

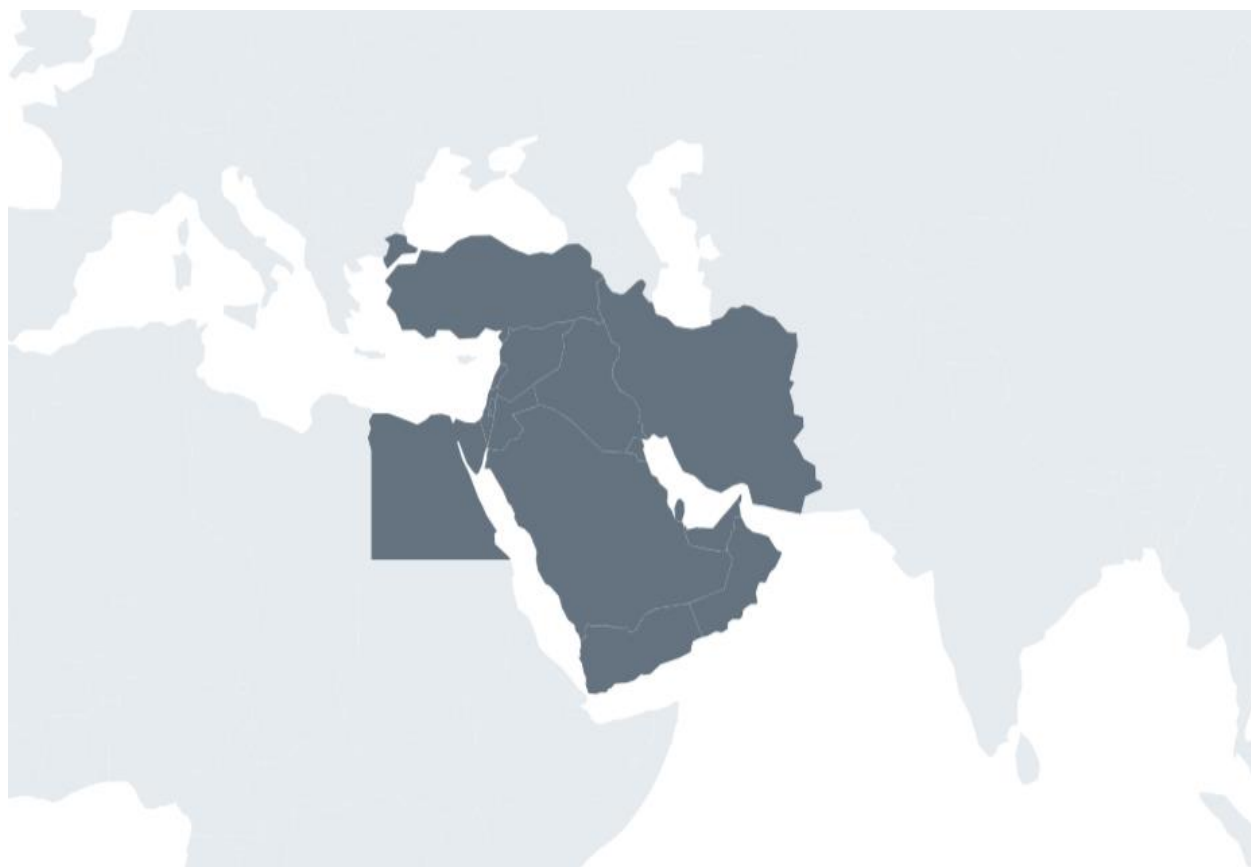


# Delhi Policy Group

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 Volume 3, Issue 3

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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](mailto:sanket@dpg.org.in).

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# DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW

## Volume 3, Issue 3

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## Abstract

The United States had imposed sanctions on Turkey for the acquisition of the S-400 surface-to-air missile defence systems under the 'Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act' (CAATSA). In light of India's planned purchase of the similar system from Moscow, a U.S. Embassy spokesperson in Delhi recently said, "We urge all of our allies and partners to forgo transactions with Russia that risk triggering sanctions under the CAATSA. CAATSA does not have any blanket or country-specific waiver provision." "We have not made any waiver determinations with respect to Indian transactions with Russia," he added. Earlier Indian Ministry of External Affairs had reaffirmed its right to choose defence supplies guided by India's national security interests.

