



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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Contents

Abstract.....	i
Bahrain.....	1
Egypt.....	2
Iraq.....	3
Iran.....	4
Israel.....	5
Jordan.....	6
Kuwait.....	7
Lebanon.....	8
Oman.....	9
Qatar.....	10
Saudi Arabia.....	11
Syria.....	12
Turkey.....	13
UAE.....	14
Yemen.....	15

Abstract

In a major success for India's vaccine diplomacy, 360,000 Made-in-India coronavirus vaccines have arrived in Yemen, hailed as a "game changer" and "milestone" in the fight against the pandemic by the UN official. In another development, India and Bahrain reviewed their bilateral cooperation in oil and gas, trade and investment, defence, healthcare and renewables ahead of the visit of Bahraini Foreign Minister to New Delhi on April 07 for the 'High Joint Commission' meeting.

On the energy front, India has reportedly asked its oil refiners to review their contracts with Saudi Arabia that are "loaded against the buyer". This comes amid New Delhi's frustration with the OPEC+ decision to keep the production cuts steady even as the rising crude prices were undermining post-Covid economic recovery in countries like India. In a related development, the United States has asked OPEC to "keep oil prices affordable for consumers" ahead of the next OPEC+ meeting scheduled to be held on April 08.

The Suez Canal reopened after a weeklong blockage caused by a stranded container on March 23. The blockage caused an estimated cumulative loss of USD54 billion causing serious disruption to the global maritime trade. Concerned with the incident, Egypt is considering widening the Suez Canal to prevent future disruptions to this all important navigation channel.

On the security front, world powers are planning to launch talks in Vienna on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA). Iran has however ruled out any direct or indirect talks with the United States and has rejected the US proposal to halt Uranium enrichment to 20 percent to create conditions for gradually lifting sanctions imposed by the Trump administration. In an important development, the Biden administration has lifted sanctions imposed on ICC prosecutor by the Trump administration, imposed last year after the ICC prosecutors launched an investigation into alleged war crimes by the US military personnel in Afghanistan. Further, the US Department of State in its human rights report described the 'West Bank' and 'Gaza' as "occupied" by Israel. Importantly, this report noted 2019 US recognition of the 'Golan Heights' (Syrian territory till the 1967 Arab-Israeli War) as Israeli territory, as well as the 2017 US recognition of 'Jerusalem' as Israel's capital. It must be noted that, "this report is not meant to convey a position on any final status issues, including on borders".

In a security related development, the United States has shifted some of its major military assets from Saudi Arabia including at least one Patriot anti-missile system, an aircraft carrier, and surveillance systems. “The Pentagon in February had announced that it would conduct a global force posture review of the US military’s footprint, resources, strategy, and missions at the directive of President Joe Biden”. Meanwhile Saudi Arabia’s Foreign Minister stated that, normalising relations with Israel would bring “tremendous benefits” to the Middle East, but this depends on peace between the Israelis and Palestinians.

In a major development, Jordan has placed former Crown Prince Hamzah bin Al Hussein and several other high-profile leaders under house arrest amid links to an alleged coup plot against the Kingdom. In light of this, the United States and GCC have shown their full support to Jordan’s King Abdullah to preserve the security and stability of the Kingdom.

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

Bahrain

[India, Bahrain Review Bilateral Cooperation Ahead of Al Zayani's New Delhi Visit](#)

March 31, 2021, Mint

India and Bahrain reviewed their current levels of bilateral cooperation in oil and gas, trade and investment, defence, healthcare and renewables ahead of a visit to New Delhi by Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani on April 07.

[Bahrain's Leaders Hold Talks with Chinese Foreign Minister](#)

March 30, 2021, Arab News

King Hamad said Bahrain takes pride in its close historical ties with China during a meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi. The king said relations are based on strong foundations of trust, mutual respect, cooperation and joint coordination in all fields.

Egypt

[Suez Canal Reopens after Giant Stranded Ship is Freed](#)

March 31, 2021, BBC News

Traffic has resumed in Egypt's Suez Canal after a stranded container ship blocking it for nearly a week was finally freed by salvage crews.

