



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



Volume III, Issue 11 | March 15, 2021

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

www.delhipolicygroup.org



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power

DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW Volume III, Issue 11

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.

© 2021 by the Delhi Policy Group

Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor,

India Habitat Centre,

Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003.

www.delhipolicygroup.org

DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW

Volume III, Issue 11

Contents

Abstract	i
Bahrain	1
Egypt	2
Iraq	3
Iran	4
Israel	6
Jordan	8
Kuwait	9
Lebanon	10
Oman	11
Qatar	12
Saudi Arabia	13
Syria	15
Turkey	16
UAE	17
Yemen	18

Abstract

In a boost to the already strong 'India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership', Prime Minister Narendra Modi held telephonic conversation with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. "The two leaders reviewed functioning of bilateral Strategic Partnership Council established in 2019. PM Modi expressed a desire to expand bilateral trade and investments while highlighting opportunities for Saudi investors in India". As a result, Saudi Agriculture and Livestock Investment Company (Salic) is likely to step up investments in the Indian agricultural ecosystem. In another development, External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar held discussions with Kuwait's Foreign Minister on bilateral cooperation and the regional politics.

To strengthen regional maritime cooperation, UAE will take part in the 'Varuna Naval Exercise' involving India and France in the strategically important Gulf of Oman and the Persian Gulf. This exercise is scheduled between April 25 and 27.

In a security related development, Indian counter-terror officials blamed Iran's 'Quds Force' (Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps) for the blast outside the Israeli Embassy in New Delhi. Investigators believe that the 'IRGC' tasked local Shiite cell with planting the remote controlled device. Iran rejected these reports describing them as "unsubstantiated allegations", while offering to cooperate with the Indian authorities in the probe. Meanwhile India's imports of crude oil from Iran fell to 'Zero' in the financial year 2020-21 from a historic high of 27.2 million tonne in 2016-17 with the US replacing Iran as an alternative supplier for India's crude basket. In another development, India provided 150,000 'COVAXIN' vaccines to Iran.

On the energy front, Beijing is disregarding US sanctions on Iranian oil exports. Reportedly "Some Chinese refiners are buying so much Iranian crude that the ports in the Shandong province are experiencing tanker traffic congestions". In a further sign of regional engagement, China has supplied 300,000 doses of the Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine to Bahrain. Meanwhile Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi spoke with his Iraqi counterpart to "deepen mutual political trust, while thanking the Iraqi's for supporting Beijing's position on Xinjiang and Hong Kong, adding that supporting China on these issues means non-interference in other countries internal affairs, a key principle of the UN Charter".

In a major development, Russian Foreign Minister Lavrov visited Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Qatar. This visit comes at a critical time in Saudi Arabia-United States relations, when the Biden administration is recalibrating the bilateral strategic partnership and has suspended certain major arms sales to Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Further, Russia seeks Arab countries support to revive the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). Besides the US and the European countries, Russian Foreign Minister has also slammed the Houthi rebels of Yemen for their recent attacks on the Saudi oil facilities as “unacceptable”, while stating that, “removing the Houthis from the American terrorism list is not a blank cheque for them to continue with violence”.

On the US-Iran relations, US National Security Advisor revealed that, Washington and Tehran are engaged in “indirect diplomacy” about the possible ways in which Iran can resume compliance with the 2015 JCPOA. Further, US Secretary of State re-iterated that, “US will not relieve sanctions imposed on Iran before Tehran’s compliance with the terms agreed under the JCPOA”.

In a major development, reports have revealed “Israeli attacks on at least a dozen vessels bound for Syria carrying Iranian oil since 2019. The United States and Israel believe oil profits are funding Iranian extremism across the Middle East”. Further, Israel and the United States held first meeting of the ‘bilateral strategic group’ with focus on Iran. In a significant development, an independent expert group, International Panel on Fissile Material (IPFM) has published new satellite images highlighting major expansion of Israel’s Dimona nuclear facility in the Negev desert.

In light of the growing cross-border missile and drone attacks in the Middle East (West Asia), Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and UAE’s state-owned weapons maker ‘EDGE’ have signed defence collaboration agreement to develop ‘anti-drone technology’. In terms of the rocket attacks on the US troops in Iraq, Iraqi paramilitaries have declared that they would stop attacks if PM Mustafa al-Kadhimi demands Washington to withdraw US troops from Iraq.

