



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



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Delhi Policy Group
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ABOUT US

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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

With an unprecedented spike in COVID-19 cases, New Delhi's strategic partners in West Asia including UAE and Saudi Arabia have stepped up their efforts to supply Oxygen to India. Saudi Arabia is shipping 80 metric tonnes of liquid oxygen, while India is in talks with UAE to import Oxygen tankers. In another development, the Indian Embassy in Qatar has confirmed that, Doha will accept 'Covishield' vaccination certificate for quarantine exemption. Meanwhile Bahrain and Israel have signed an agreement to recognise each other's vaccination and green passports in a bid to smoothen travel between the two countries. Under this agreement, "people who have been inoculated in one country with vaccinations recognised in the other will be exempt from quarantine and be able to enter places that require a green passport".

On the energy front, despite the on-going spat between India and Saudi Arabia over the crude prices, "Saudi Aramco's plans to purchase a stake in Reliance O2C Ltd (oil to chemicals) remains unaffected". Reportedly "Aramco is serious about partnering with Reliance and the discussions are progressing as expected". In another development, Abu Dhabi has launched new oil futures for its oil grade 'Murban' that will provide greater pricing transparency and offer more choices to the market.

In a major development of great historical and religious significance, President Biden has become the first US President to officially recognise 1915-1917 mass killing of the Armenian Christians by the erstwhile 'Ottoman Empire' (Turkey) as a "genocide". President Biden stated that, "We remember the lives of all those who died in the Ottoman-era Armenian genocide and recommit ourselves to preventing such an atrocity from occurring ever again". Turkish foreign minister rejected President Biden's statement and stated that, "words cannot change or rewrite history".

On the US-Iran relations, the Biden administration has "signalled its openness to ease sanctions against Iran's economy, including oil and finance helping to narrow differences in the nuclear talks". However, US diplomats have declined to confirm these reports stressing that there are still "pretty important disagreements over returning to the deal, adding that the Vienna talks were expected to be multi round process". In light of this, there is a visible discomfort among the US allies in the region about Washington's proposed return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) 2015.

Iran's fuel tanker was attacked on April 24 off Syria's coast; Iranian Army Chief Mohammad Bagheri without directly blaming Tel Aviv for this attack threatened

to “teach Israel a very good lesson”. Further, a Syrian missile strike has triggered alarms near an Israeli nuclear facility in Dimona. Israeli military officer stated that, “the Syrian missile probably was an errant attempt to hit one of its aircraft striking targets in the Syrian Golan Heights”. US CENTCOM Commander Gen. Kenneth McKenzie also believes “this attack actually reflects incompetence of Syrian air-defence...it was not an intentional attack”. In light of these developments, an Israeli delegation including Director of the Mossad Yossi Cohen and National Security Advisor Meir Ben-Shabbat will travel to Washington on Monday (April 26) to lobby against potential US return to the JCPOA. However, ‘The White House’ has already made it clear that, “visit of Israeli delegation will not change US position on Iran deal”. The future of JCPOA still remains unclear, but it appears that the US will eventually lift certain sanctions imposed on Iran. This could benefit India as Delhi can resume crude imports from Tehran to diversify its oil basket, and strengthen strategic relations with Iran to counter Pakistan and China’s influence in Afghanistan.

As President Biden announced withdrawal of the US troops from Afghanistan, Iraqi leadership raised the possibilities of a similar withdrawal by the US from Iraq soon. However, US CENTCOM Commander Gen. Kenneth McKenzie has confirmed that, “Washington currently does not plan to withdraw the remaining 2500 troops from Iraq”. He also expressed his fear that, “there is going to be something that follows ISIS, the conditions that gave birth to it (ISIS) still exist. So why should we expect different outcomes? The future is not going to be bloodless”. Further, rocket attacks on the US troops continued in Iraq. In another development, China has won the bid to develop Iraq's Mansuriya gas field near the Iranian border.

As coronavirus has receded in Israel, tensions between the Israelis and Palestinians have returned to Jerusalem. Several rockets have been fired into Israel from the Gaza strip in response to the tensions in Jerusalem. The Israeli air-force has also launched retaliatory air-strikes in Gaza, while the IDF Chief of Staff Aviv Kochavi has cancelled his trip to Washington.

