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DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW

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Abstract

Amidst rising crude prices and inflation, the United States in coordination with India, Japan, China, Republic of Korea, and the UK agreed to release 50 million barrels of oil from strategic reserves. India too agreed to release 5 million barrels of crude from its strategic reserves. In the light of above, forceful response, OPEC+ is weighing pausing planned production increases.

India’s Air Chief Marshal VR Chaudhari embarked on a visit of Egypt from November 28 to December 02. During the visit, he will attend Egypt Air Power Symposium and Defence Exposition (EDEX) and deliver a keynote address on “strategic air intelligence in confronting new and non-organised threats”.

The PS+1 and Iran will reconvene in Vienna on November 29 after a hiatus of nearly five months to salvage the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) aimed at curbing Iran’s nuclear program. Ringing alarm bells on possible sanctions relief to Iran, Israeli Prime Minister Bennett stressed that “Israel is very worried about the readiness to remove sanctions, allowing the flow of billions [dollars] to Iran in exchange for unsatisfactory restrictions in the nuclear realm”. Amidst Israeli concerns, US and its allies are likely to exert more pressure on Tehran to stop it from using Vienna talks as a pretext to boost nuclear program. Iran on the other hand believes that US face with diminishing range of choices, the only viable option for Washington is to revert back to JCPOA 2015. In another development, the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) has failed to reach an agreement with Iran to monitor countries nuclear sites especially the factory at Karaj that produces key parts for centrifuges used to enrich Uranium.

Israel and the United States have continuously warned Iran about “exploring all options on table” in case the Vienna talks fail. In light of this, former Director of the ‘Mossad’ Tamir Pardo warned that “Israel should think twice before attacking Iranian nuclear sites as it would be far more complicated than the successful Israeli air-strikes on Iraq (1981) and Syria’s (2007) reactors”. “Iran can see that US is stuttering today, as highlighted by China and Russia’s aggressive moves toward their neighbours Taiwan and Belarus. The Iranians are rubbing their hands at this development”, Pardo added. In another development, Israel and Morocco signed their first defence agreement “laying foundation for security cooperation, intelligence sharing, and future arms sales”.

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To curb growing menace of terrorism in the Middle East, United Kingdom has designated Palestinian militant organization that controls Gaza ‘Hamas’ as a terrorist outfit. Meanwhile, Australia has listed Lebanon’s ‘Hezbollah’ as a terrorist organisation.

Turkey-UAE relations showed signs of improvement as Abu Dhabi’s Crown Prince Mohammed bin Zayed met Turkish President Erdogan in Ankara. This was UAE Crown Prince’s first visit to Turkey in nine years. Meanwhile, in an important regional development, reportedly “nine Arab countries want Syria to return to the Arab League sooner rather than later maintaining that suspending Damascus in 2011 was hasty decision, complicating the situation in the country”.

On developments in Afghanistan, US will resume talks with Taliban in Doha [Qatar] this week with focus on country’s humanitarian crisis and steps to ensure Afghanistan does not become a “launchpad” for “terrorism”.

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

S&P Revises Bahrain’s Outlook To Stable on Fiscal Reforms and Higher Oil Prices

November 27, 2021, The National

S&P Global Ratings revised Bahrain’s outlook to stable from negative, as the Gulf country undertakes fiscal reforms to strengthen its economy. Higher oil prices as well as support from other GCC members are also expected to help the country improve its fiscal position.
Egypt

IAF Chief VR Chaudhari To Embark on 5-Day Visit To Egypt

November 27, 2021, India Today

IAF Chief VR Chaudhari will visit Egypt to attend the Egypt Air Power Symposium and Egyptian Defence Exposition (EDEX) which is scheduled to take place in Cairo from November 28 to December 2.

Indian Sugar Enters Egyptian Market To Fill Brazil's Void

November 17, 2021, The Hindu BusinessLine

Indian sugar has found its way into the Egyptian market, filling the space left empty by Brazil, according to traders.

Egypt Bans Flights from Southern African Countries Over Omicron Variant

November 28, 2021, News18

The Egyptian government suspended direct flights with a number of southern African countries due to concerns over the new Covid-19 variant Omicron.
Iraq

Five Peshmerga Killed in ISIL Attack in Iraq's Diyala
November 28, 2021, AL Jazeera
Five Peshmerga fighters were killed in an attack by the ISIL (ISIS) armed group in northern Iraq, the Kurdistan Regional Government (KRG) said.