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

Bahrain

[Bahrain Rejects European Parliament Resolution on Human Rights Situation in the Kingdom](#)

March 13, 2021, Arab News

Bahrain has rejected the European Parliament (EP) resolution on the human rights situation in the Kingdom, affirming its lack of evidence.

[Bahrain Receives 300,000 Doses of China's Sinopharm Covid-19 Vaccine](#)

March 12, 2021, Saudi Gazette

A total of 300,000 doses of China's Sinopharm COVID-19 vaccine arrived in Bahrain on Friday (March 12), Bahrain's Health Minister Faeqa Bint Saeed Al-Saleh announced in a statement.

Egypt

[US Urged to Cut Military Aid to Egypt amid Worsening Crackdown on Dissent](#)

March 10, 2021, Middle East Eye

Leading rights advocates have called on the United States to cut military aid to Egypt over President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi's ongoing crackdown against dissidents and activists.

[Egypt Denies Resumption of Diplomatic Ties with Turkey](#)

March 13, 2021, Arab News

The Egyptian Foreign Ministry has denied claims by the Turkish government that there has been resumption and restoration of ties with Cairo and Gulf states.

[China, Egypt Ink Cooperation Deal on Technology Incubators](#)

March 05, 2021, CGTN

Egypt and China signed a deal to conduct cooperation on technology incubators, the Chinese embassy in Cairo said. The deal was signed by Shanghai Institute of Microsystem and Information Technology (SIMIT) of the Chinese Academy of Sciences with Egypt's Electronics Research Institute (ERI).

Iraq

[China Ready to Strengthen Friendship, Mutual Trust with Iraq, Says Chinese FM](#)

March 13, 2021, CGTN

China is ready to consolidate its traditional friendship with Iraq and deepen mutual political trust, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

[Rage in Iraq after ISIS Claims Murder of 7-Member Family](#)

March 13, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

Gunmen murdered an entire family in Iraq's Salaheddine province before fleeing the scene. ISIS claimed the responsibility for the attack and said its gunmen killed all six family members, as well as a policeman, alleging that they were "spies" for the Iran-backed Popular Mobilization Forces (PMF).

[Iraqi Paramilitaries Agree to Stop Attacks on the US Troops if PM Kadhimi Demands their Withdrawal](#)

March 11, 2021, Middle East Eye

After frantic meetings in Baghdad, Beirut and Tehran, Iranian-backed Iraqi paramilitaries have agreed to stop attacks against US forces in Iraq on the condition that Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi formally demands an American withdrawal. PM Kadhimi must tell Washington that the pull-out has to be completed within 12 months.

Iran

[China Splurges on Iranian Oil Despite U.S. Sanctions](#)

March 11, 2021, Oilprice.com

Despite the U.S. sanctions on Iranian oil exports, some Chinese refiners are buying so much Iranian crude that the ports in the Shandong province, where most independent refiners are based, are experiencing tanker traffic congestions.

[India Said to Blame Iran's Quds Force for Blast Outside Israeli Embassy in New Delhi](#)

March 08, 2021, The Times of Israel

Indian counter-terror investigators reportedly believe the IRGC tasked a local cell with planting the remote-control detonated device in January in New Delhi.

[Iran Rejects Blame for Israeli Embassy Attack in India](#)

March 08, 2021, Daily Sabah

Iran has dismissed reports of its involvement in a recent low-intensity explosion near the Israeli mission in the Indian capital. In a detailed statement on Monday (March 08), the Iranian Embassy in New Delhi rejected what it said were "unsubstantiated allegations," offering to cooperate with Indian authorities in the probe.

[Iran Says Received 150,000 Doses of India's Covid Jab](#)

March 11, 2021, The Times of India

Iran has received a shipment of 150,000 doses of India's Covaxin as the Islamic republic combats the Middle East's deadliest virus outbreak.

[US Says Engaged in 'Indirect Diplomacy' with Iran](#)

March 13, 2021, The Arab Weekly

The United States and Iran have begun indirect diplomacy with Europeans and others conveying messages about how they might resume compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, US National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan said.

[US Will Not Relieve Sanctions on Iran Before Nuclear Deal \(JCPOA\) Terms are Respected](#)

March 13, 2021, Middle East Monitor

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken has asserted that his country will not relieve sanctions imposed on Iran before complying with the terms agreed under the 2015 nuclear deal.

[Time Running Out for Serious Nuclear Diplomacy with Iran, Former U.S. Energy Secretary Says](#)

March 11, 2021, CNBC

Time is running out for the United States to engage in meaningful diplomacy with Iran and elections set for June could put nuclear talks on "hiatus," according to former U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz.

