



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

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

In a major development, President Biden announced the end of US support for the Saudi-led war in Yemen. In his first major foreign policy speech since assuming office, the US President declared, “this war (in Yemen) has to end, and to underscore our commitment, we’re ending all American support for the offensive operations in Yemen, including relevant arms sales”. However, he assured Saudi Arabia of “continued American support to defend its sovereignty and territorial integrity”. Further, Mr Biden re-iterated his strong support for the UN’s efforts to secure a ceasefire in Yemen, while pledging to bolster US humanitarian aid and diplomatic efforts to end the conflict in the war-torn country. The U.S. also plans to reverse Trump administration’s decision to label the Houthi rebels as “terrorists” in response to fears it will deepen the famine in Yemen.

On US-Iran relations, President Biden stated that, “the US will not lift sanctions on Iran before the country returns to its commitments under the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA)”. Earlier Iran’s Supreme Leader ‘Ayatollah Ali Khamenei’ had asked the US to first return to its commitments under the JCPOA, prior to Tehran doing the same. Deteriorating the situation further, the ‘International Atomic Energy Agency’ (IAEA) inspectors have found traces of radioactive material in the samples collected from the two Iranian nuclear sites during an inspection last year.

In a significant development, Iran’s Defence Minister Brig. Gen. Amir Hatami met India’s Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) Gen. Bipin Rawat in Bangalore on the sidelines of ‘Aero India 2021’. Mr. Hatami highlighted the prospects of closer military cooperation between Tehran and Delhi, particularly in the Indian Ocean. In another arms procurement deal at Aero India, Israel’s ‘Rafael Advanced Defence Systems’ unveiled a new addition to the air-to-surface munitions family, SPICE 250ER (Extended Range); this weapon system is an upgradation of SPICE 2000 munitions currently being used by the Indian Air-Force.

In a boost to India-Bahrain energy cooperation, the joint working group on ‘Renewable Energy’ held a virtual meeting on February 04. Both countries agreed to “forge deeper engagement in capacity building and focused cooperation between concerned government agencies and the private sector, in the field of solar, wind and clean hydrogen”. In another development, India and Qatar held foreign office consultations and reviewed the “entire gamut of bilateral relations, covering political, energy, trade, defence, food and health security, and science

and technology, among other issues". On the economic front, Israel's top business chamber the 'Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce' (FICC) has extended its strong support for an Israel-India free trade agreement (FTA).

In a major development, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has ruled that, "it has jurisdiction to probe war crimes charges against the Israelis with respect to their activities in the Palestinian territories of West Bank, Gaza strip and East Jerusalem". The United States expressed "serious concerns" about ICC's decision and stated that, "we do not believe the Palestinians qualify as a sovereign state, and therefore are not qualified to obtain membership as state or participate as a state in international organizations, entities, or conferences including the ICC". In another development, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ruled that it can take up Iran's bid to overturn US sanctions imposed by the Trump administration. Earlier Iran had filed a lawsuit in which it argued that the US breached a 1955 friendship treaty between the two countries – at a time when the Shah was the ruler of Iran.

In terms of the 'CAATSA' sanctions on Turkey, the Biden administration has maintained Trump administrations tough stand on Ankara's purchase of the Russian S-400 missile defence systems. Meanwhile UAE's Ambassador to the United States showed confidence that the "deal for F-35 stealth aircrafts will go through as planned underscoring that the Biden administration during its on-going review will discover that everything was done as per the rules".

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

Bahrain

[Bahrain, India Clean-Energy Working Group Pushes for Enhanced Private Sector Cooperation](#)

February 05, 2021, The Hindu Business Line

India and Bahrain have agreed to raise engagement in renewable energy capacity building and focus on cooperation between their governments as well as the private sector, particularly in the field of solar, wind and clean hydrogen.