Iraq Doesn't Have Expectations About Outcome of OPEC+ Meeting
November 28, 2021, S&P Global
Iraq does not have any expectations about the outcome of the Dec. 2 meeting of OPEC+ ministers, as the 23-member coalition is set to assess the impact of the oil price crash on November 26, a new COVID variant and the coordinated release of oil stocks from major consumers.

Iraqi Army: US Forces To Leave Iraq Soon
November 26, 2021, i24 News
Foreign forces are expected to leave Iraq within 15 days, except for those whose mission has turned to advise and support the Iraqi security forces,” Maj. Gen. Tahsin Al Khafaji, spokesman for the Joint Operations Command, told Iraq’s state news agency.

Iraq: Sadr Rejects Coalition, Wants Majority Gov't
November 26, 2021, Middle East Monitor
Leader of Iraq’s Sadrist movement, Muqtada Al-Sadr, said that he will not participate in any coalition government, reiterating his position on forming a "national majority" government.

US President Joe Biden Invites 110 Countries Including India, Iraq and Pakistan To Virtual Democracy Summit
November 24, 2021, Mint
US President Joe Biden has invited 110 countries to a virtual summit on democracy on December 9-10. The summit excluded China, Turkey, and Russia, according to a list posted on the State Department website.
Russia, China Jointly Slam US For Creating New Rifts Among Countries By Holding Provocative Summit on Democracy

November 27, 2021, Press TV (Iran)

In a joint op-ed, Russia and China have sharply decried the United States for holding a summit on democracy, saying the upcoming conference is a product of Washington’s Cold War mentality that will create new rifts in the international community.
Iran

Pressure Likely To Be Exerted On Iran If It Uses Talks To Boost Nuclear Programme - U.S. Envoy
November 28, 2021, Reuters

The United States and its partners are likely to exert pressure on Iran if it uses talks scheduled to resume in Vienna as pretext to accelerate its nuclear programme, the U.S. special envoy to Iran said.

In Seventh Round of Nuclear Talks, Iran's Intentions Will Finally Become Clear
November 29, 2021, The Times of Israel

Negotiators will meet in Vienna on Monday (November 29) for the first indirect nuclear talks between Iran and the US in nearly six months. The hiatus was much longer than originally anticipated, and in the interim, an agreement continues to look ever more unlikely.

U.S. Faces a Diminishing Range of Choices in Vienna
November 28, 2021, Tehran Times

Iran’s chief negotiator, Ali Bagheri outlined that the only viable option for the U.S. is to revive the JCPOA and redress its past blunder in abandoning the deal. Of course, this needs to be done in a new spirit.

Iran Has Biden's Nuclear Number

The Iran nuclear talks resume in Austria, and pessimism seems to be the order of the day. Iran refuses to make concessions, while the U.S. is signalling that its patience may be limited. But don’t underestimate the Biden Administration’s desire for a deal—any deal.

Russia Criticises U.S. Over Threat of Escalation with Iran at IAEA
November 26, 2021, Reuters

Russia chided the United States for threatening a diplomatic escalation with Iran at the U.N. nuclear watchdog next month unless it improves cooperation with the agency, saying it risked harming wider talks on the Iran nuclear deal.
U.N. Nuclear Chief Leaves Iran Without a Deal on Factory Inspection, Diplomats Say


The head of the United Nations atomic watchdog IAEA left Iran after failing to reach a deal to allow inspectors access to a factory making equipment for Tehran’s nuclear program, diplomats said.

US Threatens Escalation With Iran at IAEA Next Month If Tehran Does Not Cooperate

November 26, 2021, WION

In a move that could potentially undermine talks on reviving the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran, the US threatened to confront Iran next month at the IAEA if the country does not cooperate more with the watchdog.
Israel

Israel Worries Iran Will Get Sanctions Relief Without Capping Nuclear Projects
November 28, 2021, Arab News

Israel worries Iran will secure a windfall in sanctions relief in renewed nuclear negotiations with world powers but will not sufficiently roll back projects with bomb-making potential, Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett said.

