



# 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 boost to the India-Oman partnership, Prime Minister Narendra Modi “spoke with Oman’s Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said about Delhi-Muscat strategic partnership and close cooperation during the COVID-19 pandemic”. Oman’s Sultan expressed “appreciation for the COVID-19 vaccines supplied by India to Oman...the two leaders expressed satisfaction about the growing bilateral cooperation in all areas including defence, health, trade and investment”. In another sign of India’s growing defence cooperation with the Gulf countries, the Indian Navy has sent a warship to Abu Dhabi to participate in naval defence exhibitions.

On the energy front, “India has urged OPEC and allied oil producers to ease production cuts as higher crude prices are hitting oil demand in India and adding to inflationary pressure on the economy”. In a related development, “Saudi Arabia is planning to increase oil production, reversing a recent big production cut, a major sign of growing confidence in oil price recovery”. In another development, Qatar approved the ‘North Field East Project’ (NFE) that is likely to raise Doha’s Liquefied Natural Gas (LNG) production capacity from 77 million tons per annum (mmtpa) to 110 mmtpa.

On the security front, the Indian Army has acquired four High Altitude Long Endurance (HALE), Heron TP drones on lease for USD200 million from Israel. “These drones are likely to be used for surveillance along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh where disengagement process between the Indian and Chinese troops has started after a protracted military standoff”. A Disinfo Lab report has shed light on how Pakistan and Turkey’s disinformation and propaganda campaign is attempting to internally destabilise India. Reports highlight two names, ‘Pieter Friedrich’ and ‘Ali Keskin’ as the central figures in this anti-India propaganda campaign. It also exposes the fact that, foreign elements are using the United States territory to launch information warfare against India. Considering the growing strategic proximity between Islamabad and Ankara, India is also keeping a close eye on Joint Turkey-Pakistan military exercises in the region, including areas bordering Afghanistan.

On the US-Iran relations, in a major policy reversal from the Trump administration, the “United States is willing to accept an invitation from the European Union High Representative to attend a meeting of P5+1 and Iran to discuss the way forward on Iran's nuclear program”. The Biden administration

also rescinded former President Donald Trump's restoration of U.N. sanctions on Iran. As noted in last week's DPG West Asia Review, President Biden has been forced into making a major decision about the future of the 'JCPoA' by February 21, as this was the last day when Iran under a law passed by its Parliament, would stop allowing inspections by the IAEA, unless the U.S. lifts sanctions. Further, Iran held a meeting with IAEA's Director-General on February 21 and "agreed to allow necessary verification and monitoring of nuclear sites for up to three months, with less access and no more snap inspections". Earlier, Israel's Ambassador to the United States had hinted at a possibility that, "Israel may not engage with US President Joe Biden on strategy regarding the Iranian nuclear program, urging tougher sanctions and a "credible military threat" against Tehran". Meanwhile Iran and Russia conducted joint naval exercise in the Northern Indian Ocean; earlier it was reported that India was also going to participate in this exercise, however the Indian Navy has denied any such participation. Amid growing tensions with Iran, the US and Israel announced work on New 'Arrow 4 Air Defence System'. The Biden administration has also approved the sale of Raytheon-made 'Rolling Airframe Missiles' to Egypt for around USD197 million.

In an important development, the United States is likely to recalibrate its relationship with Saudi Arabia. As a result, according to White House Press Secretary, "when President Biden makes his first official call to Saudi Arabia as the US President, it will be to the 85-year-old King Salman –and not to his 35-year-old son who runs the country on a day to day basis". During the week, President Biden officially spoke with Israeli PM Netanyahu "affirming his personal history of steadfast commitment to Israel's security and conveyed his intent to strengthen all aspects of the U.S.-Israel partnership, including the strong defence cooperation".

Meanwhile, rocket attacks on the U.S. service members in Iraq continued unabated with an attack on the airport in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil killing a civilian contractor with the American-led military coalition and wounding six others. Reacting to the attacks, Biden administration warned that, "There will be consequences for those behind the deadly rocket attacks in Northern Iraq". In the aftermath of this, NATO announced "expansion of its security training mission in Iraq with a view to preventing the war-torn country from becoming a safe-haven for international terrorists". Further, it has been revealed that, "Islamic State terrorists are regrouping in Northern Iraq and they are heavily relying on women operatives to secure logistical support in the Hamrin basin".

In terms of investments from the Gulf, Indian Edtech startup 'Eupheus Learning' has raised USD4.1 million from Kuwait-based firms United Education Company (UEC) and Al Rayan Holding Company (ARHC). Further, a Shapoorji Pallonji group company - Sterling and Wilson Limited has signed an order worth USD127.5 million (INR930 crore) for a solar power project in Egypt's Kom Ombo region. This order has been received from Saudi Arabia's leading renewable energy company.

