

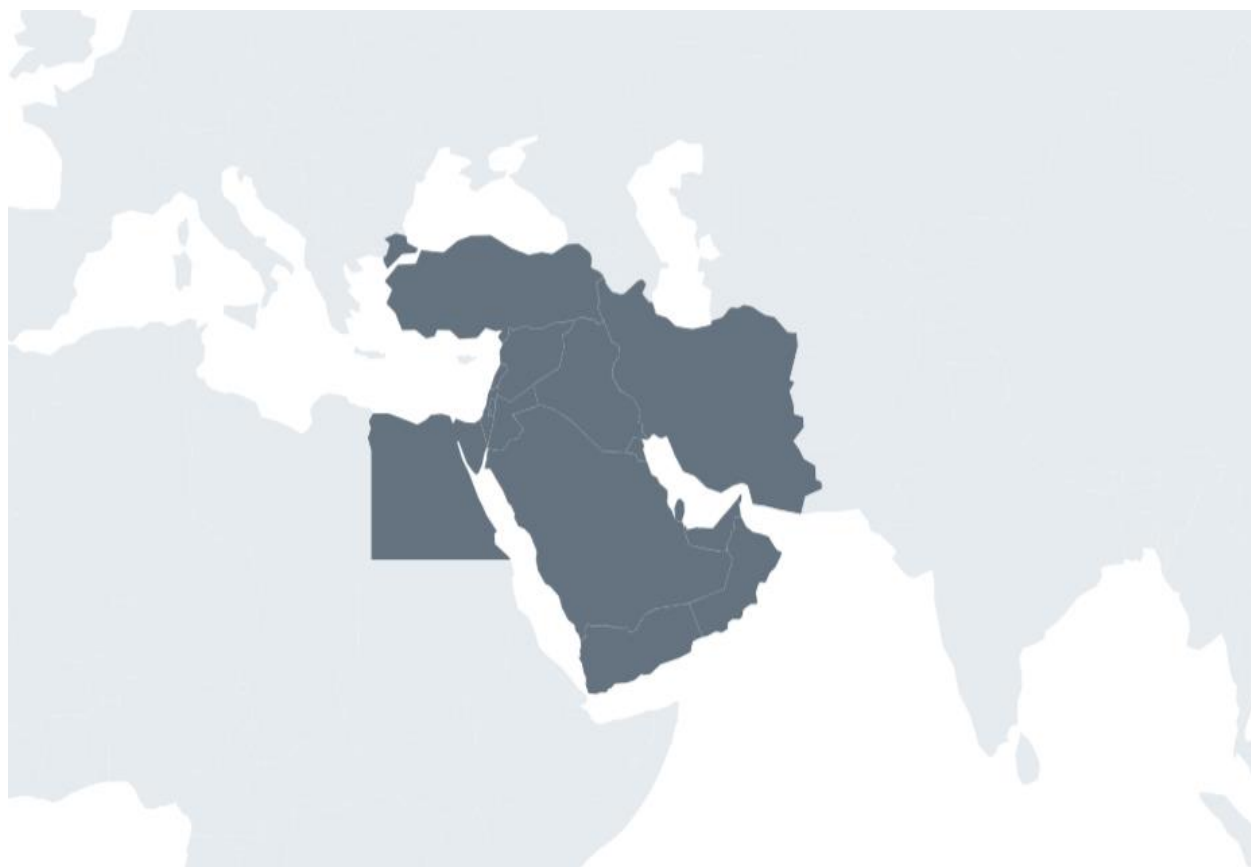


Delhi Policy Group

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

As the Islamist militant group 'Taliban' captured Kabul and declared 'Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan', questions are being raised about the future of Afghanistan's relations with India. Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, deputy head of Taliban's office in Doha (Qatar) in a recent statement asserted that India is "very important for the subcontinent" and that the Taliban wants to continue Afghanistan's "cultural", "economic", "political" and "trade ties" with India "like in the past".

With a view to further strengthen India's relations with Bahrain, Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs, V. Muraleedharan was to visit the Gulf Kingdom from August 30. Meanwhile, "Indian nationals who have travelled to India after receiving two doses of [COVID] vaccine in Saudi Arabia will be able to return to the Kingdom directly without the need for quarantine in a third country". Oman has also allowed entry for fully vaccinated Indian's with Oman-approved COVID vaccines beginning September 1.