On the regional economy front, COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent global economic contraction has left a deep scar on India's remittances. The rising crude oil prices and the depreciation of the Indian rupee could lead to a gradual recovery in India's remittances in the fiscal year 2022. In another development, Iran's Consul General highlighted the possibility of 'Iran-India Preferential Trade Agreement' that caters to both countries' needs. Meanwhile India and Oman held their Strategic Consultative Group meeting in Delhi on January 14. Both countries decided to pursue a future oriented partnership with agreements in fields such as energy, trade, investment, defence, security, space, mining, science and technology, culture, and politics. Further, Indian Union Cabinet approved an MoU to boost cooperation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on tsunami warning in the Gulf of Oman and the Arabian Sea including sharing the larger climate information and earth sciences. On the energy front, as per the Iraqi oil minister's estimation, crude prices could rise to around 60 USD/barrel in the second quarter of 2021.

On the regional security front, India's Permanent Representative to the UN highlighted the plight of Yemenis to the UNSC, especially the children impacted by the famine. Delhi appreciated the "role played by Saudi Arabia and the unified GCC in promoting peace, stability and prosperity in Yemen." In a significant development, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo stated that, "Iran is Al-Qaeda's new base of operations", but offered no specific intelligence as evidence to back his statement." In another development, United States announced to cut its troops in Iraq and Afghanistan to 2500, their lowest level in nearly two decades. Further, the US described Bahrain and UAE as "Major Security Partners" and included Israel in its Middle East command area (CENTCOM), as a result the US military dealings

with Israel will no longer be handled by America's European command. The United States has sanctioned Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and Hezbollah Brigades militia leader Abdulaziz al-Mohammadawi, known as Abu Fadak.

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has warned that, Iran was "quite rapidly" moving towards enriching uranium to 20 percent, giving mere few "weeks" to save the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). In a related development, French foreign minister stressed that, "Trump administration's maximum pressure campaign has only increased the risk and threat; this has to stop, as Iran is in the process of acquiring nuclear (weapons) capacity." In a major development, Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corp (IRGC) carried out long range ballistic missiles drill that successfully hit a mock enemy vessel 1,800 Km away in the Northern Indian Ocean.

The Israel-Iran conflict shows no signs of abating in Syria, rather it has escalated considerably over the past few months. Israel carried out a significant air-strike in east Syria killing 57 Assad regime and allied Iran-backed fighters. James Jeffrey, former US Special Representative for the Syrian Engagement stated that, "US-supported Israeli strikes on Iranian targets in Syria further limited the [Syrian] regime's military options." James Jeffery sees "Israeli air-strikes in Syria as a part of America's multi-pillar strategy against Iran." Russia also carried out 40 air-strikes on Daesh (ISIS) held areas in Syria, including Aleppo, Hama and Raqqa on January 17.

Some of the Middle Eastern countries are driving their COVID-19 immunisation campaigns totally or partially based on coronavirus vaccines from China. Turkey, Jordan, Bahrain, UAE, and Algeria, are some of the major countries in the region that have purchased the Chinese coronavirus vaccines.

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

## Bahrain

### [US Calls Bahrain, UAE 'Major Security Partners'](#)

January 16, 2021, The Economic Times

The United States called Bahrain and the United Arab Emirates "major security partners" early Saturday (January 15), a previously unheard designation for the two countries home to major American military operations.

### [UNHRC Presidency 2021, in Fiji vs Bahrain Contest, India Set for a Key Role](#)

January 13, 2021, Moneycontrol

The 2021 presidency of the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) is expected to be decided by a vote, as the Fijian candidate, Nazhat Shameem Khan, has met with opposition from Russia and China, and India is poised to play a key role.

## Egypt

### [Egypt, Germany, France, Jordan Meet to Revive Israeli-Palestinian Talks](#)

January 11, 2021, Daily Sabah

Egypt on Monday (January 11) hosted the foreign ministers of Germany, France and Jordan to discuss ways to revive peace talks between Israel and the Palestinians, a week before the U.S. President-elect Joe Biden takes office.