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

## Bahrain

### [Bahrain Launches Digital COVID-19 Vaccine Passport](#)

February 17, 2021, Arab News

Bahrain has launched a digital COVID-19 vaccine passport, one of the first countries to do so. Governments and developers around the world are exploring how certificates and passports could help to reopen economies by identifying those protected against COVID-19.

### [Bahrain among Top 15 Emerging Markets for Logistics](#)

February 09, 2021, Trade Arabia

Bahrain ranks 15th overall among the world's most competitive emerging markets and seventh in the area of business fundamentals, according to the annual Agility Emerging Markets Logistics Index.

## Egypt

### [India's Shapoorji Pallonji Group Company Wins ₹930-crore Order in Egypt](#)

February 13, 2021, Mint

Sterling and Wilson Limited, a Shapoorji Pallonji group company, announced that it has signed an order worth ₹930 crore (\$127.5 million) in the Kom Ombo region of Egypt. The order has been received from Saudi Arabia's leading renewable energy company.

### [US Sells \\$200m in Weapons to Egypt Despite Human Rights Abuses](#)

February 17, 2021, AL Jazeera

The United States approved an arms sale worth nearly \$200m to Egypt but vowed to press human rights issues. The \$197m sale of the Raytheon-made Rolling Airframe Missiles was requested by the Egyptian navy to improve defence in coastal areas and around the Red Sea, the US Department of State said.

### [Egypt's Exports to China Hit \\$36M in 2020: FEC](#)

February 10, 2021, Egypt Today

Egypt's food exports to China witnessed a 21 percent increase in 2020, registering \$36 million in total compared to \$21 million in 2019, Deputy Executive Director at the Egyptian Food Export Council (FEC) Tameem El-Dawy said.

## Iraq

### [India Urges OPEC+ to Ease Production Cuts](#)

February 18, 2021, The Economic Times

India has urged OPEC and allied oil producers to ease production cuts as higher crude prices are hitting fuel demand in Asia's third largest economy and adding to inflation, oil minister Dharmendra Pradhan said.

### [India at UN: Fully Support Iraq's Request for UN Observation of Polls](#)

February 17, 2021, Business Standard

India has strongly backed Iraq's request for the UN observation of parliamentary elections in the country in October, saying it endorses any process that respects the Gulf nation's sovereignty and strengthens the democratic exercise.

### [Rockets Hit Iraq Military Airbase Hosting US Contractors](#)

February 20, 2021, AL Jazeera

At least four rockets struck an Iraqi air-base on Saturday night (February 20), the Iraqi military said in a statement, while other officials said one person was wounded at the base where a United States defence company services combat aircraft.

### [Rocket Attack in Iraq Kills a U.S. Military Contractor](#)

February 15, 2021, The New York Times

A rocket attack on the airport in the northern Iraqi city of Erbil killed a civilian contractor with the American-led military coalition and wounded six others, including a U.S. service member, according to a coalition spokesman.

### [Biden Administration Warns of Consequences for Deadly Iraq Attack](#)

February 17, 2021, CNBC

The Biden administration vowed that there will be consequences for those behind the deadly rocket attack earlier this week in northern Iraq.

### [NATO Announces Expanded Mission in Iraq on the Heels of Deadly Rocket Attack](#)

February 18, 2021, CNBC

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg announced that the 30-member alliance will expand its security training mission in Iraq in order to prevent the war-torn country from becoming a safe haven for international terrorists.

[Islamic State Regrouping in Northern Iraq and Relying on Women Operatives](#)

February 04, 2021, Middle East Eye

Islamic State group (IS) militants have been regrouping in northern Iraq and become heavily reliant on women to secure logistical support for their operatives in the Hamrin Basin.

## Iran

### [US Says It is Ready for Direct Talks with Iran over Nuclear Deal](#)

February 19, 2021, Middle East Eye

The United States has said it would accept a European invitation to engage in direct talks with Iran to revive the 2015 nuclear deal.

### [President Biden Rescinds Trump's Sanctions on Iran](#)

February 19, 2021, Voice of America

The Biden administration on Thursday (February 18) rescinded former President Donald Trump's restoration of U.N. sanctions on Iran, an announcement that could help Washington move toward re-joining the 2015 nuclear agreement aimed at reining in the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

### [IAEA, Iran Agree Temporary Deal for Inspections with Less Access](#)

February 21, 2021, AL Jazeera

UN Nuclear watchdog says Iran will begin offering its inspectors 'less access' but still allow the agency to monitor atomic program for up to three months.

