



# 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

[www.delhipolicygroup.org](http://www.delhipolicygroup.org)



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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 concerning development, OPEC+ ignored the calls for increasing the crude production, to prevent spike in the oil prices. The Indian Minister for Petroleum's request for easing the production cuts as rising crude prices were hurting post Covid economic recovery went unheeded. Saudi Arabia advised India to use its crude reserves bought last year when the oil prices were low, to tide over the situation. "India had purchased 16.71 million barrels of crude in Apr-May 2020 to fill its strategic petroleum reserves located at Visakhapatnam, Mangalore and Padur". The escalation of war in Yemen is also playing its part in the rise of oil prices, as Houthi rebels have been targeting the Saudi Aramco facilities.

The Indian External Affairs Minister Dr S. Jaishankar addressing the 'India Maritime Summit' reiterated the strategic importance of 'Chabahar Port' as a "safe, secure, and reliable route to Afghanistan and Central Asia to enhance India's trade and connectivity. Further, the Indian Shipping Minister urged for the inclusion of Chabahar in the 'International North South Transport Corridor project' (INSTC), a 7,200-km-long multi-mode network of ship, rail, and road route for moving freight between 13 Eurasian countries. "India is likely to start full operations at Chabahar Port by May-end", shipping minister added. In a related development, Iran's Minister for Roads has "sought increased Line of Credit from India to complete first phase of the Chabahar port". In an address to Israeli heads of missions in Asia-Pacific region, EAM Dr. Jaishankar urged the Israeli diplomats to "utilise the deep comfort enjoyed by the two-sides to further the 'forward and upward trajectory' in bilateral relations".

On the arms procurement front, the Chinese drone sales are on an upward trajectory in West Asia (Middle East). UAE army plans to purchase Chinese Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAV's). These include 10 to 15 Golden Eagle CR500 drones fitted with Red Arrow 12 missiles, and 20 MR40 unmanned aircraft fitted with BBE-2 bombs. These two deals are worth USD9 million and USD7 million respectively.

On the counter-terrorism front, Indian intelligence agencies are keeping an eye on Al-Qaeda linked charity group from Turkey – 'The Foundation for Human Rights and Freedoms and Humanitarian Relief' (IHH) that has reportedly been colluding with 'Islami Sangh Nepal' for providing sanctuary to expand logistical hub for "jihadist networks". "IHH has been named in the UN Security Council documents, for supporting armed terrorist groups in Syria". Meanwhile India has

urged the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to “objectively investigate the alleged use of ‘Chemical Weapons’ in Syria, while urging UNSC to remain aware about the potential dangers of weapons of mass destruction (WMD’s) falling into the hands of terrorist organizations”.

In a historic development, Head of the Catholic Church – ‘Pope Francis’ visited war-torn Iraq (Ancient City of Ur), the birthplace of Prophet Abraham, the father of Jews, Christians, and Muslims. Pope Francis in his remarks declared, “From this place, where faith was born, from the land of our Father Abraham, let us affirm that God is merciful and that the greatest blasphemy is to profane his name by hating our brothers and sisters. Hostility, extremism and violence are not born of a religious heart: they are betrayals of religion”. In the holy city of Najaf, Pope Francis met Iraq’s top Shiite cleric Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, spiritual leader of most of the world’s Shiite Muslims to urge Iraqis to embrace countries beleaguered Christians.

On the US-Iran relations, Washington reiterated its strong interest in re-engaging Iran over Tehran’s nuclear program after European countries dropped plans to censure Iran at the IAEA, maintaining that “Iran has accepted to discuss the impending issues including the presence of uranium particles, the status of nuclear sites and the 2015 nuclear deal restrictions with the IAEA”. IAEA Director General expects to get a better understanding on the status of Iranian nuclear sites by April. Further, Iran’s Foreign Minister Zarif reiterated his countries commitment to take steps to live up to measures in the 2015 ‘JCPoA’ as soon as the US lifts sanctions on Iran. Meanwhile rocket attacks on the US troops continued in Iraq with the latest attack targeting the ‘Ayn Al Asad Air Base’ in country’s western Anbar Province.

In a related development, Prime Minister Netanyahu of Israel, spoke with US Vice President Kamala Harris stressing that, “Israel will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons”. While the Israeli Defence Minister claimed that, “Israel has drawn up a list of Iranian targets to strike if Tehran shows signs of nuclear escalation”. In another development concerning Israel, with far reaching consequences, the International Criminal Court (ICC) has launched war crimes probe into alleged Israeli crimes in the Palestinian territories including the West Bank, Gaza strip, and East Jerusalem. Biden administration has opposed the ICC’s decision, while reiterating strong commitment to Israel’s security.