The arrests of several high-profile personalities in Jordan earlier this month had raised tensions in the Kingdom. However, Jordanian authorities have now revealed that they would release most of those arrested for allegedly plotting to destabilise the rule of Jordanian King Abdullah II. In light of this, reports indicate, that the recent events in Jordan were planned by the former Trump administration, Saudi Arabia’s Crown Prince, and another Middle Eastern country (most probably Israel). Reportedly, Saudi Arabia supported an Israeli plot to overthrow Jordanian King Abdullah II in exchange for guardianship of the ‘Al-Aqsa Mosque’ (third holiest site in Islam) in Jerusalem. While, Israel’s main intent

was to annex the Jordan Valley (parts of the West Bank) that has been opposed by the Jordanian King.

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

Bahrain

[Bahrain, Israel to Recognize Each other's COVID-19 Vaccinations](#)

April 24, 2021, Arab News

Bahrain and Israel have signed an agreement to recognize each other's COVID-19 vaccinations in a bid to smoothen travel between the two countries which normalized ties last year.

Egypt

[Ever Given Still 'stranded' in Suez Waters amid Legal Fracas](#)

April 23, 2021, Deutsche Welle

The Suez Canal Authority (SCA) wants \$916 million (€761 million) recompense for last month's six-day snarl of world shipping, but the insurer of the Egyptian-impounded Ever Given said it had filed an appeal and again implied costs were exaggerated.

Iraq

[CENTCOM Commander: The Future is Not Going to be Bloodless](#)

April 17, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

CENTCOM Commander General Kenneth McKenzie expected the Middle East to continue to witness bloodshed and violence, despite the defences and military forces deployed along the borders. McKenzie further said that he fears there's going to be something that follows ISIS, noting that the conditions that gave "it birth still exist."

['We're Going to stay in Iraq,' Says Top US CENTCOM Commander](#)

April 23, 2021, Military Times

As the U.S. prepares to draw down its last 2,500 troops in Afghanistan, the head of Central Command told reporters Thursday that there are no current plans to begin a similar withdrawal of the last 2,500 in Iraq.

[Toll Climbs to 82 in Baghdad Hospital Fire, Says Iraqi Government](#)

April 25, 2021, The Washington Post

At least 82 people were killed in the fire which ripped through a Baghdad hospital's coronavirus ward, Iraq's Interior Ministry said Sunday, sparking anger and frustration over the state of the country's buckling health system.

[Baghdad Airport Hit in Latest Iraq Rocket Strike, No Injuries](#)

April 23, 2021, AL-Monitor

Baghdad International Airport, which houses personnel of the US-led international military coalition against the Islamic State, was targeted by at least three rockets on Thursday (April 22) night.

[5 Wounded in Rocket Attack on Iraqi Base Hosting US Troops](#)

April 18, 2021, Voice of America

Five rockets targeted an Iraqi air base hosting U.S. soldiers Sunday (April 18), wounding two foreign contractors and three Iraqi soldiers, in the latest attack coinciding with tensions between Baghdad's allies Tehran and Washington.

[China Wins Bid to Develop Iraq's Mansuriya Gas Field](#)

April 21, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Chinese company Sinopec has won a deal to develop Iraq's Mansuriya gas field near the Iranian border, the Gulf state's Ministry of Oil announced.

Iran

[U.S. Sees Major Differences with Iran in Nuclear Talks](#)

April 22, 2021, The Hindu

Serious differences persist between the United States and Iran over how they might resume compliance with the 2015 Iran nuclear deal despite making some progress in their latest indirect talks in Vienna, a senior U.S. official said.

[Iran Nuclear Deal Talks Advance as U.S. Offers Sanctions Relief](#)

April 21, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

The Biden administration has signalled it is open to easing sanctions against critical elements of Iran's economy, including oil and finance, helping narrow differences in nuclear talks, according to people familiar with the matter.

[Vienna Talks: US Gives Iran 'examples' of Sanctions it Could Lift](#)

April 22, 2021, AL Jazeera

The United States has shared with Iran details of sanctions it is prepared to lift under a return to the 2015 nuclear accord, a senior US official has said, but there will be difficulty in untangling some sanctions imposed by former President Donald Trump.

[Iranian Fuel Tanker Attacked off Syria Amid Tensions with Israel](#)

April 25, 2021, The Arab Weekly

At least three people died when an Iranian tanker was attacked off Syria's coast Saturday (April 24), in the first assault of its kind since the war started a decade ago.

[Iranian Army Chief Threatens to 'Teach Israel a Good Lesson' after Tanker Targeted](#)

April 25, 2021, The Times of Israel

Iran's Armed Forces Chief Mohammad Bagheri threatened to "teach Israel a very good lesson," appearing to hint the Jewish state was behind a reported attack on an Iranian tanker off Syria's coast over the weekend, but stopping short of blaming Jerusalem directly for the incident.

[Iran Unveils Long-range Air Defence System](#)

April 19, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The Iranian army yesterday unveiled a new Damavand long-range air defence system.

