



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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Abstract

Following disagreements between Saudi Arabia and the UAE and intense negotiations, Organisation of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and their allies have agreed to boost oil production. "OPEC+ alliance will ease its production cuts by 400,000 b/d each month starting August, amounting to a 2 million b/d total increase by the end of 2021". Importantly UAE, Saudi Arabia, Russia, Iraq, and Kuwait's reference oil production level has been boosted beginning May 2022. This is likely to lead to a sizeable jump in OPEC+ crude production in the second half of 2022, with anticipation of full recovery in global oil markets from COVID-19 pandemic. Earlier Indian Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri had spoken with his Saudi counterpart with a view "to bring greater predictability and calm in the global oil markets, as also to see hydrocarbons become more affordable".

Four Kargil-based students arrested in a case related to an explosion near the Israeli embassy in New Delhi were granted bail by a city court. While describing all accused as blemish-free, Metropolitan Magistrate stressed that "nothing incriminating had been put forth by the investigating officer (IO) to suggest that they were linked to any terrorist organisation or constituted a threat to society". In another development, Organisation of the Islamic Cooperation (OIC) "conveyed its desire to dispatch a delegation to Kashmir and called for a possible mediation between India and Pakistan were the countries to request the OIC. In response the Indian Ministry of External Affairs stressed that "OIC should be watchful that their platform is not subverted by... vested interests for comments on internal affairs of India or for anti-India propaganda through biased and one-sided resolutions".

To enhance India's trade engagement in West Asia, New Delhi and UAE have reportedly begun talks on free trade agreement (FTA). In another development of importance, Kuwait has recognized India's Covishield as equivalent of Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine. Meanwhile, Indians fully vaccinated with Covishield vaccine at least 14 days before their departure would be exempted from mandatory quarantine in Qatar.

As the threat of drone attack increases, Israel Defence Forces (IDF) launched first-of-its-kind international drone exercise 'Blue Guardian' involving Israel, US, UK, France, and Germany. As a part of it, foreign teams will fly Israeli Air Force Hermes-450 unmanned aerial vehicles while "simulating various scenarios, including ground troop support, reconnaissance-intelligence collection missions and cooperation with various forces in the air". Importantly, Israeli Defence Ministry and Elbit Systems demonstrated prototype of "Airborne Laser Interceptor for Drones". A high-power airborne laser system placed on board an aircraft shot

down multiple unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over the Mediterranean Sea. Israeli Ministry of Defence stressed that “the trial was part of an initial development program that aims to produce a prototype of a solid state, 100-kilowatt laser that can be flown on a Boeing-sized aircraft within three to four years. The system will be able to shoot down large hostile UAVs, smaller drones, rockets, missiles and particularly long-range threats as they travel through the air”. Further, it has been revealed that, the “IDF deployed drone swarms (hundreds of drones) in Gaza communicating with each other, to locate targets, direct airstrikes, highlighting advances in artificial intelligence-driven combat (AI War) in Israel’s 11-day conflict with Hamas”.

An investigation by several media organisation’s has concluded that Israeli firm NSO group’s military-grade Pegasus spyware was used to track terrorists, criminals, journalists, human rights activists, business executives, and two women close to assassinated Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

On the US-Iran relations, Iran accused the US and UK of holding prisoner exchange talks “hostage” to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) after Tehran stressed that Vienna talks should be delayed until after the new Iranian government comes into office in early August. The US State Department Spokesperson described Iranian comments as “an outrageous effort to deflect blame from the current impasse”. “We stand ready to return to Vienna to complete work on a mutual return to the JCPOA once Iran has made the necessary decisions”, he added.

Further it has come to light, that former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had reportedly urged former US President Donald Trump to attack Iran after Trump lost presidential election. General Mark Milley, the then chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff reportedly battled hard to prevent Trump from ordering a strike against Iran as it would have led to an all-out war.

Importance of the Middle East and East Coast of Africa is growing in Chinese strategic calculus. Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Syria on July 17 to meet President Bashar al-Assad. Chinese state media described the visit as “underscoring Beijing’s independent foreign policy in sharp contrast to the West and sending positive message to the region in countering negative influence of the US”. In another important development, Tanzanian government is likely to revive a port project on the East Coast of Africa that was originally planned to be three-way collaboration between China Merchants Holdings, Oman's State General Reserve Fund and the Tanzanian government. This project had stalled due to “Tanzania’s frustration over the conditions China had presented,

including a request that Tanzania not question who invests in 'Bagamoyo' once the port was operational".

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

Bahrain

[Bahrain Starts Joint Drills with Britain, US in Persian Gulf](#)

July 17, 2021, Mehr New Agency

The military exercise, which began on July 17 will last until July 22, and as claimed, the military forces of the three countries will practice how to maintain the security of maritime transportation and how to deal with shared threats.