[US Replaces Iran in India's Crude Basket in 2020-21](#)

March 09, 2021, Moneycontrol

In a major shift in India's crude basket and bilateral trade, the country's crude oil imports from Iran dropped to zero during the current financial year from a historic high of 27.2 million tonne (MT) in 2016-17.

Israel

[Israel Expands Nuclear Facility Previously Used for Weapons Material](#)

February 18, 2021, The Guardian

Israel is carrying out a major expansion of its Dimona nuclear facility in the Negev desert, where it has historically made the fissile material for its nuclear arsenal. Construction work is evident in new satellite images published by the International Panel on Fissile Material (IPFM), an independent expert group.

[U.S., Israel Discuss Iran in First Meeting of Strategic Group](#)

March 12, 2021, Reuters

Senior U.S. and Israel officials focused on concerns about Iran during the first virtual meeting of a bilateral strategic group on Thursday (March 11), the White House said, an issue on which Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu has differences with the new Biden administration.

[Israeli Strikes Target Iranian Oil Bound for Syria](#)

March 11, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

Israel has targeted at least a dozen vessels bound for Syria and mostly carrying Iranian oil out of concern that petroleum profits are funding extremism in the Middle East, U.S. and regional officials say, in a new front in the conflict between Israel and Iran.

[Kosovo Follows US, Guatemala in Opening Embassy in Jerusalem](#)

March 14, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Muslim-majority Kosovo opened its embassy to Israel in Jerusalem on Sunday (March 14), joining the United States and Guatemala as the only countries with embassies in a city whose status is at the heart of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

[Arab League and Palestinians Condemn Opening of Czech Republic Jerusalem office](#)

March 14, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The Palestinian Authority and the Arab League condemned the Czech Republic's opening of a diplomatic office in Jerusalem as a violation of international law.

[UAE Announces \\$10 Billion Fund for Investments in Israel](#)

March 12, 2021, The Times of Israel

The United Arab Emirates announced it was setting up a \$10 billion investment fund aimed at strategic sectors including energy manufacturing, water, space, healthcare and agri-tech in Israel.

Jordan

[Israeli PM Netanyahu Forced to Cancel Trip to UAE amid Dispute with Jordan](#)

March 11, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu was forced to cancel a planned whirlwind visit to the United Arab Emirates, Israeli officials said, because Jordan delayed approving his flight path over the Hashemite kingdom. The PMO said this was apparently in retaliation for the Jordanian crown prince's canceled trip to the Temple Mount (Al-Aqsa Mosque), which he called off amid a dispute with Israel over entry permits for his security detail.

Kuwait

[EAM Jaishankar Discusses Bilateral Cooperation, Regional Situation with Kuwait's FM](#)

March 02, 2021, The Times of India

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar and his Kuwaiti counterpart discussed bilateral cooperation and the regional situation.

Lebanon

[Thousands Join Protests in Lebanon as Local Currency Continues to Slide](#)

March 13, 2021, TRT World

Lebanon's currency has plummeted to a new record low, continuing its crash amid a worsening economic crisis that has triggered near-daily protests throughout the tiny Mediterranean country.

Oman

[Oman Blocks Audio App Clubhouse Citing Lack of Permit, But Some Fear Censorship](#)

March 15, 2021, The Economic Times

Oman blocked US audio app Clubhouse on Sunday (March 15) because it did not have the right permit, authorities said, but some activists described the move as a further erosion of freedom of expression in the Gulf state.

Qatar

[Qatar, China Sign Protocol Amending Pact for Avoidance of Double Taxation](#)

March 14, 2021, The Peninsula Qatar

Qatar and People's Republic of China have signed the protocol amending the agreement for the avoidance of double taxation and preventing financial evasions concerning income taxes between the two countries' governments.

Saudi Arabia

[On Call with Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, PM Modi Talks Trade, Investment](#)

March 11, 2021, Hindustan Times

During the call on Wednesday (March 10), PM Modi discussed with the Saudi leader his wish to further expand trade and investment between the two countries.

[Saudi Arabia Cuts April Crude for Some Asian Refiners, Maintains India Supply](#)

March 13, 2021, The Economic Times

Top oil exporter Saudi Arabia has cut the supply of April-loading crude to at least four north Asian buyers by up to 15%, while meeting the normal monthly requirements of Indian refiners.

