



# 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

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

### 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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## Abstract

In a major development, on January 29, an improvised explosive device (IED) blast shook the area outside the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi. The needle of suspicion is pointing towards 'Iran' with local involvement. Sources in the Indian security establishment stressed that, "preliminary forensic examination of the site and the bomb have revealed that the explosive was a military grade 'PETN', not easily available. Such an explosive has in the past been used by the groups such as Al-Qaeda". Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar has assured his Israeli counterpart that, "India is committed to the security of all Israeli diplomatic staff and will act resolutely to locate all those involved in the explosion".

In a boost to the already robust India-UAE strategic partnership, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohammed Bin Zayed Al Nahyan discussed "the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic in the region, and expressed satisfaction that cooperation between India and UAE had not halted even during the health crisis". They agreed to continue close consultations and cooperation to further strengthen the bilateral partnership in the post Covid-19 era. In a related development, Dubai based International Federation of the Indo-Israel Chambers of Commerce (IFIICC) is looking to facilitate India-Israel-UAE trilateral business relationships in the countries in which there is strong presence of the Indian and Israeli diaspora. In another development, India's Ambassador to Qatar expects "bilateral trade to return to pre-COVID levels by the middle of this year".

India's Covid-19 vaccine diplomacy gathered momentum in West Asia with the export of Covishield vaccines to Bahrain, Oman, Kuwait, and Egypt. On the economic front, Iran has started clearing the dues of the Indian exporters which have mounted to more than INR1700 crore since 2019.

In terms of regional security, U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken has signalled that U.S. sanctions on Iran are likely to remain; Washington waits to see if Tehran verifiably stops violating the 2015 'Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action' (JCPOA) before potentially re-joining the deal. In a related development, Biden administration has named 'Robert Malley', a former Obama administration official as America's special envoy for Iran. Meanwhile the French President Macron is pushing for Saudi Arabia's inclusion in any new negotiations with Iran about the JCPOA. Any talks with Iran should be very "strict", little time remains to prevent Tehran from developing a nuclear weapon, Macron added. Iran immediately

rejected this demand. In an important development, Iran's Foreign Minister Zarif met with the Taliban delegation in Tehran and insisted on formation of an "inclusive government in Afghanistan".

A top ISIS Commander in Iraq, Jabbar Salman Ali Farhan al-Issawi, 43, known as Abu Yasser was killed in a US air-strike aimed at stemming resurgence of the ISIS and exacting retribution for the recent twin-suicide bombings in Baghdad.

The Middle East (West Asia) witnessed a major spike in U.S. arms deals under the Trump administration post the Abraham accords. The Biden administration has temporarily paused some of the arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE for review, describing it as "routine action typical of presidential transitions". In terms of India's defence procurements, the Indian Army received first consignment of 6,000 Israeli Negev Light Machine Guns out of the 16,000 ordered last year under the Fast Track Procedure. Further, the Israeli firm 'Smart Shooter' whose new-age fire-control system turns assault rifles into smart weapons is looking to set up a manufacturing plant in India.

US-Palestine relations are likely to witness a drastic change under the Biden administration. "Under the new administration, the policy of the United States will be to support a mutually agreed two-state solution, one in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable Palestinian state," Richard Mills, the acting US Ambassador to the United Nations, told the UN Security Council (UNSC). India also re-iterated its support for the "Palestinian nation building efforts". Further India stated that, "normalisation of relations between Israel and some Arab states has the potential to promote regional cooperation...and can provide the necessary momentum for the resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine. India also showed its willingness to play a 'constructive role' in the UNSC to end the conflict in Syria.

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

## Bahrain

### [India Dispatches Covishield Vaccines to Bahrain, Sri Lanka](#)

January 28, 2021, Mint

After providing coronavirus vaccines to several countries including Bangladesh, Nepal and Maldives, India on Thursday (January 28) established its position as a reliable partner in COVID-19 assistance by dispatching Covishield vaccines to Bahrain and Sri Lanka.

### [UAE, Bahrain: We Need 'Unified Voice' with Israel on Iran's Missiles, Nukes](#)

January 26, 2021, The Times of Israel

The United Arab Emirates and Bahrain called for a coordinated effort with Israel to press the new US administration on Iran. Speaking alongside Israel's Foreign Minister Gabi Ashkenazi, Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashed Alzayani stressed the concern the countries share over Tehran's nuclear program, ballistic missiles, and activities across the Middle East.

## Egypt

### [Egypt Starts Vaccinating Medics with China's Sinopharm COVID-19 Vaccine](#)

January 25, 2021, Global Times

Egypt started on Sunday (January 24) vaccinating medical staff with Chinese Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine at a hospital in the north-eastern province of Ismailia, according to a vaccination program by the Egyptian Health Ministry.