Egypt

[INS Tabar Arrives at Alexandria Port in Egypt on Goodwill Visit](#)

June 29, 2021, India Today

Indian Naval Ship (INS) Tabar, which has been deployed for naval exercises with friendly nations in Europe and Africa, arrived at Alexandria port in Egypt on June 27 as part of a goodwill visit. This visit aims to strengthen the relationship between the two sides and also explore newer avenues of bolstering the relationship.

Iraq

[US President Biden to Host Iraqi PM al-Kadhimi at White House](#)

July 17, 2021, AL Jazeera

United States President Joe Biden will welcome Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi to the White House on July 26. The meeting will “highlight the strategic partnership between the United States and Iraq”.

[China's CNCEC to Build Oil Refinery, Petrochemical Plant in Southern Iraq](#)

July 14, 2021, Reuters

Iraq has picked China's state-run CNCEC (China National Chemical Engineering) to build an oil refinery at the port of Fao on the Gulf, Iraqi oil ministry said.

[2 Civilians Killed, Drone Downed in Iraq](#)

July 18, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Iraqi forces shot down a drone in western Iraq equipped with a camera for spying purposes, while two civilians were killed in the southern Dhi Qar province, according to local security officials.

[‘I Numb Myself’: Hospital Fire Deepens Iraq’s COVID Crisis](#)

July 16, 2021, Associated Press

No beds, medicines running low and hospital wards prone to fire — Iraq’s doctors say they are losing the battle against the coronavirus. This was true even before a devastating blaze killed scores of people in a COVID-19 isolation unit this week.

Iran

[Iran Accuses US, UK of Holding Prisoner Exchange Talks 'Hostage'](#)

July 17, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iran's top nuclear negotiator has accused the United States and the United Kingdom of holding prisoner exchange talks "hostage" after Iran said nuclear talks should be delayed until after its new government comes into office.

[Facebook Says Iran-based Hackers Used Site to Target US Military Personnel](#)

July 15, 2021, The Guardian

Facebook said it had taken down about 200 accounts run by a group of hackers in Iran as part of a cyber-spying operation that targeted mostly US military personnel and people working at defense and aerospace companies.

Israel

[IDF Launches First-of-its-kind International Drone Exercise](#)

July 12, 2021, The Times of Israel

The drone drill involving Israel, US, UK, France, and Germany called Blue Guardian, is scheduled to last two weeks, during which the foreign teams will fly Israeli Air Force Hermes-450 unmanned aerial vehicles. "The teams will simulate various scenarios, including ground troop support, reconnaissance and intelligence collections missions and cooperation with various forces in the air".

[Private Israeli Spyware Used to Hack Cell Phones of Journalists, Activists Worldwide](#)

July 18, 2021, The Washington Post

Military-grade spyware licensed by an Israeli firm NSO Group to governments for tracking terrorists and criminals was used in attempted and successful hacks of 37 smartphones belonging to journalists, human rights activists, business executives and two women close to murdered Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi.

[Israel Embassy Blast Case in New Delhi: Bail to 4 Kargil Students, Court Says Blemish-free](#)

July 16, 2021, The Indian Express

Four Kargil-based students, arrested by the Delhi Police Special Cell for alleged conspiracy in a case relating to a low-intensity explosion near the Israeli embassy in the Capital on January 29, were granted bail by a city court which noted that nothing incriminating had been found against them.

[FTAs with Key Nations Will Boost Exports, Attract More Investments: FIEO](#)

June 29, 2021, Business Standard

Inking free trade agreements (FTAs) with India's major trading partners such as the United States, United Kingdom, European Union, Australia, New Zealand, Canada, Israel, among others, will boost exports and help in attracting more foreign investments into the country, Federation of Indian Exports Organisation (FIEO) said.

[Benjamin Netanyahu Had Urged Trump to Attack Iran after He Lost the Presidency](#)

July 16, 2021, The Times of Israel

General Mark Milley, the chairman of the US Joint Chiefs of Staff, battled to prevent Trump from ordering a strike against Iran, while the president was circled by hawks, including Netanyahu, pressuring him to execute such a strike.

[Israel Demonstrates First-ever Airborne Laser Interceptor for Drones](#)

June 23, 2021, Jewish News Syndicate

In a ground-breaking demonstration of a new capability against aerial threats, the Israeli Defense Ministry and Elbit Systems held a trial in recent days in which a high-power airborne laser system placed on board an aircraft shot down multiple unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) over the Mediterranean Sea.

[In Apparent World First, IDF Deployed Drone Swarms in Gaza Fighting](#)

July 10, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israeli military used 'flocks' of small aircraft, all communicating with each other, to locate targets, direct airstrikes, highlighting advances in artificial intelligence-driven combat.