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

## Bahrain

### [India, Bahrain Discuss Ways to Boost Cooperation](#)

March 03, 2021, The Siasat Daily

Indian Ambassador to Bahrain Piyush Srivastava met Bahrain Foreign Affairs Minister Dr Abdullatif bin Rashid Al-Zayani and discussed ways to promote cooperation to meet common aspirations between the two countries.

### [China's Tencent Cloud Looks to Tap Middle East Growth with Bahrain Data Centre](#)

March 01, 2021, ZDNet

Chinese internet giant plans to launch an internet data centre in Bahrain by year-end, marking its first facility in the Middle East and North Africa region, where it says it is seeing strong growth opportunities.

## Egypt

### [Egypt Moves Ahead with Purchase of Russian Arms despite US Warnings](#)

March 03, 2021, AL-Monitor

Russia officially announced that Egypt had received five Sukhoi Su-35 advanced combat aircrafts, despite US threats to sanction Cairo.

### [Egypt's President Visits Sudan with Dam Diplomacy, Security on the Agenda](#)

March 06, 2021, Hindustan Times

Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi visited Sudan for the first time since the overthrow of former President Omar al-Bashir, as the neighbours push to break a diplomatic deadlock over a giant dam being built by Ethiopia.



## Iraq

### [India Asks OPEC+ to Fulfill Promise of Stable Oil Prices](#)

March 04, 2021, The Economic Times

With retail petrol and diesel prices going through the roof, India again urged oil producers' group OPEC to ease production curbs to fulfill their promise of stable oil prices.

### [Rockets Hit Iraqi Base Where U.S. Troops are Stationed](#)

March 04, 2021, The New York Times

A barrage of rockets was fired on Wednesday (March 03) at the Ayn Al Asad air base in Iraq's western Anbar Province – one of the last remaining Iraqi bases where U.S. forces are stationed. An Iraqi security statement and one released by the Pentagon said 10 rockets were launched toward the sprawling base.

### [Rockets of Iraqi Militias Test Patience of New US Administration](#)

March 05, 2021, The Arab Weekly

Observers in the region say the latest aggression by Iran-aligned militias in Iraq aims at testing the reaction of the new US administration, and whether Washington will respond or accept these attacks as a fait accompli, limiting its reaction to warnings and threats as the previous administration of former president Donald Trump did.

### [U.S. Will Defend Troops and Interests after Rocket Attack in Iraq, Defense Secretary Says](#)

March 07, 2021, CNBC

Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin warned those responsible for carrying out last week's rocket attack against an Iraqi base that hosts American troops will be held to account.

### [In Ancient Ur, Birthplace of Abraham, Pope Urges Peace among Monotheistic Faiths](#)

March 06, 2021, The Times of Israel

Standing in the traditional birthplace of the biblical Abraham, the father of the Jewish, Christian and Muslim faiths, Pope Francis on Saturday (March 06) urged Iraq's Muslim and Christian religious leaders to put aside animosities and work together for peace and unity.

[Pope Francis Meets Iraq's Shia Leader al-Sistani](#)

March 06, 2021, AL Jazeera

Pope Francis has met with Grand Ayatollah Ali al-Sistani, one of the most senior leaders in Shia Islam, in Iraq's holy city of Najaf to deliver a message of peaceful coexistence, urging Muslims to embrace Iraq's long-beleaguered Christian minority.

## Iran

### [Iran's Chabahar Port Crucial for Trade in Central Asia: EAM Jaishankar](#)

March 04, 2021, Mint

Speaking at an event to mark the Chabahar Day at the Maritime India Summit organised by India's shipping ministry, Jaishankar pointed out that there was a "huge infrastructure deficit in the region, which needs to be met to fulfil the growing aspirations of our people."

### [India Likely to Start Full Operations at Iran's Chabahar Port by May End](#)

March 05, 2021, Reuters

India expects to start full-scale operations at Iran's Chabahar general cargo port it has built by the end of May, the country's shipping minister said in a boost for regional trade.

### [Iran and IAEA Clear Potential Roadblock to Talks with US on Nuclear Deal](#)

March 04, 2021, The Guardian

A potential roadblock to talks between Iran and the US on the future of the nuclear deal has been cleared after the UN nuclear inspectorate said it had won Iran's agreement to return to Tehran to hold focused talks on doubts over the veracity of the country's previous declarations about its nuclear sites.

