacceptable” a US decision to blacklist Faleh al-Fayyad, leader of the mainly Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

Iran

[Iran Bans COVID Vaccines from UK, US](#)

January 08, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iran's Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has prohibited imports of COVID-19 vaccines from the United States and the United Kingdom. In a televised speech, the supreme leader said he has no confidence in vaccines coming out of the two Western powers since they have some of the highest mortality rates in the world.

[Twitter Hides Post About Covid-19 Vaccine Conspiracy Theory on Iranian Supreme Leader's Account](#)

January 09, 2021, CBS News

Twitter has hidden a post on the account of Iran's Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei on a COVID-19 vaccine conspiracy theory. The tweet from the account of Khamenei, who has the final say on all state matters in Iran, claimed that COVID-19 vaccines imported from the U.S. or U.K. were "completely untrustworthy."

[Iranian Army Unveils 7 Important New Drone Technologies in the Drill](#)

January 10, 2021, Tehran Times

On January 5-6, the Islamic Republic of Iran's Army staged its first-ever drone drill using its quadruple forces in the Semnan public area and border areas of the country. Some of those drones were later identified to be from classes of Mohajer, Ababil, Kaman-12, Arash, Kian, Simorq, Sa'eqeh, Hazem, etc.

[Iran Will Expel U.N. Nuclear Inspectors Unless Sanctions are Lifted: Lawmaker](#)

January 09, 2021, Reuters

Iran will expel United Nations nuclear watchdog inspectors unless U.S. sanctions are lifted by a Feb. 21 deadline set by the hard-line-dominated parliament, a lawmaker said.

[India in No Hurry to Seek US Nod for Oil Supplies from Iran, Venezuela](#)

January 06, 2021, The Economic Times

India may not push for resumption of oil supplies from sanction-hit Iran and Venezuela once the Joe Biden administration takes charge in the US but would rather wait for it to clear its stand on the issue before making a case for exemptions.

[Iran Uranium Enrichment Move Carries 'Very Significant Risks'](#)

January 06, 2021, AL Jazeera

Germany, France and Britain have said they are “deeply concerned” at Iran’s move to step up its uranium enrichment to 20 percent, warning of “very significant” risks.

[Leaders in Moscow, Beijing and Tehran Revel in US Capitol Chaos](#)

January 07, 2021, The Guardian

In much of the world, the scenes that played out in Washington on Wednesday prompted shock, horror and anguish. But in Moscow, Beijing and other capitals where autocratic governments have been subjected to frequent US criticism, there was a good dose of schadenfreude at the chaotic footage of protesters overrunning Congress.

[Iran President: US Capitol Storming Shows Western Democracy 'Fragile'](#)

January 07, 2021, AL-Monitor

President Hassan Rouhani spoke about the chaos in Washington, DC. “You saw what happened in the United States; what we saw is how false and fragile Western democracy is and how it does not have a strong foundation,” Rouhani said.

[US Flies Two Bombers to Middle East in another Iran Deterrence Mission](#)

January 07, 2021, CNN

The US military flew two B-52 bombers to the Middle East Thursday (January 07) from their base in the United States -- the fourth such deployment and show of force by the US Air Force aimed at sending a message to Iran in the past two months.

[South Korea Pushes Iran to Release Seized Oil Tanker](#)

January 07, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

South Korea is mounting a diplomatic effort to free an oil tanker seized by Iran amid a dispute over frozen bank funds, the latest flare-up of tensions between Tehran and a U.S. ally.

[Qatar Says Deal to End Gulf Crisis Will Not Change Its Ties With Iran](#)

January 07, 2021, Financial Times

Qatar will not alter its relations with Iran and Turkey in a sign that it has made few concessions after securing a deal with Saudi Arabia and its allies to end a bitter dispute between the rival Gulf states.

Israel

[Iran Ramps up Uranium Enrichment to 20 Percent; Netanyahu: Proof It is Seeking Nukes](#)

January 04, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said the move to enrich Uranium to 20 percent proved that Iran is seeking nuclear weapons and that Israel would not allow this.

[India, Israel Successfully Test Medium-range Surface-to-Air Missile Defence System to Boost Combat Capability](#)

January 06, 2021, Times Now

India and Israel have successfully tested a Medium-Range Surface-to-Air Missile (MRSAM) defence system jointly developed by the two countries in a boost to their combat capabilities aimed at providing ultimate protection from enemy aircraft.

[Israel Appoints Honorary Consul in North-east region of India](#)

January 08, 2021, The Week

Israel has extended its footprint towards India's northeast with the appointment of Joyshree Das Verma as honorary consul in the region. Based in Assam, she will oversee the embassy's outreach in Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya, Tripura and Sikkim.

[Israel, Greece Sign \\$1.7 Billion Deal for Air Force Training](#)

January 06, 2021, Defense News

As part of a \$1.68 billion deal between Israel and Greece – the largest-ever defense agreement between the two countries – the Hellenic Air Force will acquire 10 M-346 aircraft and Israel's Elbit Systems will establish a flight school and maintain training aircraft. Israel will also provide simulators, training and logistical support as part of the 20-year deal.

Jordan

[Jordan Approves China's Sinopharm Covid Vaccine](#)

January 09, 2021, WION

Jordan said it has approved China's Sinopharm coronavirus vaccine for emergency use, after previously giving the Pfizer-BioNTech jab the green light.