### [Egypt: Iranian Nuclear Issue Should be Linked to Its Regional Interference](#)

January 16, 2021, The Economic Times

Egypt believes that the Iranian nuclear issue is not the only problem with regard to Iran and its position in the region, according to Cairo's ambassador in Washington. Tehran's interference and its efforts to destroy the assets of Arab countries throughout the region is another issue that must be confronted.

### [First Tower Complete in Egypt's New Administrative Capital](#)

January 16, 2021, Construction Review

First office tower in Egypt's New Administrative Capital is complete, contractor China State Construction Engineering Corporation (CSCEC) has announced. The C08 office tower had the final piece of its curtain wall installed at the beginning of this year, making it the first building to be completed in the new capital's Central Business District (CBD).

## Iraq

### [US Cuts Troops in Iraq to 2,500](#)

January 15, 2021, Voice of America

Acting U.S. Defense Secretary Christopher Miller said the United States has cut troops in Iraq to 2,500, meeting a goal set by the Trump administration late last year.

### [US Sanctions Key Leader of Iraqi PMF, Hezbollah Brigades](#)

January 14, 2021, The Arab Weekly

The United States imposed sanctions on Iraqi Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) and Hezbollah Brigades militia leader Abdulaziz al-Mohammadawi, known as Abu Fadak, as it designated him a global terrorist figure.

### [Iraq Oil Minister Sees Oil at \\$60 a Barrel in Second Quarter](#)

January 16, 2021, The Economic Times

Iraqi Oil Minister Ihsan Abdul Jabbar expects oil prices to reach around \$60 in the second quarter of 2021.

### [Iraq Grants \\$20bn Projects to Chinese Companies](#)

January 17, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Iraq has given construction projects worth \$20 billion in the southern province of al-Muthanna to a consortium of Chinese companies.



## Iran

### [Pompeo Says Iran is New Base for Al Qaeda, but Offers Little Proof](#)

January 12, 2021, The New York Times

Al Qaeda's new base of operations is in Iran, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said on Tuesday (January 12), using his last days in office to tie together two of what he called the world's greatest terrorism threats but offering no underlying intelligence as evidence.

### [Top IRGC Commander: We Can Hit Moving Targets in the Ocean from the Heart of Our Land](#)

January 17, 2021, Tehran Times

The IRGC carried out the final stage of the drills on Saturday (January 16) with strategic operations of long-range ballistic missiles that successfully hit the mock enemy's vessels 1,800 Km away in the Northern Indian Ocean.

### [IAEA Chief: Iran Moving Rapidly to Enrich Uranium, Mere 'Weeks' to Save Deal](#)

January 11, 2021, The Times of Israel

Rafael Grossi, director of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), said that, Tehran was advancing "quite rapidly" toward enriching uranium to 20 percent, as it has announced it would, in breach of the JCPOA.

### [France Says Iran is Building Nuclear Weapons Capacity, Urgent to Revive 2015 Deal](#)

January 17, 2021, Reuters

Iran is in the process of building up its nuclear weapons capacity and it is urgent that Tehran and Washington return to the 2015 nuclear agreement, France's foreign minister was quoted as saying in an interview.

### [Biden Nominates Iran Nuclear Deal Negotiator Wendy Sherman to State Department](#)

January 16, 2021, AL Jazeera

United States President-elect Joe Biden has nominated a key negotiator of the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement to be America's next deputy secretary of state, the second-highest position at the State Department.

['India, Iran Preferential Trade Agreement will Have Huge Potential'](#)

January 12, 2021, The Hindu Business Line

Mohammad Hossein Bani Asadi, Consul General of Islamic Republic of Iran said, "Iran and India have the potential to cater to each other's needs provided the businessmen have the exposure to opportunities." He hoped that the Preferential Trade Agreement between India and Iran would be signed soon.

[Major European Powers Rebuke Iran over Uranium Metal Plans](#)

January 16, 2021, Reuters

Three European powers warned Iran against starting work on uranium metal-based fuel for a research reactor, saying it contravened the 2015 nuclear deal and had serious military implications.