Ex-Mossad Chief Tamir Pardo: Israel Should Think Twice Before Attacking Iran
November 24, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Former Director of the Mossad Tamir Pardo warned that a military strike on Iran's nuclear programme would be far more complicated than the Israeli Air Force’s successful attacks on Iraq and Syria’s reactors.

There Was No Strategic Debate On Iran Under Netanyahu, Ex-IDF Intel Chief Charges
November 23, 2021, The Times of Israel

“The Iranian issue was privatized to one person [Benjamin Netanyahu],” argued Amos Yadlin, speaking at a panel at Reichman University’s Institute for Policy and Strategy conference in Herzliya. “The strategic discussions did not take place.”

UK, Israel To Work Together To Stop Iran Gaining Nuclear Weapons
November 29, 2021, Reuters

Britain and Israel will “work night and day” in preventing Iran from becoming a nuclear power, the foreign ministers of the two countries wrote in a joint article.

Morocco, Israel Sign First-Ever Defence Agreement in Rabat
November 24, 2021, AL Jazeera

Israel and Morocco have signed a landmark agreement that lays the foundation for security cooperation, intelligence sharing, and future arms sales.

Israel Bars All Foreigners, Reinstates Phone Surveillance in Effort To Contain Omicron Variant

Israel will forbid the entry of non-citizens for two weeks, starting at midnight Sunday night (November 28), in an attempt to stem the spread of the omicron coronavirus variant in Israel and to allow experts time to assess its level of transmissibility and resistance to existing vaccines.
2 US Defense Officials Say Israel Hacked Iran’s Gas System Last Month

November 27, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel carried out a cyber-attack against Iran’s nationwide fuel system last month, two United States defense officials said.

UK Officially Bans Hamas in Its Entirety as a Terrorist Group

November 26, 2021, The Times of Israel

Britain designated all of Hamas an “Islamist terrorist group,” warning that its members and those who support the group could face stiff jail terms.

Israel Reduces Cyber Technologies Sales Amid NSO Scandal

November 27, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Amid global scandals regarding Israel’s spyware firm, the NSO Group, the Israeli Ministry of Defence has reduced the number of countries to which Israeli companies can sell cyber technologies.

Apple Sues Israel Spyware Company NSO

November 24, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Apple said it had filed a lawsuit against Israel’s NSO and its parent company OSY Technologies, in an effort to stop the spyware company from using any of its devices.

China Wants To Direct a Two-State Solution To The Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

November 24, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Chinese State Councillor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi affirmed his support and role working towards a negotiated two-state solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict.

EU: ‘Time Running Out For Two-State Solution with Israel’

November 27, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The European Union (EU) has criticised Israel’s continuous settlement construction and warned that time is running out for the two-state solution with Israel. EU Representative to the Palestinian Authority Sven Kuhn von Burgsdorff confirmed that the Israeli settlement plans defy international law and destabilise the status quo.
Palestinian Authority Condemns New Israel Settlements in Hebron

November 27, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The Palestinian Authority (PA) condemned the latest Israeli approval of the construction of 372 new settlement units in the southern West Bank city of Hebron. In a statement, the PA's foreign minister asserted that this Israeli move "is an extension of the process of deepening and expanding the illegal settlements in the heart of the old city of Hebron."
Jordan

Hundreds Protest In Jordan Against Water-Energy Deal With Israel
November 26, 2021, AL Jazeera
Hundreds of people gathered in the Jordanian capital Amman to protest a water-for-energy agreement between Jordan and Israel. The agreement, if implemented, would be one of the largest cooperation projects since the countries signed a peace deal 27 years ago.

Saudis Attempted To Block UAE-Israel-Jordan Deal on Energy, Water — Report
November 25, 2021, The Times of Israel
Saudi Arabia attempted to pressure the United Arab Emirates to torpedo a major deal with Jordan and Israel on energy and water, a report said
Kuwait

KPMG Sets Up China Business Desk In Kuwait To Support Chinese Investors

November 27, 2021, Kuwait Times

In the spirit of enabling Chinese investors to do 'business better' in Kuwait, KPMG in Kuwait announced the launch of the China Business Desk in a hybrid seminar.
Lebanon

**Australia Lists Hezbollah as 'Terrorist Organisation'**
November 24, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Australia listed all of Hezbollah – a political party and an armed wing, which has considerable power in Lebanon – as a terrorist organisation.