[China Wants to Play Bigger Role in Israel-Palestine Mediation](#)

July 16, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Speaking during a virtual Palestinian-Israeli Peace Symposium convened by the Chinese Foreign Ministry, Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China was ready to propose new ideas for peace talks and invite representatives from both sides to negotiate in Beijing.

Jordan

[Jordan, Egypt, Turkey All Condemn Jewish Visits to Temple Mount on Tisha B'Av](#)

July 18, 2021, The Times of Israel

Jordan, Egypt, and Turkey denounced Israel on Sunday (July 18) after some 1,600 Jews visited the Temple Mount in Jerusalem's Old City to mark the fast of Tisha B'Av, following overnight clashes at the holy site between Palestinians and police.

[Jordan's King Abdullah II to Meet President Biden in Washington](#)

July 18, 2021, AL Jazeera

In a turn of fortune for Jordan's King Abdullah II, who has been dealing with a series of domestic and external crises, the 59-year-old monarch is set to become the first Arab leader to meet with US President Joe Biden when he visits the White House on Monday (July 19).

Kuwait

[Covishield Vaccine Recognised in Kuwait, Says Indian Ambassador](#)

July 12, 2021, The Siasat Daily

Amid fears among some Indian expats over the approval of the Covishield vaccine in Kuwait, the Indian ambassador to the Gulf country, Sibi George, has clarified that the vaccine, which is the same as the Oxford-AstraZeneca vaccine, is recognised in Kuwait.

[Wang Yi Meets with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister Sheikh Ahmad Nasser Al-Mohammad Al-Sabah](#)

July 16, 2021, Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the State of Kuwait

State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Kuwaiti Foreign Minister in Tashkent. Noting that Kuwait was the first Gulf Arab country to establish diplomatic relations with China, Wang Yi said, both sides uphold that all countries should treat each other equally regardless of their sizes and firmly support each other on issues involving their core interests.

Lebanon

[Lebanon's PM-designate Saad Hariri Resigns as Crisis Escalates](#)

July 15, 2021, AL Jazeera

Lebanon Prime Minister-designate Saad Hariri stepped down after failing to form a government for over the past eight months. Hariri resigned following a brief meeting with President Michel Aoun at Baabda Palace.

[France Says Europe Will Have Sanctions Regime Ready for Lebanese Leaders this Month](#)

July 12, 2021, AL Jazeera

France said the European Union had reached a consensus to sanction Lebanese leaders to pressure them to form a stable government, the French foreign minister said.

Oman

[Tanzania to Revive \\$10bn Indian Ocean Port Project with China](#)

June 27, 2021, Nikkei Asia

The port project on the East Coast of Africa was planned to be three-way collaboration between China Merchants Holdings, Oman's State General Reserve Fund and the Tanzanian government is likely to be revived according to Tanzanian President Samia Suluhu Hassan.

Qatar

[Taliban, Kabul officials Hold Talks in Doha as Fighting Rages in Afghanistan](#)

July 17, 2021, France 24

Afghan government representatives and Taliban insurgents held talks in Doha on Saturday (July 17) as violence raged in their country amid the withdrawal of foreign forces.

[No Quarantine in Qatar for Eligible Travellers from India with Two Doses of Covishield](#)

July 12, 2021, The Times of India

Eligible travellers from India to Doha will now be exempt from mandatory quarantine there if they have got both doses of WHO-approved Covid vaccines (Covishield) at least 14 days before their departure.

Saudi Arabia

[OPEC+ Green Lights Deal to Hike Oil Output in Saudi-UAE Compromise](#)

July 18, 2021, S&P Global

OPEC and its allies clinched an agreement on July 18 to raise crude oil production in the coming months, while also allocating five members more generous output quotas starting May 2022, resolving a dispute with the UAE that had threatened to destabilize the oil market and the organization itself.

[Union Minister Hardeep Singh Puri Vows to Work with Saudi Arabia, UAE to Calm Oil Markets](#)

July 15, 2021, Hindustan Times

"I conveyed my desire to work with His Royal Highness Prince Abdulaziz to bring greater predictability and calm in the global oil markets, and also to see hydrocarbons become more affordable", Puri tweeted after a telephonic conversation with his Saudi counterpart.

[Don't Allow OIC to be Subverted by 'Vested Interests' like Pakistan, Says India](#)

July 08, 2021, Hindustan Times

The Indian position was articulated by the External Affairs Ministry spokesperson while responding to questions on the OIC's offer to arrange a meeting between India and Pakistan and the organisation's proposal to send a delegation to Jammu and Kashmir.

[Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi Meets with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud](#)

July 16, 2021, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China

State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi met with Saudi Arabian Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud in Tashkent. Wang Yi said, China attaches great importance to its comprehensive strategic partnership with Saudi Arabia, and is willing to be a long-term reliable and stable friend of Saudi Arabia.