[Explained: How Much did Suez Canal Blockage Cost World Trade](#)

March 30, 2021, India Today

Since the Japanese-owned ship had blocked the narrow canal for six days, the total trade loss has been estimated at roughly \$54 billion. However, this figure is based on just the cargo shipments that were halted or delayed due to the blockage.

[Egypt Considers Widening Suez Canal After Ever Given Accident](#)

April 02, 2021, Arab News

Egypt is studying potential expansion of the Suez shipping channel to prevent a recurrence of the accident that disrupted navigation there for about a week, said Suez Canal Authority Chairman Osama Rabie.

Iraq

[Two Rockets Hit Near Iraq Air Base Hosting US Soldiers](#)

April 04, 2021, Arab News

Two rockets hit near an Iraqi air base hosting US soldiers north of Baghdad on Sunday (April 04), three days ahead of a new “strategic dialogue” with Washington.

[US Places Iraq's Independence From Iran among Its Priorities](#)

April 03, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

The United States has announced its desire for Iraq to be independent from Iran, with regard to self-sufficiency in energy and other economic sources, expressing its willingness to strengthen cooperation with Baghdad.

Iran

[Iran: No Talks with US During Vienna Meeting](#)

April 04, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Sayed Abbas Araghchi ruled out any direct or indirect talks with the US one day before heading to Vienna for much-anticipated talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal (JCPOA).

[Iran Rejects Halting Enriching Uranium to 20 Percent in Return for Some Sanctions Relief](#)

March 30, 2021, The Times of Israel

The Biden administration is planning to offer to lift some sanctions on Iran if the Islamic Republic stops work on advanced centrifuges and enriching uranium to 20 percent. But Iran rejected the offer bluntly, with the state-run Press TV saying on its website: "A senior Iranian official tells Press TV that Tehran will stop its 20-percent uranium enrichment only if the US lifts all its sanctions on Iran first."

Israel

[US State Department Says Israel 'occupied' West Bank and Gaza](#)

April 01, 2021, AL-Monitor

The US State Department clarified its view that, Israel “occupied” the Palestinian territories. The comments follow a report from the department that retained some Trump administration language indicating a more pro-Israel view from the United States on the issue.

[Israel Considers Possibility of Devastating Attack by Syria, Lebanon, Iran, Iraq](#)

April 03, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Israel’s Institute for National Security Studies (INSS) has speculated in a report entitled ‘Nothing Remains the Same’ that Israel is assessing the possibility that major cities and strategic sites will be hard-hit by precision rockets from various fronts.

[ICC Hopes for ‘New Phase’ as Biden Lifts Sanctions on Prosecutor Probing Israel](#)

April 03, 2021, The Times of Israel

The International Criminal Court welcomed US President Joe Biden’s lifting of sanctions imposed by former US president Donald Trump on the tribunal’s prosecutor, saying it signalled a new era of cooperation with Washington.

Jordan

[US, Arab Nations Back Jordan's King Abdullah Amid Security Probe](#)

April 04, 2021, AL Jazeera

Jordan's security forces have arrested several high profile figures as part of a continuing security investigation, and warned former Crown Prince Hamzah bin Al Hussein against actions targeting the kingdom's stability.

Kuwait

[Expats Struggle to Get Vaccines in Kuwait, Citizens Come 1st](#)

April 04, 2021, The Economic Times

In the tiny oil-rich Kuwait, the foreigners who power the country's economy, serve its society and make up 70 percent of its population are struggling to get coronavirus vaccines.

Lebanon

[World Bank Urges Lebanon to 'Help itself so we can help it'](#)

April 02, 2021, AL Jazeera

Lebanon must be willing to implement some real changes in order to get international funding assistance, according to the World Bank's Middle East and North Africa vice president.