### [Egypt Receives Made-in-India COVID-19 Vaccines, Confirms External Affairs Minister Jaishankar](#)

January 31, 2021, Republic World

Egypt welcomed the first batch of vaccines against the deadly coronavirus from India on Sunday (January 31). India's Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar announced on Twitter that the vaccines have reached Egypt.

## Iraq

### [U.S. Airstrike Kills Top ISIS Leader in Iraq](#)

January 29, 2021, The New York Times

The ISIS commander, 'Jabbar Salman Ali Farhan al-Issawi', 43, known as Abu Yasser, was killed Wednesday (January 27) near the northern Iraqi city of Kirkuk, American-led military coalition and Iraqi officials said.

### [Iran-Iraq Railway to Connect China to Mediterranean: Iraqi Vice President](#)

January 31, 2021, Iran Front Page

Iran's First Vice-President Es'haq Jahangiri says the construction of the railway between Iran's Shalamchah and Iraq's Basra will facilitate transit of cargo from China to the Mediterranean.

### [Iraq Approves Use of Chinese COVID-19 Vaccine](#)

January 20, 2021, CGTN

Iraqi Ministry of Health spokesman Sayf al-Badr told Xinhua that the Chinese vaccine, developed by China National Pharmaceutical Group (Sinopharm), "conforms to the NBS standards, and therefore the Iraqi state approved it for use inside Iraq."



## Iran

### [Iran Link Emerges in Israel Embassy Attack Probe Despite False Flags](#)

January 31, 2021, Hindustan Times

Investigations by Indian security agencies into the improvised explosive device (IED) blast outside the Israeli Embassy on Friday (January 29) evening are still not conclusive but the needle of suspicion is pointing towards Iran with local involvement.

### [Iran Starts Clearing Basmati Rice Dues](#)

January 28, 2021, The Economic Times

Iran, the largest importer of basmati rice has started clearing the dues of Indian exporters which have mounted to more than Rs 1,700 crore since 2019.

### [US Sanctions on Iran to Remain, Antony Blinken Says](#)

January 27, 2021, Voice of America

Top U.S. diplomat Antony Blinken has signalled that U.S. sanctions on Iran will remain in place for some time as Washington waits to see if Tehran verifiably stops violating a 2015 nuclear deal with world powers before potentially rejoining the deal that the prior U.S. administration quit.

### [Iran Rejects New Talks or Parties in Nuclear Deal](#)

January 30, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iran's foreign ministry has rejected any new negotiations or changes to the participants of Tehran's nuclear deal with world powers, after French President Emmanuel Macron said any new talks should include Saudi Arabia.

### [U.S. Names Iran Envoy in Battle of Wills with Tehran over Nuclear Negotiations](#)

January 28, 2021, The New York Times

President Biden has named 'Robert Malley', a veteran Middle East expert and former Obama administration official, to be his special envoy for Iran.

### [New U.S. Envoy Spoke with Europeans on Iran Nuclear Deal: Sources](#)

January 29, 2021, Reuters

The new U.S. Iran envoy spoke with British, French and German officials on Thursday (January 28) as the United States explores how to revive the 2015 nuclear deal which the former U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned.

['Psychological War': Iran Dismisses Israel Military Action Threat](#)

January 27, 2021, AL Jazeera

President Hassan Rouhani's Chief of Staff said the Biden administration is independent and will not follow all Israeli commands like the previous US government, after Israel announced it is revising attack plans against Iran.

[Iran's Foreign Minister Zarif Meets Taliban, Calls for Inclusive Government](#)

January 31, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Iran's Foreign Minister Javad Zarif on Sunday (January 31) called for the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan, during talks with a visiting Taliban delegation in Tehran.

## Israel

### [Bomb Used in Delhi Blast Military Grade Explosive; Israel Envoy Says Probing with India](#)

January 31, 2021, The Indian Express

Sources in the Indian security establishment said preliminary forensic examination of the site and the bomb have revealed that the explosive used was PETN. A military grade explosive, PETN is not easily available and has been used in the past by groups such as Al-Qaeda.

### [Mossad Said Involved in Probe of Blast near Israeli Embassy in New Delhi](#)

January 30, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israeli intelligence agency 'Mossad' has become involved in investigating the bomb blast in New Delhi. Israeli missions have been on alert around the world in the wake of the assassination of Iran's top nuclear scientist in November of last year. Tehran has blamed Israel and promised revenge.

### [Indian Army Gets 6,000 New Israeli Light Machine Guns](#)

January 29, 2021, India Today

The Indian Army received the first consignment of 6,000 Israeli Negev Light Machine Guns out of the 16,000 ordered last year under the Fast Track Procedure.