[Russian FM Lavrov in Saudi Arabia to Take Advantage of Biden's Mistakes](#)

March 10, 2021, The Arab Weekly

An informed Saudi source said that the Gulf tour by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov, which began Monday (March 8), coincides with a Saudi effort to recalibrate its relationship with the United States.

[Russian FM Slams Houthi Attacks on Saudi Oil Facilities](#)

March 12, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov condemned Yemen's Houthis' attacks on Saudi oil facilities, describing them as "unacceptable". In a joint press conference with Saudi Foreign Minister, Prince Faisal Bin Farhan, in Riyadh, Lavrov said: "Removing the Houthis from the American terrorism list is not a blank cheque for them to continue with violence."

[Russia Seeks Arab Support in Reviving Iran Nuclear Deal \(JCPOA\)](#)

March 14, 2021, Anadolu Agency

Lavrov's efforts to push Arab countries to better relations with Iran may have a deeper meaning than a simple desire to contribute to regional security, taking into account a recent statement by US President Joe Biden who said he was willing to return to the Iran nuclear deal.

[Saudi Arabia's Salic to Step up India Agri investments](#)

March 05, 2021, The Economic Times

Saudi Arabia's Salic, which has 29% minority stake in LT Foods subsidiary Daawat Foods, will step up investments in the Indian agricultural ecosystem, Salic and United Farms Investment Company group chief executive Sulaiman AlRumaih said, during an India visit this week.

Syria

[Pope Says 10th Anniversary of Syrian Civil War Must Spur Peace Efforts](#)

March 14, 2021, Hindustan Times

Pope Francis called the Syrian civil war one of the worst humanitarian crises of current times, saying its 10th anniversary should spur all to seek "a sliver of hope" for a devastated nation.

[United States, at UN, Accuses Russia of Blocking 'Accountability' on Syrian Chemical Weapons](#)

March 05, 2021, The Hindu

The new US envoy to the United Nations accused Russia of seeking to stymie efforts to hold the government of Syrian leader Bashar al-Assad accountable for its use of chemical weapons during its long civil war.

Turkey

[Afghan Government to Attend Peace Talks in Turkey, Russia](#)

March 13, 2021, Daily Sabah

Afghan government said it would participate in two separate U.S. and Russian-backed peace conferences in Russia and Turkey in the coming weeks. The Russian-backed conference is scheduled for March 18, while the U.S.-sponsored one will take place in Turkey next month.

[Turkey Cracks Down on Uighur Protesters After China Complains](#)

March 05, 2021, Voice of America

Turkey has been a vocal champion for China's Uighur ethnic minority, pressing Beijing to end harsh policies in Xinjiang that then-Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan called a genocide in 2009. That stance has shifted in more recent years, with Turkish officials largely abandoning their public criticism of China's Uighur policies.

UAE

[Quad, France and UAE Join Hands in 2 Naval Exercises to Dominate the Indo-Pacific](#)

March 09, 2021, Hindustan Times

The Indian Navy, its partners in the QUAD grouping, and, its strategic allies France and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) will be part of a complex interoperability exercises involving carrier strike groups, anti-submarine warfare aircraft and attack submarines in April – a move aimed at projecting their dominance from the Persian Gulf to the Malacca Straits.

[UAE, Israeli Firms Team up on Anti-Drone Technology](#)

March 13, 2021, The Arab Weekly

The collaboration on a counter-drone system comes as Yemen's Iran-aligned Houthi militias are stepping up cross-border missile and drone attacks on Saudi Arabia. In the past, Yemeni militias have threatened to launch strikes on the UAE.

Yemen

[US and Europe Condemn Houthi Attacks on Saudi Arabia and Yemen's Marib](#)

March 11, 2021, Arab News

The Western governments condemned attacks by the Iran-backed Houthi militia against Saudi Arabia (Aramco facilities) and their offensive in Yemen's Marib province.

[Houthi Rebels Reject US-proposed Cease-fire Plan in Yemen](#)

March 13, 2021, Anadolu Agency

Iran-backed Houthi rebels in Yemen announced that it ruled out a US cease-fire plan, describing it as a plot to put the war-weary country in a more dangerous situation.

[Migrants Demand International Probe into Deadly Yemen Fire](#)

March 14, 2021, Outlook India

A leader of the migrant community in the Yemeni capital called for an international probe into a fire that tore through a detention center last week, killing at least 44 people, mostly Ethiopian migrants.



Delhi Policy Group
Core 5A, 1st Floor,
India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road
New Delhi - 110003
India

www.delhipolicygroup.org