### [Looking Forward with Strong Interest for Iran's Willingness to Engage: US on Nuclear Issue](#)

March 05, 2021, WION

As the United Nations nuclear watchdog looks forward to a technical dialogue with Iran, the United States said it is hopeful that Iran would come forward for diplomacy after European allies dropped plans to censure Tehran at the UN nuclear watchdog.

### [Iran Ready to Take Steps When US Lifts Sanctions, Says President Rouhani](#)

March 07, 2021, Hindustan Times

In a meeting with Irish Minister of Foreign Affairs Simon Coveney, Rouhani said: "Iran is ready to immediately take compensatory measures based on the nuclear deal and fulfill its commitments just after the U.S. illegal sanctions are lifted and it abandons its policy of threats and pressure."

## Israel

### [EAM Jaishankar Asks Israeli Diplomats to Keep up 'Forward and Upward Trajectory' in Bilateral Relations](#)

March 02, 2021, The Times of India

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar told Israeli diplomats to understand the "profound changes" underway in India post-Covid-19 pandemic and utilise the fundamental and deep comfort enjoyed by the two sides to further the "forward and upward trajectory" in bilateral ties.

### [Israeli PM Netanyahu Speaks to US VP Kamala Harris, Tells Her He Won't Allow Iran to Obtain Nukes](#)

March 05, 2021, The Times of Israel

Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu spoke to US Vice President Kamala Harris, with the conversation focusing on the pandemic, the Iranian nuclear program, and the International Criminal Court's decision to open an investigation into Israel over alleged war crimes.

### [ICC Launches War Crimes Probe Into Israeli Practices in Palestinian Territories](#)

March 04, 2021, Associated Press

The International Criminal Court's chief prosecutor on Wednesday (March 03) launched an investigation into alleged crimes in the Palestinian territories, turning the tribunal's focus toward Israeli military actions and settlement construction on lands captured in the 1967 Mideast war.

### [Defence Minister Gantz Says Israel Has List of Iran-backed Targets Ready to Strike](#)

March 05, 2021, AL Jazeera

Israel's defence minister has said that his country has drawn up plans to strike Iranian targets if Tehran shows signs of nuclear escalation.

### [Iran Will Raze Tel Aviv and Haifa to Ground if Israel Makes Mistake: Defense Minister Hatami](#)

March 07, 2021, Tehran Times

"Sometimes, the Zionist regime [Israel] out of desperation makes big claims against the Islamic Republic of Iran to allegedly threaten it while this regime knows and if it doesn't know, it must know that if it does a damn thing, we will raze Tel Aviv and Haifa to the ground," the defense minister Brig. Gen. Amir Hatami said.

[US Opposes ICC Probe into Israel, Palestinians; Weighs Maintaining Sanctions](#)

March 04, 2021, The Times of Israel

The Biden administration “firmly” opposes the International Criminal Court’s decision to open an investigation into alleged war crimes committed by Israel and the Palestinians, but is still weighing whether to maintain sanctions against the body imposed by the Trump administration.

## Jordan

### [Jordan Opens Consulate in Western Sahara](#)

March 04, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Jordan opened a consulate in the disputed Western Sahara region. Jordan became the third Arab country to open a consulate in the Sahara region after the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain.

## Kuwait

### [China Eyes Deepened Ties and Cooperation with Kuwait](#)

February 23, 2021, CGTN

Senior Chinese diplomat Yang Jiechi called for closer cooperation between China and Kuwait to push forward the bilateral ties to a higher level when meeting with Kuwaiti Emir Sheikh Nawaf Al-Ahmad Al-Jaber Al-Sabah.

## Lebanon

### [Lebanon on Edge as Protests Persist, Caretaker PM Pleads for New Government](#)

March 06, 2021, Voice of America

Demonstrators blocked various roadways across Lebanon for the fifth day in a row, and a heavy army presence filled parts of the capital as anger simmered over the country's economic downturn. Caretaker Prime Minister Hassan Diab threatened in a speech earlier in the day to stop performing his duties to pressure politicians to form a new government.



## Oman

### [Oman: Top US General Visits Khasab Air Base](#)

February 21, 2021, Gulf News

General Kenneth Mackenzie, Commander-in-Chief of the US Central Command (CENTCOM), and his accompanying delegation, currently on a three-day official visit to Oman, visited the Khasab air-base recently.