[PM Modi Thanks Bahrain's Crown Prince for Partnering to Fight Covid-19](#)

January 30, 2021, Mint

Prime Minister Narendra Modi thanked Bahrain's crown prince and Prime Minister Salman bin Hamad for their partnership in the fight against the Covid-19 pandemic.

Egypt

[Egypt Considers Purchase of Indian Missile System](#)

February 04, 2021, AL-Monitor

India may supply Egypt with its BrahMos missile systems as part of New Delhi's efforts to emerge as a major arms exporter and Cairo's push to diversify its weaponry.

[Egyptian Authorities Release Al Jazeera Journalist Mahmoud Hussein](#)

February 06, 2021, Middle East Eye

Egyptian authorities released Al Jazeera journalist Mahmoud Hussein, more than four years after he was detained on allegations of spreading false news and defaming Egypt's reputation.

Iraq

[Defense Secretary Austin to Review Trump's Last-Minute Withdrawal of Troops From Afghanistan, Iraq](#)

January 26, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

The Pentagon's new chief is expected to review troop levels in Afghanistan and Iraq in an effort to examine American strategy in two conflicts, following former President Donald Trump's drawdown of forces there.

[High-level Iraqi Delegation in Iran to Talk Trade, Soleimani](#)

February 03, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iraq's foreign minister, Fuad Hussein, has held high-level talks with Iranian officials with justice for the American assassination of Iran's top general a major point of discussion.

Iran

[US Won't Lift Iran Sanctions until Nuclear Deal Compliance: President Biden](#)

February 07, 2021, AL Jazeera

President Joe Biden has said the United States will not lift sanctions on Iran before the country returns to its commitments under the 2015 nuclear deal, the latest impasse in an ongoing standoff between the two nations.

[Iran FM Tells Biden to Re-join Nuclear Deal within 2 Weeks, Before Stance Hardens](#)

February 07, 2021, The Times of Israel

Iran's top diplomat urged US President Joe Biden to act swiftly and return Washington to the 2015 nuclear agreement and end sanctions on the country by February 21, after which the Iranian government stance is set to "harden."

[Iran U.N. Inspectors Find Radioactive Traces, Raising Fresh Concerns](#)

February 05, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

United Nations inspectors have found new evidence of undeclared nuclear activities in Iran, according to three diplomats briefed on the discovery, raising new questions about the scope of the country's atomic ambitions.

[Iran Calls for UN Response over Israeli Military Action Threat](#)

February 07, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iran's representative to the United Nations has protested recent Israeli military action threats against the country, calling on the intergovernmental organisation to interfere.

[Iran, India Enjoy Great Potential for Closer Military Cooperation: Hatami](#)

February 04, 2021, Press TV

Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Amir Hatami says the Islamic Republic and India enjoy great capacities to promote defense and military ties given the many commonalities that the two states share, including their position on various international issues.

[India Looks to Continue Chabahar Port Development; Industry Awaits More Clarity on US Sanctions on Iran](#)

February 03, 2021, Mint

Indian Industry representatives added that they will wait for clear signs that US President Joe Biden is ready to re-engage Iran and willing to remove all sanctions on entities doing business with Tehran. The lifting of embargos by Washington on oil trade, they say, is the litmus test that will indicate a restoration of predictability in US-Iran ties.

[US 'disappointed' as UN International Court of Justice Takes up Iran Sanctions](#)

February 04, 2021, AL Arabiya

The US said it was "disappointed" by the top UN court's ruling that it can take up Iran's bid to overturn US sanctions reimposed by Donald Trump. State Department spokesman Ned Price said: "We are disappointed that the court did not accept our well-founded legal arguments that the case Iran brought is outside the court's jurisdiction."

[Iran Installs Advanced Centrifuges in Natanz and Fordow Facilities](#)

February 02, 2021, Tehran Times

Kazem Gharibabadi, Iran's Ambassador and Permanent Representative to international organizations in Vienna, has declared Iran will accelerate its nuclear program by operating more advanced centrifuges.