As regards trade and economy, India seeks to double its exports to the UAE this fiscal while substantially increasing its exports to the US, UK, Singapore, and Hong Kong to achieve USD 400 billion in merchandise exports this year. India's proposed free trade agreement (FTA) with UAE is likely to enhance exports in gems and jewellery, engineering, leather goods and chemicals. In another development, Egypt plans to grow 'Basmati rice' from next year. If Egypt were to export Basmati rice to Europe and nearby Gulf countries, it could impact India's Basmati export in the region.

Iraq's stability is key to the stability of the Middle East. In light of this, Baghdad hosted regional summit aimed at easing tensions in the region which was attended by French President Emmanuel Macron and foreign ministers of Iran and Saudi Arabia among others. Considering the continued threat of ISIS, President Macron asserted that France "would continue to deploy troops in Iraq to battle "terrorism" even if the US were to withdraw". "No matter what choices the Americans make, we will maintain our presence in Iraq to fight terrorism", he added.

In a sign of continued Russian defence engagement in the region, Egypt and Saudi Arabia signed military cooperation agreement with Moscow. Meanwhile, Russian Ambassador to Iran announced that "China, Russia and Iran will hold

joint maritime exercises in the Persian Gulf around late 2021 or early 2022 to “ensure the safety of international shipping and fight against sea pirates”.

President Biden hosted Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett at the White House. US reiterated its commitment to “ensure Iran never develops a nuclear weapon”. However, President Biden stressed on putting “diplomacy first” and “if diplomacy fails the United States is ready to turn to other options”, he added. President Biden did not specify as to what other options meant. Sharing intelligence and operational activity was also discussed between the Washington and Tel Aviv. On its part, Israel wants Biden administrations “continued support for their covert operations against Iran’s nuclear program”. Further, it has been revealed that, former Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu had curtailed Mossad’s intelligence sharing with the United States amid mistrust between Netanyahu and President Biden. Reportedly, the Mossad gave “less than two hours’ notice to US prior to the sabotage of Iran’s Natanz nuclear plant in April”. Israeli officials clarified that they had taken such a step as “US had been leaking information about Israeli operations” and the Biden administration was inattentive to Israel’s concerns about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). It must be noted that, intelligence sharing between Washington and Tel Aviv was at its peak during the Trump administration.

Amidst US withdrawal from Afghanistan, a US official has claimed that this “benefits Israel as Washington will be in a better position to direct resources and attention to its allies in the region”. “We’re not trying to transform the Middle East. We’re not trying to overthrow regimes. We are pursuing a very steady course, centred on achievable aims; alignment of ends and means; and, first and foremost, support for our partners and, of course, Israel being second to none”, he added. Meanwhile, China continued its outreach in the Middle East with Premier Li Keqiang showing keenness to “support Syria in combating the coronavirus pandemic, improving the livelihood of its people and accelerating reconstruction”.

As the P5+1 plan to revive talks about the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in Vienna, Iran’s supreme leader Ayatollah Khamenei described Biden administration as “predatory” and not much different from its predecessors. Iran’s new foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian held talks with European Union’s foreign policy chief Josep Borrell who called on Tehran to commit to a date for resuming Vienna talks. The sixth round of talks was concluded on July 20 without a specific date determined for the next meeting.

Turkish President Erdogan revealed that the Taliban has asked Ankara to operate the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. Turkey stressed that “a decision will be taken on this only after there is greater clarity regarding the administration in Afghanistan”. In another development, 27-members of the US Congress have written a letter to Secretary of State Antony Blinken expressing concerns over Turkey’s unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs). They believe Turkey’s drones have “destabilized multiple regions of the globe and threaten U.S. interests, allies and partners”. Turkish drones have come to prominence after its success in conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia in the Nagorno-Karabakh region.

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

Bahrain

[MoS V Muraleedharan to Embark on 3-day Visit to Bahrain From August 30](#)

August 29, 2021, India TV

Minister of State (MoS) for External Affairs, V Muraleedharan will embark upon a three-day visit to the Kingdom of Bahrain from August 30 to September 1, 2021. This will be his first visit to the country. During the visit, the MoS will hold discussions with Bahraini Ministers and dignitaries.

Egypt

[Egypt Throws a Spatula in Indian Basmati Rice Exports](#)

August 24, 2021, The Hindu BusinessLine

In what could turn out to be a concern for India in the long-term, Egypt will start growing Basmati rice and market it next year. Egypt could try to export Basmati to Europe and nearby Islamic nations reducing India's export share.