## Qatar

### [Hedging its Bets with US, Qatar Reaches Out to Tehran](#)

February 16, 2021, The Arab Weekly

Doha is hedging its bets with both Tehran and Washington, especially as the Biden administration continues to consider how to effectively deal with Iran's nuclear ambitions.

## Saudi Arabia

### [Oil Prices Jump as OPEC+ Keeps Production Largely Steady, Saudi Arabia Continues Voluntary Cut](#)

March 04, 2021, CNBC

Oil prices jumped after OPEC and its oil-producing allies said the group would keep production largely steady through April. Saudi Arabia also said that it would extend its one million barrels per day voluntary production cut into April.

### [OPEC Ignores India's Call; Saudi Arabia asks New Delhi to Use Cheap Oil it Bought Last Year](#)

March 05, 2021, The New Indian Express

International oil prices rose after OPEC and its allies ignored India's plea to ease production control, with Saudi Arabia asking New Delhi to instead use oil it bought at rock bottom rates last year.

### [Saudi Arabia 'Fears Defeat of Netanyahu' in Upcoming Israeli Election](#)

March 04, 2021, Middle East Eye

Saudi Arabia is concerned about a possible election defeat for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu, who they consider a "spearhead" against Iran.

### [US Says it Wants to Push Israel-Saudi Pact, but Only if Riyadh Honors its Values](#)

March 02, 2021, The Times of Israel

The US wants to advance a wide-ranging agenda in its relationship with Saudi Arabia that includes brokering a peace deal between the Gulf power and Israel, but will only be able to do so if Riyadh improves its human rights record.

## Syria

### [India Calls for Investigation into Chemical Weapons Use in Syria, Warns UNSC About WMDs](#)

March 05, 2021, Republic World

India on Thursday (March 04) called for an objective investigation into the alleged use of chemical weapons in Syria and urged the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) to remain aware of the dangers of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) falling into the hands of terrorist groups.

### [Missile Strikes Hit Oil Refineries in Northern Syria, Killing One](#)

March 05, 2021, AL Jazeera

A series of missile attacks near oil facilities ignited major blazes in northern Syria near the Turkish border and killed one person.

## Turkey

### [Indian Intelligence Agencies Keep an Eye on Al-Qaeda Linked Turkish Group Expanding in Nepal](#)

February 28, 2021, Mint

An Al-Qaeda linked-charity group from Turkey has been working with Islamai Sangh Nepal (ISN), which is under the scanner of Indian intelligence agencies for allegedly providing sanctuary to terrorists, to expand its logistical hub for jihadist networks.

### [US, Turkey Have Shared Interests in Syria: State Department](#)

March 03, 2021, Daily Sabah

"We have shared interests with Turkey, specifically when it comes to Syria," United States' State Department Spokesman Ned Price said in a statement. "We will continue to work with Turkey, and to work constructively with Turkey to achieve our common interests," he said.

## UAE

### [Emirati-Chinese Drone Link-up Revealed at IDEX: Source](#)

February 27, 2021, Asia Times

UAE army plans to buy several new Chinese unmanned aerial vehicles (UAV's) and work on long-term R&D projects.

### ['A Shared Mission': Israel officially Receives First-ever UAE Ambassador](#)

March 01, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israeli President Reuven Rivlin formally received the first-ever ambassador to Israel from the United Arab Emirates, following last year's historic agreement between the countries to normalize ties.

### [Arab League Ministers Reaffirm UAE's Sovereignty over 3 Iran-occupied Islands](#)

March 04, 2021, Arab News

Foreign ministers of the Arab League have reaffirmed the UAE's sovereignty over three islands (Abu Mousa, Lesser Tunb and Greater Tunb) that were occupied by Iran in the 1970s.

## Yemen

### [Brent Crude Breaks \\$70 After Saudi Arabia's Oil Facilities Attacked by Yemen's Houthis](#)

March 07, 2021, CNBC

The surge in oil prices came after Saudi Arabia said its oil facilities were targeted by missiles and drones on Sunday (March 07). A Houthi military spokesman claimed responsibility for the attacks.

### [Fighting in Yemen's Marib Kills 90 in 24 Hours: Government Military Source](#)

March 06, 2021, Arab News

Fierce fighting between Yemeni pro-government forces and Iran-backed Houthi rebels has killed at least 90 combatants on both sides in the past 24 hours, government military sources said.



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