[Iranian Diplomat is Convicted in Plot to Bomb Opposition Rally in France](#)

February 04, 2021, The New York Times

A Belgian court stripped a senior Iranian official 'Assadollah Assadi' of his diplomatic immunity, convicted him of organizing a thwarted bomb attack aimed at an Iranian opposition rally in France in 2018 and sentenced him to 20 years in prison.

Israel

[Aero India: Israel offers IAF New Smart Weapon from 'SPICE Bomb Family'](#)

February 04, 2021, The Week

Israel-based Rafael Advanced Defense Systems has unveiled a new member of the air-to-surface munition family, with the addition of an integrated turbojet engine at the Aero India exhibition in Bengaluru. If Rafael officials are to be believed, they are ready to offer the SPICE 250ER (Extended Range) to the IAF, which is currently using the Spice 2000 version.

[Israel's Top Business Chamber Bats for FTA with India](#)

February 05, 2021, WION

Israel's top business chamber, the Federation of Israeli Chambers of Commerce (FICC) has extended strong support to a free trade agreement (FTA) with India.

[ICC Rules It Has Jurisdiction to Probe War Crimes Charges against Israelis](#)

February 06, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Israelis are a step closer to facing war crimes suits for actions against the Palestinians now that the International Criminal Court (ICC) has ruled it has the jurisdiction to probe such allegations with respect to activity in Gaza, the West Bank and East Jerusalem.

['Pure Anti-Semitism': Israel's PM Netanyahu Slams ICC Decision and Says Will Fight it](#)

February 06, 2021, WION

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu described a decision by the International Criminal Court investigation as "pure anti-Semitism", hours after judges at the ICC found the court has jurisdiction over war crimes committed in the Palestinian territories, paving the way for a possible criminal investigation, despite Israeli objections.

[U.S. Has 'serious concerns' about International Criminal Court Decision on Israel War Crimes Probe](#)

February 06, 2021, NBC News

The United States has "serious concerns" about an International Criminal Court (ICC) ruling which paves the way for a prosecutor to investigate alleged Israeli war crimes in the Palestinian territories, a State Department spokesman said.

[US Can't be 'Sole Mediator Any More Between Israel and Palestine,' Says Palestinian PM](#)

February 07, 2021, France 24

Palestinian PM Mohammed Shtayyeh claimed, a real peace process could not be mediated solely by the US and a broader international involvement was necessary to bring about a two-state solution. Such an effort, he noted, should include regional players such as Jordan and Egypt, as well as Europe, Russia and China.

[Bangladesh Bought Mass Spying Equipment from Israeli Company](#)

February 02, 2021, AL Jazeera

Documents and statements obtained by Al Jazeera's Investigative Unit show that the Bangladesh army purchased the Israeli equipment in 2018 using a Bangkok-based middleman and Bangladeshi military intelligence officers were trained in Hungary by Israeli intelligence experts.

Jordan

[Russian FM Calls for Expulsion of White Helmets from Jordan](#)

February 05, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov has called on his Jordanian counterpart Ayman Safadi to expel members of the Syria Civil Defence, known as the White Helmets, from Jordan, during a press conference held by the officials in Moscow.

Kuwait

[Valuing Strong Ties Says EAM Jaishankar After India-made Vaccines Reach Kuwait](#)

February 01, 2021, Business Standard

A consignment of Indian-made vaccines arrived in Kuwait tweeted Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar, adding that it shows the close friendship and strong ties between the two nations.

Lebanon

[Prominent Hezbollah Critic Lokman Slim Found Murdered](#)

February 04, 2021, Middle East Eye

Lebanese activist and publisher Lokman Slim, a fierce critic of Hezbollah, was found shot dead in his car.

Oman

[India Delivering Covid Vaccines to Oman Reflects 'Friendship Spanning Millennia'](#)

January 31, 2021, Mint

A consignment of India-made vaccines arrived in Muscat, said Indian External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar adding that India providing vaccines to Oman is a friendship "spanning millennia."