The army displayed dozens of reconnaissance and attack drones and electronic warfare systems, during a military parade held in the capital, Tehran, on the Iranian Army Day.

[Iran Halts Flights with India and Pakistan over COVID](#)

March 24, 2021, AL Jazeera

All flights to and from India and Pakistan were suspended as Iran continues to deal with a severe fourth wave of COVID-19 infections.

Israel

[Syrian Missile Strike Triggers Alarms Near Israeli Nuclear Facility and Retaliatory Attack](#)

April 22, 2021, The Washington Post

A missile launched from Syria flew into southern Israel early Thursday (April 22), triggering air raid sirens near a nuclear facility, according to the Israeli military, raising fears of an escalation in ongoing tensions among Israel, Syria and Iran.

[As Coronavirus Recedes in Israel, Tensions Rise in Jerusalem](#)

April 23, 2021, The Washington Post

Dozens of Palestinians were injured in and around Jerusalem's Old City in clashes with police, who also faced off with hundreds of largely young, far-right Israelis marching nearby, chanting "death to Arabs."

[Israeli Airstrikes Hit Gaza Strip after Rocket Attacks, Clashes Intensify in Jerusalem](#)

April 24, 2021, CNBC

Israel launched air strikes on the Gaza Strip late Friday (April 23) in response to rocket attacks by Palestinian militants, as tensions in Jerusalem spilled over into the worst round of cross-border violence in months.

[The White House Says Israeli Delegation Will Not Change US Position on Iran Deal](#)

April 25, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel's delegation to Washington DC including the Mossad Chief, Israeli NSA will not change the United States position on re-joining the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, the White House press secretary said in a briefing.

[Israel Issues Travel Warning for India, Six Other Countries over Surge in COVID-19 Cases](#)

April 22, 2021, The New Indian Express

Israel issued a travel advisory warning Israelis, including those who have recovered from or been vaccinated against COVID-19, to refrain from travelling to India, Ukraine, Ethiopia, Brazil, South Africa, Mexico and Turkey because of high COVID morbidity rates in the seven countries.

Jordan

[Jordan to Free Most of Those Arrested in Alleged Plot to Destabilize the Government](#)

April 22, 2021, The Washington Post

Jordanian authorities said they would release most of those arrested this month for allegedly plotting to destabilize the rule of King Abdullah II.

Kuwait

[Kuwait Suspends Commercial Flights from India Due to Rising Cases](#)

April 24, 2021, Hindustan Times

Kuwait's directorate general of civil aviation said in a tweet that it had suspended all direct commercial flights coming from India, effective April 24 and until further notice.

[Kuwait and China Seek Diversifying Economy via Belt and Road Initiative](#)

April 13, 2021, AL-Monitor

Kuwait and China discussed promoting the digital economy during a virtual forum, with the aim of enhancing cooperation in several fields to achieve the interests of the two countries and meet aspirations of their peoples.

Lebanon

[Lebanon Vows to Punish Drug Smugglers as Saudi Import Ban Bites](#)

April 25, 2021, Arab News

Lebanon has vowed to punish drug smugglers after massive quantities of narcotics were intercepted and seized by Saudi Arabia and Greece.

Oman

[UAE, Oman, Australia Impose Travel Curbs on India Amid Massive Covid-19 Surge](#)

April 22, 2021, Hindustan Times

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), Australia and Oman have joined the list of countries that have imposed travel restrictions on India in the wake of a massive surge in Coronavirus infections, either completely barring or restricting flights from the country.

Qatar

[Qatar to Accept Covishield Vaccination Certificate for Quarantine Exemption: Indian Embassy](#)

April 23, 2021, The Peninsula Qatar

Residents coming into Qatar who have obtained Covishield Vaccine in India are eligible for quarantine exemption, stated the Indian Embassy in Doha.

[Ex-Qatar PM: Events in Jordan Were Planned by Trump and one of Region's Countries](#)

April 13, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The recent tensions in Jordan were orchestrated by the administration of former US President Donald Trump and one of the countries in the region, former Qatari Prime Minister Sheikh Hamad Bin Jassim Bin Jaber Al Thani has said.

Saudi Arabia

[Covid-19: Saudi Arabia to Ship 80 Metric Tonnes of Oxygen to India](#)

April 25, 2021, Business Standard

Saudi Arabia is shipping 80 metric tonnes of liquid oxygen to India as the country is running low on supplies due to an unprecedented spike in coronavirus cases.