Kuwait

[Kuwait Amir Calls Alula Agreement a Historic Achievement](#)

January 06, 2021, Gulf News

During his speech at the 41st Gulf Cooperative Council (GCC) summit, Kuwait's Amir, Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Sabah, praised the AlUla agreement pointing out that it is a "historic event" and stated that it should be called the "solidarity agreement".

Lebanon

[Lebanon's Hariri Pays Unannounced Visit to Turkey's Erdogan](#)

January 08, 2021, Arab News

Lebanon's Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri paid an unannounced visit Friday (January 08) to Turkey for talks with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan that came with his crisis-hit country struggling to form a government.

Oman

[Central Bank of Oman Issues New Banknotes](#)

January 10, 2021, Times of Oman

The Central Bank of Oman (CBO) has issued new banknote denominations of OMR20, OMR10, OMR5, OMR1, OMR $\frac{1}{2}$, and 100 baisa for circulation in the market.

Qatar

[India Welcomes Restoration of Ties between Qatar and Four Other Arab States](#)

January 06, 2021, Hindustan Times

India welcomed the restoration of diplomatic ties between Qatar and four other Arab countries that had imposed an embargo on it in 2017, saying such a move would give a boost to peace and stability in the region.

[No Intention of Altering Ties with Turkey, Iran after Saudi Summit, Qatar says](#)

January 07, 2021, Daily Sabah

Qatar will not halt or make concessions in its relationships with Turkey and Iran following a "solidarity and stability" agreement that was signed by Gulf leaders in a landmark summit that took place in the ancient desert city of Al-Ula.

Saudi Arabia

[GCC Summit Sends a Clear Message to Belligerent Iran](#)

January 06, 2021, Gulf News

For the leaders of the GCC, the actions of Iran and its policies of deliberate interference across the region serve as a reminder that peace and stability cannot be taken for granted. The regime in Tehran continues on policies that have interrupted the regional equilibrium, interfering in the internal matters of Arab countries.

[With Eye on US Ties, Saudi Arabia Leads Pack on Gulf Detente](#)

January 06, 2021, Reuters

Saudi Arabia will move faster than its allies to reconcile with Qatar, sources familiar with the matter said, aiming to impress the incoming Biden administration by ending what the West sees as a parochial dispute that benefits only mutual foe Iran.

[Crude Oil Flow from Saudi Arabia to U.S. Falls to Zero](#)

January 06, 2021, Oilprice.com

For the first time in 35 years, no oil flowed from Saudi Arabia to the United States last week, according to EIA data, in a show that the United States—at least for now—isn't as reliant on oil from the Middle East as it used to be.

[Saudi Arabia Courts US and Russia with Surprise Cut in Oil Output](#)

January 06, 2021, Middle East Eye

Saudi Arabia has pledged additional, voluntary oil output cuts of one million barrels per day (bpd) in February and March as part of a deal under which most OPEC+ producers will hold production steady in the face of new coronavirus lockdowns.

Syria

[President Putin Says Syria Decisions Serve Russia's interests First](#)

January 08, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Russian President Vladimir Putin has announced that when making decisions regarding Syria, his priority is serving Russian interests first.

Turkey

[Storming of US Capitol Hill Catches Attention of the Middle East](#)

January 08, 2021, The Arab Weekly

The storming of US Capitol Hill caught the attention of rulers and populations alike in the Middle East and North Africa. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan called the assault on the US Congress by Trump's supporters a disgrace that has "shocked humankind."

[Turkey, U.S. in Talks to Form Joint Working Group on S-400s, Sanctions - Minister](#)

December 30, 2020, Reuters

Turkey and the United States have started talks to form a joint working group regarding U.S. sanctions imposed over Ankara's purchase of Russian S-400 missile defence systems, Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said.

UAE

[UAE's F-35 Contracts Expected to be Signed before End of Trump Administration](#)

January 09, 2021, Defense News

A contract for the sale of F-35 Joint Strike Fighters to the United Arab Emirates is likely to be inked before the end of the Trump administration, according to a top U.S. State Department official.

[UAE to Restore Qatar Trade and Travel Links 'Within a Week' After Row Ends](#)

January 07, 2021, BBC News

The United Arab Emirates could reopen trade and travel links with Qatar within a week under a deal that ended a bitter dispute between the Gulf States.

[UAE Airlines under Scanner for Air Bubble Violations](#)

December 29, 2020, Hindustan Times

The ministry of civil aviation has found breaches of the air bubble agreement put in place between India and the United Arab Emirates by some UAE airlines that carried unauthorised transit passengers from India.

Yemen

[U.S. to Declare Yemen's Houthis a Terrorist Group](#)

January 10, 2021, The New York Times

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo will designate the Houthi rebels in Yemen as a foreign terrorist organization, four U.S. officials familiar with the decision said on Sunday (January 10), deploying one of his last means of hard power against Saudi Arabia's nemesis at the risk of exacerbating a famine in one of the world's poorest nations.

[Yemeni Leader Slams Iran's 'blatant' Meddling](#)

January 06, 2021, Arab News

Yemeni President Abed Rabbo Mansour Hadi has accused the Iranian regime of becoming more blatant in its support for the Houthis while undermining peace initiatives to end the war in the country.



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