[U.S. Imposes Fresh Sanctions on Iran in Final Days of Trump Presidency](#)

January 15, 2021, Reuters

The United States imposed sanctions on companies in Iran, China and the United Arab Emirates for doing business with the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines and on three Iranian entities over conventional arms proliferation.

[Iran Unveils Its Largest Military Vessel During Missile Drill](#)

January 13, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iran's navy has officially inducted the country's largest military vessel into its fleet during a maritime missile drill at a time of heightened tensions with the United States over its nuclear programme. The indigenously-made forward base ship IRIS Makran, which is said to be able to carry up to five helicopters, joined the fleet with another ship that is capable of firing missiles.

[Biden Picks Arabic-speaking Veteran Diplomat William Burns to Lead CIA](#)

January 11, 2021, The Arab Weekly

William Burns was involved in back-channel negotiations that set the stage for the 2015 deal to limit Iran's nuclear capabilities.

[In Threat to Israel, Iran positions 'Suicide Drones' in Yemen](#)

January 14, 2021, Israel Hayom

Satellite footage from Dec. 25 shows Revolutionary Guards sent the drones to the Al-Jawf province in northern Yemen, an area that is controlled by the Houthi rebels. Move believed to be part of Tehran's effort to achieve plausible deniability in case it decides to strike Israel.

## Israel

### [Report: IDF Drawing up Plans to Strike Iran's Nuclear Program](#)

January 14, 2021, The Times of Israel

The Israel Hayom newspaper said that IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kohavi has asked for three alternate proposals to derail Tehran's program, without elaborating on them. It only indicated one of the proposals is a military strike, noting that such a plan would require a significant budgetary boost for the Israeli military.

### [Pentagon includes Israel in Middle East Command Area \(CENTCOM\)](#)

January 15, 2021, Arab News

The US Defense Department announced that it would include close ally Israel in the area covered by its Middle East-focused Central Command. In another sign of the rapprochement brokered by President Donald Trump between Israel and Arab countries, the Pentagon said US military dealings with Israel would no longer be handled by its European Command.

### [Abbas Announces Dates for Presidential, Parliamentary Elections in Palestine](#)

January 15, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas issued a "presidential decree" setting dates for new presidential and parliamentary elections. According to the decree, the parliamentary election will be held on May 22, while the presidential election will take place on July 31.

### [Deadliest Israeli Air-strikes on Syria in Years Kill 57, Say Observers](#)

January 13, 2021, The Guardian

Israeli airstrikes on east Syria killed 57 regime forces and allied Iran-backed fighters in the deadliest such strikes since the start of the conflict, a war monitoring group said on Wednesday (January 13).

## Jordan

### [Jordan, Egypt Could Join Quartet's Mideast Peace Drive](#)

January 12, 2021, Arab News

Jordan and Egypt are emerging as potential new members of the international Quartet for Mideast peace after the foreign ministers of both countries joined a meeting of the multilateral forum in Cairo on Monday (January 11).

## Kuwait

### [Crude Price Revival is Unlikely to Lift India's Remittances Instantly](#)

January 18, 2021, Mint

Despite some favourable factors such as rising crude oil prices and a depreciating rupee, economists foresee only a gradual recovery in India's remittances in fiscal year 2022.

### [Kuwait PM Submits Cabinet Resignation to Emir](#)

January 13, 2021, AL Jazeera

Kuwait's Prime Minister Sabah Al Khalid Al Sabah presented the resignation of his cabinet to the emir, Sheikh Nawaf Al Ahmed Al Sabah.

## Lebanon

### [Lebanon to File Urgent Complaint to UN over Israeli Breaches of Airspace](#)

January 12, 2021, The Times of Israel

The Lebanese president's office said that the country will file an urgent complaint with the United Nations against what it called Israel's daily violations of its airspace, and intensifying drone reconnaissance and mock raids around the country.

## Oman

### [Strategic Dialogue: India & Oman to Pursue Slew of Pacts for Future-oriented Partnership](#)

January 14, 2021, The Economic Times

India and its oldest strategic partner in West Asia Oman on Thursday (January 14) decided to pursue pacts in political, energy, trade, investment, defence, security, space, mining, S&T, culture and consular fields for a future-oriented partnership.