### [Israel Military Revising Operational Plans against Iran: IDF Chief of Staff](#)

January 27, 2021, AL Jazeera

Israel's top general warned attack plans against Iran were being revised and said any US return to the 2015 nuclear accord with Tehran would be "wrong".

### [US Announces it's Renewing Relations with Palestinians, Seeking Two-State Solution](#)

January 26, 2021, The Times of Israel

"Under the new administration, the policy of the United States will be to support a mutually agreed two-state solution, one in which Israel lives in peace and security alongside a viable Palestinian state," Richard Mills, the acting US ambassador to the United Nations, told the UN Security Council.

[Consistently Supported Palestinian Nation-building Efforts, Says India's Permanent Representative to the UN](#)

January 26, 2021, WION

India has reiterated its position on the Israel-Palestine conflict and pointed out its consistent support to "Palestinian nation-building efforts" during a discussion on the issue at the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

[Normalisation of Ties Between Israel, Some Arab States Can Promote Regional Cooperation: India](#)

January 26, 2021, News18

India said that the normalisation of relations between Israel and some Arab states is an important development that has the potential to promote regional cooperation for peace and security and can provide the necessary momentum for resumption of direct negotiations between Israel and Palestine.

[Israeli Defence Firm Smart Shooter Wants to 'Make In India', Seeks More Contracts](#)

January 4, 2021, The Print

Israeli defence firm Smart Shooter, whose new-age fire-control system turns assault rifles into smart weapons, is looking to set up a manufacturing plant in India, eyeing more contracts besides the one it has already bagged from the Indian Navy.

[Affle India to Acquire Israel Based Discover Tech](#)

January 27, 2021, Business Standard

Affle India announced that the company through its wholly-owned step down subsidiary Affle MEA FZ-LLC (AMEA) (subsidiary of Affle International) has entered into a definitive Business Transfer Agreement to acquire the Business Assets of Discover Tech (registered in Israel).

## Jordan

### [Jordan Announces Resumption of Al-Aqsa Mosque Restoration Work](#)

January 28, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Jordan has announced the resumption of reconstruction and restoration work at Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the city of Jerusalem, following an Israeli obstruction lasting four days.

## Kuwait

### [Kuwait Enforces Ban on Expats Aged 60](#)

January 28, 2021, Gulf News

Kuwait has started in January implementing a decision banning renewal of work permits for expatriates aged 60 and above holding pre-university degrees.

## Lebanon

### [Lebanon PM Threatens Mass Arrests over Deadly Clashes](#)

January 31, 2021, Arab News

Lebanon's caretaker Prime Minister, Hassan Diab, broke his silence on Saturday (January 30) to condemn days of violent protest in Tripoli, the country's most impoverished city, as "an assault on the state and its integrity."

## Oman

### [Indian Ambassador Hands over Vaccines to Oman's Health Minister](#)

January 31, 2021, Times of Oman

The Indian Ambassador to Oman handed over 100,000 doses of Covishield vaccine to the minister of health as a gift from the government and people of India to Oman.

### [Oman Increases Cost of Expatriate Hires](#)

January 28, 2021, Arab News

Oman's Ministry of Labour released a new fee structure for employers with increased fees for expatriate hires. Hiring non-nationals under the new structure will cost nearly \$5,198 for top positions, \$2,600 for mid-levels, and \$1,561 for technical and skilled workers. The decision was made to increase Omanization, the nationalization program of various jobs in the Sultanate.



## Qatar

### [Qatar-India Trade Volume to Soon Return to pre-COVID level](#)

January 26, 2021, The Peninsula Qatar

Ambassador of India to Qatar, Dr. Deepak Mittal has said Qatar-India trade volume is expected to return to pre-COVID-19 level by middle of this year. "Bilateral trade between Qatar and India crossed \$11bn in 2019. Despite COVID-19 challenges the trade volume between two countries from April to November in 2020 was about \$7bn which was a good growth".

## Saudi Arabia

### [Saudi Arabia to Get Three Million AstraZeneca Shots from India](#)

January 26, 2021, CNBC

The Serum Institute of India (SII) will supply Saudi Arabia with 3 million AstraZeneca COVID-19 vaccine doses priced at \$5.25 each in about a week on behalf of the British drug maker.

### [Saudi Arabia Must be involved in Fresh Talks on Iran Deal, Says Macron](#)

January 29, 2021, Arab News

French President Emmanuel Macron on Friday (January 29) said that Saudi Arabia should be involved in any new negotiations with Iran about the 2015 nuclear deal. He added that talks with Tehran would be very "strict," and warned that little time remains to prevent Iran developing a nuclear weapon.