[Egypt, Russia Sign Military, Security Cooperation Protocol](#)

August 26, 2021, Egypt Today

During his visit to Moscow, Minister of Defense and Military Production Mohamed Zaki signed with his Russian counterpart a cooperation protocol that tackles different military and security aspects.

[Egypt Participates in International Army Games in Russia, China](#)

August 26, 2021, Egypt Today

Egypt is participating in the International Army Games in Moscow and China with four teams, said the Egyptian Ministry of Defense in a statement.

Iraq

[Iraq Hosts Summit Aimed at Easing Regional Tensions](#)

August 28, 2021, AL Jazeera

Iraq hosted a regional conference on Saturday (August 28) aimed at easing tensions in the Middle East while emphasising the Arab country's new role as a mediator.

[Statement by President Joe Biden on the Baghdad Conference for Cooperation and Partnership](#)

August 28, 2021, The White House

US President Joe Biden congratulated the Government of Iraq on hosting a successful and ground-breaking regional summit. This kind of diplomacy has never been more important as we seek to ease tensions among neighbouring states and expand cooperation across the Middle East, and Iraq's leadership on this is historic.

[President Macron Vows French Troops Will Remain in Iraq Even if US Withdraws](#)

August 29, 2021, The Times of Israel

"No matter what choices the Americans make, we will maintain our presence in Iraq to fight against terrorism," Macron told a news conference in Baghdad.

[President Macron Visits Daesh Former Stronghold in Iraq's Mosul](#)

August 29, 2021, Arab News

French President Emmanuel Macron visited the Daesh group's former Iraqi stronghold Mosul, a day after vowing to keep troops in the country.

[Chinese Envoy Urges Countries to Continue to Support Iraq's Political Process](#)

August 26, 2021, CGTN

A Chinese envoy urged the international community to continue to support Iraq's political process and assist Baghdad in combating terrorism and COVID-19.

Iran

[No Different from Trump, Iran's Khamenei Slams 'Predatory' Biden](#)

August 28, 2021, AL Jazeera

Shortly before Iran and the United States, along with other world powers, are expected to head back to Vienna for nuclear talks, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei said "predatory wolf" President Joe Biden is no different from his predecessor.

[Iran Supreme Leader Khamenei Blames US For Afghanistan 'Tragedy'](#)

August 28, 2021, Outlook India

Iran's supreme leader has called the situation in Afghanistan a tragedy and blamed the U.S. for the problems there. Ayatollah Khamenei in his first official meeting with new president Ebrahim Raisi's Cabinet said "the tragedies in Afghanistan are deeply affecting human beings (and were) made by America."

[China, Russia, Iran Military Drills in Gulf Enhance Regional Security, Against External Interference](#)

August 24, 2021, Global Times

China, Russia and Iran will hold joint maritime exercises in the Persian Gulf around late 2021 or early 2022, according to Russian Ambassador to Iran Levon Dzhagaryan. Dzhagaryan said the drills are to "ensure the safety of international shipping and the fight against sea pirates".

[Amir-Abdollahian Takes Over As Iran's New Foreign Minister](#)

August 26, 2021, Iran International

President Ebrahim Raisi (Raeesi) appointed Amir-Abdollahian, 56, as foreign minister at a critical juncture in US-Iran relations, when talks to revive the 2015 nuclear agreement have been suspended with both sides insisting on their conditions.

[Iran Appoints Nuclear Chief As Some Expect A Return To Vienna Talks](#)

August 29, 2021, Iran International

Iran might be preparing for the rough road ahead to the resumption of talks with world powers over its nuclear program some believe, as President Ebrahim Raisi appointed 'Mohammad Eslami' as new head of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization.

[Exporters Confident of Shipping 35 Million Kg of Tea to Iran This Year](#)

August 23, 2021, The Economic Times

India's tea exporters are confident of shipping 35 million kg of teas to Iran this year, despite the continuing US sanctions on the West Asian country.

Israel

[Israeli PM Presented Biden with "Death by a Thousand Cuts" Iran Strategy](#)

August 27, 2021, Axios

The strategy Bennett presented to Biden involves countering Iran through a combination of many small actions across several fronts – both military and diplomatic – instead of a single dramatic strike, the Israeli officials said.