### [Iran, Russia Conduct Joint Naval Drill in Indian Ocean](#)

February 16, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iranian forces have concluded a two-day naval exercise with Russia in the northern part of the Indian Ocean.

### [Indian Navy Denies It Has Joined Iran-Russia Naval Exercise in Indian Ocean](#)

February 18, 2021, Times Now

The Indian Navy has denied that it is participating in an exercise along with the navies of Iran and Russia in the northern part of the Indian Ocean. Earlier, there were reports that the Indian Navy too has joined the exercise named 'Iran-Russia Maritime Security Belt 2021'.

### [Iran Keen to Lift Whole Leaf Teas from India, Ready to Pay Good Price](#)

February 18, 2021, The Economic Times

Iranian buyers have initiated negotiations with Indian tea traders to procure whole leaf teas to meet the country's domestic demand.

## Israel

### [India Leases Four Heron Drones from Israel to Keep a 'Hawk-Eye' on 'Retreating' China](#)

February 18, 2021, Eurasian Times

The Indian Army has acquired four Heron TP drones on lease for \$200 million from Israel. The UAVs are likely to be used for surveillance along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Eastern Ladakh from where India and China are currently withdrawing their troops after a protracted military standoff.

### [President Biden and Israel's PM Netanyahu Talk for First Time Since Inauguration](#)

February 17, 2021, CNBC

The White House said that President Biden during the call "affirmed his personal history of steadfast commitment to Israel's security and conveyed his intent to strengthen all aspects of the U.S.-Israel partnership, including the strong defence cooperation."

### [US and Israel Announce Work on New Arrow 4 Air Defence System amid Iran Tensions](#)

February 18, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel and the US have begun developing the Arrow 4, the latest generation in the family of Israeli anti-ballistic missiles and an essential part of the country's multi-layered defense system.

### [Israel Hints It May Not Engage Joe Biden on Iran Nuclear Strategy](#)

February 17, 2021, Arab News

Israel held out the possibility that it would not engage with US President Joe Biden on strategy regarding the Iranian nuclear program, urging tougher sanctions and a "credible military threat" against its arch-enemy.

### [Israel: US Paving Path to Iranian Nuclear Bomb with Push to re-join JCPOA](#)

February 19, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

"Israel remains committed to preventing Iran from getting nuclear weapons and its position on the nuclear agreement has not changed," the Israeli Prime Minister's Office said.

[In Israel and the Gulf, Reaction to U.S. Push for Iran Talks is Muted but Wary](#)

February 19, 2021, The New York Times

Nations that opposed the 2015 nuclear deal with Tehran responded cautiously to the Biden administration's decision to re-engage, while those that supported the deal cheered the move.

## Jordan

### [Jordan Presses Israel to Vaccinate Palestinians](#)

January 29, 2021, Arab News

Jordan's King Abdullah said, "Israel's failure to provide vaccines to Palestinians under occupation in the West Bank or blockaded in the Gaza Strip was counterproductive for the Jewish state".

## Kuwait

### [Indian Edtech Startup Eupheus Learning Raises \\$4.1 Million from Kuwait-based Firms](#)

February 15, 2021, Mint

Edtech startup Eupheus Learning has raised \$4.1 million in a Series B funding round, led by Kuwait-based United Education Company (UEC) and Al Rayan Holding Company (ARHC) in which UEC holds a majority stake.

## Lebanon

### [UN Gives Green Light to Fund Lebanon Tribunal for 2021](#)

February 20, 2021, Arab News

The UN Security Council has given a green light to keep the UN-backed tribunal investigating the 2005 assassination of Lebanon's former Prime Minister Rafik Hariri operating and funded for at least this year.

## Oman

### [PM Modi Speaks with Oman's Sultan, Discusses Strategic Partnership](#)

February 17, 2021, BW Business World

Prime Minister Narendra Modi spoke with Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said over the phone and discussed New Delhi-Muscat strategic partnership and close cooperation between the two countries during COVID-19.

## Qatar

### [Qatar, China Vow to Enhance Cooperation, Deepen Strategic Partnership](#)

February 21, 2021, Global Times

Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Saturday (February 20) held a meeting with visiting senior Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi, during which the two sides vowed to boost cooperation and deepen the China-Qatar strategic partnership.