Qatar

[India, Qatar Hold Fourth Foreign Office Consultations Virtually](#)

February 01, 2021, All India Radio

The fourth Foreign Office Consultations between India and Qatar were held virtually. The Indian side was led by Sanjay Bhattacharyya, Secretary (Consular, Passport and Visa and OIA), Ministry of External Affairs. The Qatari side was led by Dr. Ahmad Hassan Al-Hamadi, Secretary General, Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

[Overground JeM Worker Arrested in Delhi Upon Deportation from Qatar](#)

February 05, 2021, Hindustan Times

The Jammu & Kashmir police arrested an alleged "overground worker" of Jaish-e-Mohammad (JeM) at the New Delhi airport following his deportation from Qatar, an officer aware of the matter said.

[UN's Top Court Dismisses Qatar Discrimination Case against UAE](#)

February 04, 2021, AL Jazeera

The ICJ upholds objections raised by the UAE that the 2017 blockade measures were not racially motivated.

Saudi Arabia

[Biden Administration Expects Saudi Arabia to Improve Human Rights: White House](#)

February 06, 2021, Hindustan Times

The United States expects Saudi Arabia to improve its human rights record, including releasing women's rights activists and other political prisoners, White House spokeswoman Jen Psaki said.

[US's Blinken Raises Yemen War in First Call with Saudi FM](#)

February 06, 2021, AL Jazeera

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has discussed "key priorities" for President Joe Biden's administration, including the war in Yemen, in his first phone call with Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan.

Syria

[Islamic State Brutality Returning to Syrian Towns](#)

December 07, 2021, BBC News

The Islamic State (IS) group has launched more than 100 attacks in north-eastern Syria over the last month alone and is terrorising many towns and villages at night.

Turkey

[Turkish Minister Says US behind 2016 Failed Coup](#)

February 05, 2021, AL Jazeera

Turkey's interior minister has accused the United States of being behind a 2016 failed coup that Ankara has blamed on a US-based Muslim preacher and businessman. In a prompt response to the comments, the US State Department said the accusation was "wholly false".

[US Talks Tough over Turkey's S-400 Russian Missile System Purchase](#)

February 06, 2021, WION

The US government under President Joe Biden has maintained a tough stance against Turkey over its purchase of Russian S-400 missile defense system. The US has maintained its tough position since Donald Trump presidency.

UAE

[The UAE Sees US Credibility Over Gulf Security at Stake](#)

February 05, 2021, The Arab Weekly

UAE Foreign Minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan discussed with US Secretary of State Antony Blinken "strategic relations and Middle East regional issues."

[UAE Confident F-35 Jets Sale Will Go Through, Says Ambassador](#)

February 02, 2021, The Economic Times

"We did everything by the book and they (Biden administration) will discover that once the review is complete and it will proceed," Ambassador Yousef Al Otaiba told a virtual Washington Institute forum, describing the review as "pro forma".

[UAE Hires US Intelligence Hackers for Espionage against Foes](#)

February 07, 2021, Daily Sabah

A new report claims that the United Arab Emirates (UAE) hired a team of hackers consisting of former U.S. intelligence officials to spy on its neighbour Qatar and many other states.

Yemen

[Biden Ends US support for Saudi Arabia's War in Yemen](#)

February 04, 2021, Middle East Eye

US President Joe Biden announced the end of US support for a Saudi-led coalition that is waging war in Yemen, in a major policy reversal from the previous administration that may alter the course of the conflict.

[U.S. to Drop Houthi Terrorist Designation Due to Yemen Crisis](#)

February 06, 2021, Reuters

The United States intends to revoke the Houthi movement's terrorist designation in response to Yemen's humanitarian crisis, reversing one of the Trump administration's most criticised last-minute decisions.



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