[Israel's Mossad Snubbed the U.S. Can Trust Be Restored?](#)

August 26, 2021, The New York Times

In the spring, Benjamin Netanyahu, then Israel's prime minister, curtailed intelligence sharing with the United States because he did not trust the Biden administration. The question is can Israel and the US rebuild trust in intelligence sharing.

[President Biden Tells Israel, U.S. Has Options if Iran Diplomacy Fails](#)

August 28, 2021, Tehran Times

Israeli PM Bennett was on a mission to lobby the American president into a new confrontational approach towards Iran. "We're putting diplomacy first and we'll see where that takes us. But if diplomacy fails, we're ready to turn to other options," Biden added, without offering specifics.

[Withdrawal from Afghanistan Benefits Israel, Says US Official](#)

August 26, 2021, Middle East Monitor

A US official has defended the withdrawal from Afghanistan by claiming that it will benefit Israel. The unnamed official said that Washington will be in a better position to direct resources and attention to its allies such as Israel.

[PM Bennett: No Peace with Palestinians, Siege on Gaza to Continue](#)

August 25, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said that there would be no peace with the Palestinians and the Israeli siege on Gaza will continue as long as Hamas rules the coastal enclave.

[18 Palestinians Wounded in Israel's Crackdown on Gaza Protests](#)

August 30, 2021, Middle East Monitor

At least 18 Palestinian demonstrators were reported wounded in an Israeli crackdown on demonstrations near the eastern fence of the northern Gazan city of Jabalia, the Palestinian Ministry of Health in Gaza announced.

[PA President Abbas: 'No Reconciliation Talks with Hamas Unless International Resolutions Recognised'](#)

August 28, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Palestinian Authority (PA) President Mahmoud Abbas has asserted that he will not accept any reconciliation talks with Hamas unless it recognises international resolutions.

[Hamas, Russian Officials Meet in Moscow](#)

August 28, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Senior Hamas leader Dr Musa Abu Marzouq met with Special Presidential Representative on the Middle East Mikhail Bogdanov. The two officials met at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs headquarters in Moscow and discussed several issues related to the Middle East.

Jordan

[Hamas Rejects Jordan Settlement Projects](#)

August 28, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Chief of Hamas Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh announced that his movement rejects settlement projects for Palestinians in Jordan. The top Hamas leader insisted that the only solution for Palestinian refugees is to return to their homes from where they were forcefully evicted in 1948.

Kuwait

[Kuwait's Economic Makeover Under Threat as Small Businesses Fight for Life](#)

August 12, 2021, Reuters

Thousands of small and medium Kuwaiti businesses could go to the wall after being walloped by the pandemic, potentially torpedoing a private sector central to the country's efforts to remake its unorthodox and oil-pumped economy.

[Afghan Evacuees Start Arriving in Kuwait, U.S. Ambassador Says](#)

August 24, 2021, Reuters

The first flight carrying at-risk Afghan evacuees arrived in Kuwait, which has approved passage for 5,000 under an agreement with the United States following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan.

Lebanon

['In the Eye of Chaos': Lebanon's Security Chief Issues Warning](#)

August 27, 2021, AL Jazeera

The head of one of Lebanon's most powerful security agencies has ordered his officers to stand firm in the face of its national crisis, warning of the chaos that would ensue if the state collapsed.

[Lebanon Heading Towards Collapse, Sunni Sheikh Warns](#)

August 27, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Lebanon is heading towards complete collapse unless action is taken to remedy the crisis caused by its financial meltdown, Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Latif Derian, the state's most senior Sunni Muslim cleric warned.

[Lebanon's Hezbollah Agrees to Third Shipment of Iranian Fuel](#)

August 27, 2021, AL Jazeera

Hezbollah leader Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah has said a third shipment of Iranian fuel has been agreed to ease crippling shortages in Lebanon.

Oman

[Oman to Allow Entry to Vaccinated Indians from September 1](#)

August 24, 2021, The Week

In a relief to thousands of stranded NRIs, the government of Oman announced that travellers from 21 countries, including India, could enter the Gulf kingdom. "All passengers arriving to the Sultanate are required to present a COVID-19 vaccine certificate containing a QR code stating that they have received two doses of a vaccine approved in Oman, or in cases where a single dose is approved by the health authorities of the Sultanate, have received one dose of such a vaccine.