## Qatar

### [Saudi Arabia to Reopen Qatar Embassy in Coming Days: Saudi Minister](#)

January 16, 2021, Reuters

Saudi Arabia expects to re-open its embassy in Qatar in the coming days, Saudi foreign minister said, following a U.S.-backed detente last week in a three-year-old dispute between Arab states.



## Saudi Arabia

### [Saudi Arabia Welcomes US Designation of Yemen's Houthis as Terrorists](#)

January 11, 2021, Daily Sabah

Saudi Arabia's foreign ministry welcomed the United States' move to designate Yemen's Houthi group as a foreign terrorist organization.

### [TCS to Acquire General Electric's Stake in TCS Saudi Arabia](#)

January 12, 2021, Business Today

Tata Consultancy Services (TCS), the country's largest software exporter said it will acquire General Electric's (GE) stake in Tata Consultancy Services Saudi Arabia for \$12,471 (about INR 9.13 lakh).

### [Royal Saudi Navy Inducts Multi-mission MH-60R Helicopters into its Fleet](#)

December 23, 2020, Gulf News

The Royal Saudi Navy formally inducted the multi-mission combat naval helicopters (MH-60R) in its fleet. The event was presided over by Lieutenant General Fahd Abdullah Al Ghufaili, commander of the naval forces.

## Syria

### [Russia Carries out 40 Raids on Daesh Areas in Syria](#)

January 17, 2021, Arab News

Russian warplanes carried out 40 air-strikes on Daesh (ISIS) areas in Syria on Sunday (January 17), the Syrian Observatory reported. Russia targeted areas in Aleppo, Hama and Raqqa throughout the day, the Britain-based war monitor reported.

### [US Support for Israeli Air-strikes in Syria has been Important Recently](#)

January 17, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

The former American envoy on Syrian policy notes that "US-supported Israeli strikes on Iranian targets in the country further limited the [Syrian] regime's military options."

## Turkey

### [Middle East Countries Push Chinese COVID-19 Vaccine Campaigns](#)

January 17, 2021, The Arab Weekly

Countries of the Middle East are ramping up immunisation drives against COVID-19 infection, in vaccination campaigns totally or partially based on Chinese vaccines. Turkish President Erdogan called on Turks to ignore the criticism levelled at the Sinovac vaccine.

### [India's Friction with U.S. Rises over Planned Purchase of Russian S-400 Defence Systems](#)

January 15, 2021, Reuters

The United States has told India it is unlikely to get a waiver on its planned acquisition of Russian S-400 air defence systems, raising the risk of sanctions similar to those imposed on Turkey for buying that equipment.

### [Turkey Says Turning Back on S-400s 'Problematic', Seeks US Dialogue](#)

January 14, 2021, Hindustan Times

Turkish Defence Minister Hulusi Akar said it would be "very problematic" for Ankara to turn back on its purchase of Russian S-400 defence systems but expressed hope that a dispute with the United States on the issue could be resolved through dialogue.

## UAE

### [India to Boost Cooperation with UAE on Tsunami Warning, Climate Information](#)

January 13, 2021, Mint

The Union Cabinet approved a memorandum of understanding to boost cooperation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on tsunami warning in the Oman Sea and Arabian Sea, and the larger climate information and earth sciences space.

### ['Security Concerns' Push UAE to Suspend Issuance of Visit Visas to Pakistan](#)

January 14, 2021, Hindustan Times

The suspension of visas by the United Arab Emirates to the citizens of Pakistan and 12 other countries was the outcome of alerts about possible attacks on growing numbers of Israeli citizens flocking to the emirates, people familiar with developments said.

## Yemen

### [Children Suffering in Yemen Should Move Conscience of the World, Says India at UNSC](#)

January 15, 2021, WION

India's envoy to the United Nations, TS Tirumurti said, "The plight of millions of Yemenis facing, inter alia, severe food insecurity, as well as children suffering malnourishment, are immediate needs which should move the conscience of the world community."



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