[Saudi Arabia Amends Import Rules to Sideline Israel-linked Products](#)

July 05, 2021, The Times of Israel

Saudi Arabia has revised the tariffs that previously governed its imports from fellow Gulf Cooperation Council countries, aiming to deal a blow to the United Arab Emirates' position as the Gulf's primary trade and business hub.

[UK Arms Sale to Saudi Arabia Three Times Higher Than Previously Thought](#)

July 16, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Britain's role in fuelling the Saudi-led war in Yemen is much greater than earlier thought, according to a new report by the UK-based organisation 'Campaign against Arms Trade' (CAAT). More than three times as much weaponry and military equipment was sold to Riyadh over the past six years.

[In Key Reform, Saudi Arabia Allows Businesses to Open During Prayers](#)

July 17, 2021, The Times of Israel

Saudi Arabia has officially allowed businesses to remain open during the five daily Muslim prayers, a highly sensitive reform in a kingdom that is trying to shake off its austere image.

[India Has Tremendous Potential for Medical Value Tourism](#)

July 12, 2021, BW Hotelier

In a bid to revive tourism and strengthen bilateral relationship between India and Saudi Arabia, Trade Promotion Council of India organised a webinar on Tourism Collaboration between India and Saudi Arabia with the support of embassies of both countries.

Syria

[Chinese FM's 2nd visit to Middle East in Half a Year Highlights Significance of China-Middle East Ties](#)

July 18, 2021, Global Times

Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi visited Syria on Saturday (July 17) and is scheduled to visit Egypt as well as Algeria this week, underscoring China's independent foreign policy, again striking a sharp contrast from the West, while also unleashing a positive message to the Middle East in countering the negative influence of the US.

Turkey

[Turkey's Erdogan, China's Xi Discuss Uighurs in Phone Call](#)

July 14, 2021, AL Jazeera

Turkish President Erdogan has told his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping it is important to Turkey that Uighur Muslims live in peace as “equal citizens of China” but said Turkey respects China’s national sovereignty.

[Turkey's Erdogan to Visit Northern Cyprus Amid Tensions with EU](#)

July 18, 2021, AL Jazeera

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan is set to travel to the self-declared Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus (TRNC) on Monday (July 19) for a two-day official visit. He has said he will deliver “good news” in the breakaway state. But the visit could also further stoke tensions with Greek Cypriots and the European Union.

[Pakistan Tweet Sparks Hopes of Islamabad Recognizing North Cyprus](#)

July 12, 2021, Yeni Safak

A tweet published by Pakistan’s Embassy in Turkey has sparked hopes over the prospect of Islamabad officially recognizing the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus.

[Women Protest Across the Country as Turkey Officially Withdraws from the Istanbul Convention](#)

July 05, 2021, Global Voices

Thousands of women marched across the largest cities in Turkey on July 1, to protest Turkey's official withdrawal from the Istanbul Convention. Heavy police intervention and violence were reported throughout the country.

UAE

[India Begins Talks on Free Trade Agreement with UAE](#)

July 13, 2021, The Hindu Businessline

New Delhi has begun discussions with the UAE about an FTA that could help India increase exports in goods, services, leading to a possible FTA with GCC.

[Expo 2020 Dubai to Strengthen UAE-China Partnership: Chinese Ambassador](#)

July 16, 2021, Khaleej Times

The UAE-China partnership has grown stronger during the pandemic and Chinese participation in the Expo will make it stronger, the Chinese Ambassador to the UAE, has said.

[Oil Prices Drop Over 1 Percent; Brent Crude Reaches \\$72.59 Per Barrel](#)

July 19, 2021, Business Today

Oil prices fell more than 1% on Monday (July 19), hit by an agreement over the weekend within the OPEC+ group of producers to boost output.

[UAE Becomes 1st Gulf Nation to Open Embassy in Israel](#)

July 15, 2021, Hindustan Times

The United Arab Emirates on Wednesday (July 14) became the first Gulf nation to open an embassy in Israel, nearly a year after both countries signed an agreement to normalise diplomatic ties.

Yemen

[Saudi Commentators Go Public in Criticising UAE's Role in Yemen](#)

July 18, 2021, Reuters

Pro-government commentators in Saudi Arabia are publicly criticising the United Arab Emirates' role in Yemen, a rare move that reflects political and economic tensions between the two Gulf allies that also led to an open standoff over oil policy by OPEC+.

[UN Raises Alarm Over Yemeni Children's Education Amid Conflict](#)

July 05, 2021, AL Jazeera

The United Nations has warned that Yemeni children's education and futures were under threat because of the continuing war in the Middle Eastern country.



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