Qatar

[India Important, Want to Maintain Ties: Taliban Leadership in Qatar](#)

August 30, 2021, The Indian Express

In what is being seen as a signal to India, a member of the Taliban leadership in Qatar has said that India is “very important for this subcontinent” and that his group wants to continue Afghanistan’s “cultural”, “economic”, “political” and “trade ties” with India “like in the past”.

Saudi Arabia

[Indians Vaccinated in Saudi Arabia Won't Be Required to Quarantine on Return](#)

August 24, 2021, Hindustan Times

Saudi Arabia lifted the quarantine rule for Indians who have received both doses of Covid-19 vaccines in the Gulf nation. The Indian embassy in Riyadh announced on Twitter that Indian citizens fully vaccinated against Covid-19 in the country can enter the Middle Eastern country directly without quarantining in a third country.

[Saudis Sign Military Cooperation Agreement with Russia](#)

August 24, 2021, Radio Free Europe

Saudi Deputy Defense Minister Khalid bin Salman announced on August 24 that he signed the agreement with Russian Deputy Defense Minister Alexander Fomin "aimed at developing joint military cooperation between the two countries."

[Saudi Arabia's Former Intel Chief Calls Weapons Proliferation Risk in Afghanistan Very Worrying as Terror Threat Grows](#)

August 29, 2021, CNBC

Saudi Arabia's former intelligence chief says he is very worried that American weapons could fall into the hands of militant groups such as Al Qaeda, bolstering a sworn enemy of the United States in the wake of an exit from Afghanistan that he says was mismanaged.

[Saudi Arabia Inks Deal with China to Boost Tourism Sector](#)

August 27, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The Saudi Tourism Authority (STA) and Alibaba Cloud have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to boost the kingdom's tourism sector. Alibaba Cloud which is the digital technology subsidiary of the Alibaba Group, is set to provide technical support to the STA in order to promote Saudi Arabia as a new and viable travel destination for Chinese tourists.

Syria

[China Keen to Support Syria, Accelerate Reconstruction](#)

August 26, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Chinese Premier Li Keqiang said his government is keen to support Syria in combating the coronavirus pandemic, improving the livelihood of its people and accelerating reconstruction.

[Iran and Syria Vow to Confront 'Economic Terrorism' of US Sanctions](#)

August 30, 2021, The Times of Israel

Iran and Syria vowed to take “mighty steps” to confront US sanctions imposed on the two regional allies, saying their relations will strengthen under Iran’s new leadership.

Turkey

[Taliban Requested Turkey To Operate Kabul Airport: Turkish President Erdogan](#)

August 28, 2021, Swarajya Magazine

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has revealed that the Taliban asked Turkey to operate the Hamid Karzai International Airport in Kabul. However, he added that any decision on this issue will be taken only after there is greater clarity regarding the administration in Afghanistan.

[US Congress Alarmed by Turkish Drones' Global Success, Capability](#)

August 11, 2021, Daily Sabah

Twenty-seven United States Congress members have voiced concern and alarm over Turkey's unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) in a letter sent to Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

UAE

[India's Proposed FTA with UAE to Boost Jewellery, Engineering Exports](#)

August 29, 2021, Business Standard

The proposed free trade agreement (FTA) with the UAE can result in enhanced exports of several sectors, including gem and jewellery, engineering, leather goods and chemicals to the Emirates as the pact would enhance competitiveness of domestic traders, according to exporters.

[\\$400 Billion Target: India Seeks to Double UAE Exports, Raise Bar for US and UK](#)

August 30, 2021, The Economic Times

India is looking to double its goods exports to the UAE this fiscal and substantially increase its outbound shipments to the US, the UK, Singapore and Hong Kong as part of its plan to achieve a record \$400 billion in merchandise exports this year.

[India Signs Agreement with UAE to Send Visiting Professors to Abu Dhabi](#)

August 27, 2021, The Indian Express

Aiming at deepening the academic and cultural ties between India and the UAE, an agreement was signed under which faculty members from Indian universities will spend six to 10 months every year undertaking research and teaching social sciences in Abu Dhabi.

Yemen

[At least 30 Killed in Houthi Strikes on Yemen Base, Says Spokesman](#)

August 29, 2021, The Economic Times

At least 30 soldiers were killed and 60 wounded in Houthi strikes on a military base belonging to forces of the Saudi-led coalition in southwest Yemen, a spokesman for the southern forces and medical sources said.



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