Oman

[China Eyes Cooperation with Oman, Stresses No Intervention in Middle East](#)

March 29, 2021, CGTN

China reiterated that it has no intention of seeking big-power intervention or geopolitical rivalry in the Middle East, confirming instead a desire to deepen investment and cooperative ties with Oman.

Qatar

[Qatar- Middle East Airlines Post Losses of \\$7.1bn in 2020: IATA](#)

April 02, 2021, MENAFN

Region's airlines received \$4.8bn in government aid in 2020. Despite this, several Mideast airlines remain at risk of bankruptcy or business administration, says International Air Transport Association. Middle East airlines posted losses of \$7.1bn in 2020, a loss of \$68.47 for each passenger flown.

Saudi Arabia

[India Set to Review 'Unfair' Oil Import Contracts with Saudi Arabia](#)

April 02, 2021, Oilprice.com

India continues its efforts to shake off its oil dependence on OPEC's decisions by asking its state refiners to review what it sees as contracts "loaded against the buyer" with Saudi Arabia.

[US Tells Saudi Arabia to Keep Oil Prices Affordable Ahead of OPEC Meet](#)

April 01, 2021, Mint

The United States in a call with Saudi Arabia said that it is important to keep the energy prices affordable for consumers.

[Saudi Arabia Hikes Arab Light Crude Price for Asia in May](#)

April 04, 2021, Business Today

Saudi Arabia increased the price of its Arab light crude for the Asian market by \$0.4/barrel in May, compared to April, and lowered those for the U.S. and European markets by \$0.1/barrel and \$0.2/barrel respectively, according to a statement from oil producer Saudi Aramco.

[Saudi Foreign Minister Says Normalization of Israel's Status Would Bring 'Tremendous Benefits' for Middle East](#)

April 02, 2021, Arab News

Any potential deal to normalize relations between Saudi Arabia and Israel would benefit the Middle East, but depends on the progress of the peace process between Israelis and Palestinians, the Saudi Kingdom's foreign minister said.

[US Removes Military Assets from Saudi Arabia, Gulf: Report](#)

April 02, 2021, Middle East Eye

The US has begun to reconfigure its military capabilities in the Gulf and removed at least three Patriot missile defence systems from the region.

Syria

[Syria: Rights Groups in Moscow Urge Russians to Wake up to War Abuses](#)

April 02, 2021, Middle East Eye

Rights groups in Moscow urged Russians to take responsibility for abuses in Syria as they released a rare and damning report on the country's role in the decade-old conflict.

Turkey

[US, Turkey Remain Divided over Purchase of Russia's S-400s](#)

March 25, 2021, Defense News

Top U.S. and Turkish diplomats failed to overcome sharp differences over Turkey's purchase of an advanced Russian air-defense system, which Washington sees as a security threat.

[Turkey Tells Israel it is Ready to Exchange Ambassadors again](#)

March 30, 2021, Israel Hayom

Turkey informed Israel that it is ready to dispatch an ambassador to Tel Aviv once the Israeli government commits to simultaneously reciprocating the measure.

UAE

[Israel Issues Travel Warning for UAE, Citing Iranian Threats](#)

March 30, 2021, Bloomberg

Israel issued travel warnings for the United Arab Emirates, Bahrain, Turkey and other countries neighbouring Iran as it allowed vaccinated citizens to board flights amid an uptick in tensions with the Islamic Republic.

[UAE, GCC Voice Support for Jordan's King Abdullah](#)

April 04, 2021, Khaleej Times

The Gulf Cooperation Council's secretary-general said in a statement that the GCC stands with Jordan and all its measures to maintain its security and stability. Separately, UAE also voiced its support for King Abdullah II of Jordan and "his measures to maintain security and stability in the region,".

Yemen

[Made-in-India Covid-19 Vaccines in Yemen a 'Game Changer': UN official](#)

April 02, 2021, Hindustan Times

The shipment of 360,000 Made-in-India Covid-19 vaccines that arrived in Yemen, as part of the first batch of 1.9 million doses it will receive throughout the year, is a "game changer" and a "milestone" in the fight against the pandemic in the country, health officials have said.



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