### [Qatar Looks to be World's Top LNG Producer for Decades](#)

February 17, 2021, Oilprice.com

Qatar Petroleum sanctioned the North Field East Project (NFE), which is set to raise Qatar's LNG production capacity from 77 million tons per annum (mmtpa) to 110 mmtpa. The project, expected to start production in the fourth quarter of 2025, will cost US\$28.75 billion. Qatar also plans another expansion phase at the North Field, set to further increase Qatar's LNG production capacity from 110 mmtpa to 126 mmtpa, with an expected production start date in 2027.

## Saudi Arabia

### [Saudi Arabia Set to Raise Oil Output amid Recovery in Prices](#)

February 17, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

Saudi Arabia plans to increase its oil output in the coming months, reversing a recent big production cut, say advisers to the Kingdom, a sign of growing confidence over an oil-price recovery.

### [Biden Looks to Recalibrate Relationship with Saudi Arabia and Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman](#)

February 20, 2021, NBC News

The White House press secretary Jen Psaki said that when President Biden makes his first official call to Saudi Arabia as president, it will be to the 85-year-old King Salman – and not his 35-year-old son who runs the country day to day.

### [US Seeks 'fall-back' Saudi Bases in Case of Iranian Escalation](#)

February 19, 2021, The Times of Israel

The US military is looking for fall-back bases in Saudi Arabia to prevent its troops deployed there from becoming obvious targets in the event of tensions with Iran, a senior US military official said.

## Syria

### [Israel Secretly Agrees to Fund Vaccines for Syria as Part of Prisoner Swap](#)

February 20, 2021, The New York Times

To secure the release of an Israeli civilian held in Syria, Israel agreed to finance a supply of Russian-made Covid-19 vaccines for Damascus, an official said.

### [Israel and Syria Conclude Russia-mediated Prisoner Swap](#)

February 19, 2021, AL Jazeera

Syria released an Israeli woman after Israel returned two shepherds to the Syrian-controlled side of the Golan Heights amid a Russian-mediated prisoner swap. The woman, who has not been publicly identified, had crossed the border into Syria several days ago, prompting Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu to approach Russian President Vladimir Putin in efforts to secure her release

## Turkey

### [Disinfo Lab Report Reveals How Pakistan and Turkey Use the U.S. for Information War against India](#)

February 19, 2021, Greek City Times

A recent report has stirred a massive global interest towards an information war launched against New Delhi to create political instability by converging anti-India forces within the country, as well as across the world. A Disinfo Lab report titled 'The Unending War: From Proxy War to Info-War' has exposed the design in which foreign elements are using the U.S. to attack India.

### [India Keeps Close Watch on Turkey-Pakistan's Joint Military Exercises](#)

February 16, 2021, The Economic Times

India is keeping a close watch as Turkey and Pakistan launch joint military exercises this week in areas bordering Afghanistan, as the move is expected to create a strategic alliance with implications in South Asia.

### [Erdogan: Turkey's Common Interests with US Outweigh Differences](#)

February 21, 2021, AL Jazeera

Turkey wants to improve cooperation with the United States on a "win-win" basis, President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said, striking a conciliatory tone amid strained relations between the two NATO allies. "As Turkey, we believe our common interests with the United States far outweigh our differences in opinion," Erdogan said.

## UAE

### [India Sends Naval Ship to UAE for Participation in Military Exhibitions](#)

February 20, 2021, The Economic Times

India has sent a warship to Abu Dhabi to participate in two naval defence exhibitions from February 20 to 25, in reflection of its gradual expansion of military cooperation with the United Arab Emirates.

### [UAE's Arms Expo Draws Major Traders Amid Pandemic; Israel, US Stay Home](#)

February 21, 2021, The Times of Israel

The biennial trade fair, the International Defense Exhibition and Conference, is Abu Dhabi's first major in-person event since the outbreak of the virus – a sign of its significance to the oil-rich sheikhdom that has maintained tight movement restrictions in recent months.

### [Iran Accused of Plot to Attack UAE Embassy in Ethiopia](#)

February 15, 2021, Arab News

Iran was behind a recent plot to attack the UAE embassy in Ethiopia, US and Israeli officials have revealed. Iranian intelligence services activated a sleeper cell in Addis Ababa late last year to also gather intelligence on the US and Israel embassies.

## Yemen

### [As Biden Seeks End to Yemen War, Rebels Press Offensive for Strategic Province](#)

February 22, 2021, The Washington Post

The military escalation in Marib, the last northern stronghold of the internationally recognized Yemeni government, threatens to displace hundreds of thousands of Yemenis, many of whom have already fled violence multiple times. That would significantly worsen a humanitarian crisis already described by the United Nations as the world's most severe, say U.S. and U.N. officials and aid workers.



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