### [Biden Administration Pauses Weapons Sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE](#)

January 27, 2021, AL Jazeera

The United States is reviewing weapons sales to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) authorised by former President Donald Trump, a move that Secretary of State Antony Blinken said was "typical" of a new administration.

### [US Exploring New Bases in Saudi Arabia amid Iran Tensions](#)

January 26, 2021, The Economic Times

The U.S. military is exploring the possibility of using a Red Sea port in Saudi Arabia and additional two airfields in the kingdom amid heightened tensions with Iran, the military said.

## Syria

### [Airstrikes in Syria Pinpoint Iranian Influence](#)

January 31, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

The Syrian Observatory for Human Rights, which monitors Syria, noted on January 30 that airstrikes targeted an area of "pro-Iranian militia" influence in the countryside of Deir Ezzor. The report says that an area called A-Abbas near Albukamal, near the Iraqi border, was targeted.

### [India Ready to Play 'Constructive Role' in UNSC to End Syrian Conflict](#)

January 21, 2021, Business Standard

Hoping that conflict in Syria will end completely, sooner than later, India said that it is ready to play a "constructive and meaningful" role in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) towards achieving that objective.

## Turkey

### [US Calls on Russia, Turkey, UAE to Halt Military Interventions in Libya](#)

January 29, 2021, Business Standard

The United States called on Russia, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates on Thursday (January 28) to immediately halt their military interventions in Libya as demanded in a cease-fire agreement, and accept Libyan sovereignty as it moves to unify its government, hold elections and end years of fighting.

### [Pakistan Seeking Turkey's Help to Run Anti-India Campaign: Report](#)

January 24, 2021, Swarajya

Turkey's state-run Anadolu Agency reported earlier this week that, Pakistan has asked the media in Turkey to "play their role" in spotlighting various issues related to Kashmir. It quoted Pakistani politician Shehryar Afridi, who serves as Chairperson of the Parliamentary Special Committee on Kashmir, as saying that his government is "employing modern media tools to protect the heritage of Kashmir".

### [Turkey, Saudi Arabia Eye Improved ties After Gulf Crisis Ends](#)

January 25, 2021, AL Jazeera

Two years ago, relations between Turkey and Saudi Arabia stood at one of the lowest points in the history of the two regional powers following the murder in Istanbul of journalist Jamal Khashoggi. Today, however, ties between Ankara and Riyadh appear on the verge of a return to cordiality, thanks in part to the detente between Turkey's ally Qatar and the four-nation Saudi-led bloc that imposed an embargo on Doha in 2017.

## UAE

### [PM Modi Holds Talks with UAE to Strengthen Bilateral Ties post-Covid](#)

January 28, 2021, Mint

India and the United Arab Emirates on Thursday (January 28) discussed possible opportunities for diversifying trade and investment links to strengthen bilateral ties in a post Covid-19 pandemic world.

### [Dubai-based IFIICC to Unlock Opportunity for NRI Businesses in Israel](#)

January 26, 2021, Gulf News

India's strong historical relationships with the UAE and Israel could help establish business relationships among the three countries while unlocking growth opportunities in other nations where there is a strong Indian diaspora. The International Federation of the Indo-Israel Chambers of Commerce (IFIICC) hopes to facilitate that process through knowledge sharing, strategic partnerships and cultural bonds.

### [Darwin Platform Group Signs MoUs to Boost India-UAE Partnerships](#)

January 31, 2021, Khaleej Times

Darwin Platform Group of Companies (DPGC), one of the leading global business conglomerates from India, has announced its investment plans with UAE-based companies. DPGC's Dubai-headquartered companies signed several agreements to form joint ventures and other modes of partnerships.

### [Dubai to Roll out China's Sinopharm COVID-19 Vaccine](#)

January 31, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Dubai will roll out China's Sinopharm vaccine to the general public from Sunday as coronavirus infections surged to record levels in the Middle East tourism hub, the government said on Saturday (January 30).

## Yemen

### [Yemen's War a Result of Economic Profiteering, Says UN Panel](#)

January 27, 2021, Outlook

Economic profiteering is fuelling the catastrophe in Yemen, where a six-year war has involved attacks on civilians, forced disappearances and other violations of human rights and international law, UN experts said in a new report.

### [Biden Administration Suspends Some Sanctions Imposed on Yemen Rebels](#)

January 26, 2021, Business Standard

The Biden administration suspended some of the terrorism sanctions that former Secretary of State Mike Pompeo imposed on Yemen's Houthi rebels in his waning days in office.

### [Italy Permanently Blocks Arms Sales to Saudi Arabia, UAE over Yemen](#)

January 30, 2021, Daily Sabah

Italy has joined a growing number of countries blocking arms exports to Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) over their involvement in the Yemen war with the recent move making an 18-month temporary suspension permanent.



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