[Reliance-Aramco Deal Progressing Despite India-Saudi Oil Stand-off](#)

April 22, 2021, Business Today

Even as the stand-off between India and Saudi Arabia escalates with the kingdom increasing the crude oil price for Asia and India cutting imports from the Gulf nation, the state-run Saudi Aramco's stake purchase plan in Reliance O2C Ltd is unaffected, said sources in the know.

[Report: Saudi Crown Prince backed Israeli Plan to Overthrow Jordanian King](#)

April 20, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman is said to have supported an Israeli plot to overthrow the Jordanian King Abdullah II in exchange for guardianship of the holy sites in the city of Jerusalem.

[Saudi Arabia Sees over \\$200 bn in Savings from Energy Reforms](#)

April 25, 2021, The Economic Times

Saudi Arabia could save over \$200 billion over the next decade by replacing liquid fuel used for domestic consumption with gas and renewable energy sources, the finance minister said, as the kingdom seeks to cut costs to fund investments.

Syria

[Syrian Missile Exploding in Israel not Intentional: US General](#)

April 23, 2021, Arab News

A senior US general (CENTCOM Commander) said that he believes a Syrian missile exploding in Israel was not intentional, but rather showed a lack of Syrian air defense capability.

[Syria Gets 200,000 Doses of AstraZeneca Vaccine Under COVAX Scheme: U.N. Officials](#)

April 22, 2021, News18

Syria's government has received its first delivery of Covid-19 vaccines through the global COVAX initiative, with almost 200,000 doses of the AstraZeneca shot, U.N officials said

[Syria Receives Gift of 150,000 Chinese Covid-19 Vaccines](#)

April 24, 2021, The New Indian Express

The Syrian government received the first batch of Chinese COVID-19 vaccines, a gift of 150,000 jabs to Damascus, Syrian and Chinese officials said.

Turkey

[President Biden Recognizes Armenian Deaths as 'Genocide', Prompting Relief in Armenia and Fury in Turkey](#)

April 24, 2021, NBC News

Recognizing the historical massacre of Armenians by the Ottoman Empire during World War One as genocide, Biden went further than any previous occupant of the White House and departed from decades of carefully calibrated language on the subject.

[Turkey Summons US Ambassador over Biden's Genocide Recognition](#)

April 25, 2021, France 24

From the streets of Istanbul to the halls of power, Turks were united in anger at Biden's decision to side with Armenia, France, Germany, Russia and numerous other countries in their interpretation of the horrific World War I events.

[India's Onion Export Ban Helps Iraq, Turkey Gain Foothold in Global Market](#)

April 20, 2021, The Hindu Business Line

Iraq and Turkey are providing tough competition to India in the latter's traditional onion export market, particularly with the Union Government taking ad hoc decisions to ban shipments over the last few years.

UAE

[Covid-19: India in Talks with UAE, Singapore to Import Oxygen Tankers](#)

April 25, 2021, Khaleej Times

With several states flagging scarcity of medical oxygen amid a surge in Covid-19 infections, the government is in talks for the import of high-capacity oxygen-carrying tankers from Singapore and the UAE and directed states to revive closed oxygen plants for augmenting its production.

[Abu Dhabi Launches New Oil Futures as It Targets Asian Refiners](#)

March 29, 2021, The Financial Times

Abu Dhabi began trading futures contracts for its most important oil grade Murban, as the emirate seeks to create a rival regional benchmark as part of a big shake-up in the way its crude is traded.

Yemen

[Yemen Rebels Advance on Marib, Dozens Reported Dead](#)

April 25, 2021, Voice of America

Yemen's Houthi rebels have made major gains in the battle for the government's last northern stronghold, advancing close to the center of Marib city despite heavy casualties.

[Houthis Claim They Targeted Saudi Airbase with Drone](#)

April 24, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Houthis in Yemen said that they targeted an airbase in southern Saudi Arabia with an explosive-laden drone. "The UAV air force (of the group) managed to retarget the King Khalid Air Base in Khamis Mushait area on Friday morning with a 2K Qasef drone," said Yahya Saree, the Houthi military spokesperson.

[70 Dead in Fighting over Yemen's Marib](#)

April 11, 2021, The Economic Times

Fierce fighting for Yemen's strategic city of Marib has killed 70 pro-government and Houthi rebel fighters over the past 24 hours. The Huthis have been trying to seize oil-rich Marib, the government's last significant pocket of territory in the north, since February.

[Saudi-led Coalition Intercepts Houthi Drones](#)

April 11, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The Saudi-led military coalition battling Yemen's Houthi movement intercepted and destroyed drones launched by the Iran-aligned group towards Khamis Mushait and Jazan in southern Saudi Arabia.



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