**UNICEF: Generation of Children ‘at Stake’ In Lebanon Crisis**
November 23, 2021, AL Jazeera

The UN children’s agency has called on Lebanon to take urgent action to protect children after it documented a spike in child labour rates and food insecurity since April.
Oman

Oman, Kuwait and Saudi Arabia Impose Travel Ban On African Countries Amidst Omicron Scare

November 28, 2021, Republic World

Oman, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait joined a list of countries that have suspended air travel from certain African countries in the wake of the omicron COVID variant.
Qatar

US To Resume Talks With Taliban in Qatar: State Department

November 24, 2021, AL Jazeera

The United States is set to resume talks with the Taliban next week in Qatar, discussing the humanitarian crisis in Afghanistan and steps to ensure that the country does not become a “launchpad” for “terrorism”, US State Department Spokesman Ned Price has said.
Saudi Arabia

Oil Rebounds To $76 On Speculation Omicron-Related Drop Overdone
November 29, 2021, Reuters

Oil rebounded by almost 5 percent on Monday (November 29) to $76 a barrel as some investors viewed slump in oil and financial markets on concern about the Omicron coronavirus variant as overdone.

US To Release Oil From Strategic Reserves, In Joint Plan with India, Other Nations
November 23, 2021, Mint

US President Joe Biden has authorised the release of 50 million barrels of oil from strategic reserves to cool down oil prices and address lack of supply around the world, a move that could draw the ire of OPEC.

OPEC Weighs Shift in Oil Policy After Crude Release

Top oil producers Saudi Arabia and Russia are considering a move to pause their recent efforts to provide the world with more crude, according to people familiar with those discussions, after Washington and other countries said they would release a slug of stored oil in an effort to lower prices.

Saudi Lifts Suspension of Direct Entry for Travellers From Six Countries, Including India
November 26, 2021, The Economic Times

Saudi Arabia has announced that it will lift a travel ban on expats from six countries including India and Pakistan that was introduced to contain the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic.
Syria

Middle East States Seek 'Mechanism' To Bring Syria Back to Arab League

November 29, 2021, The National

Regional countries driving to re-engage with Syria are seeking a mechanism and consensus to readmit Damascus to the Arab League, senior Middle East diplomats and officials said.

Syrian Militants Planning Provocation With Use of Chemical Weapons — Defense Ministry

November 26, 2021, TASS (Russian News Agency)

According to Deputy Head of the Russian Center for the Reconciliation of the Warring Parties in Syria Vadim Kulit, the terrorists intend to stage some provocations to accuse the Syrian government forces of using chemical weapons against civilians in Idlib province.
Turkey

**MBZ Visit and a Fresh Start in UAE-Turkey Relations**

November 29, 2021, Daily Sabah

The UAE crown prince’s trip to Turkey is the first in nine years since relations were frozen in 2012. Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have been on opposing sides in regional conflicts and have distanced themselves from each other.

**UAE Invests $10bn Into Turkey, Signing Deals To Improve Ties**

November 24, 2021, Middle East Monitor

An agreement was struck for direct investments and cooperation in the sectors of energy, petrochemicals, technology, transportation, infrastructure, health, financial services, food and agriculture.

**Afghan Economy Needs To Be Revived To Prevent Refugee Crisis: President Erdoğan**

November 28, 2021, Hurriyet Daily News

Afghanistan’s economy should be revived to prevent a refugee crisis that will affect our entire region, President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan said on Nov. 28, speaking at the 15th Leaders’ Summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization held in Turkmenistan.

**Turkey’s Central Bank, Banks Discuss Rates After Lira Tumble**

November 25, 2021, AL Jazeera

Turkey’s central bank governor said he discussed recent interest rate cuts with bankers at a meeting after a slide in the lira to record lows, and he also said that the banking sector was able to overcome market volatility.
UAE

**UAE Candidate Elected Interpol President**

November 25, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The UAE’s Ahmed Nasser Al Raisi has been appointed President of the international policing agency ‘Interpol’ for the next four years.

**India Looking at $2.5bn Investment in Textiles Sector**

November 27, 2021, Times of Oman

The ‘Textile Week’ kicked off at the India Pavilion in Expo 2020 with the country looking at a fresh investment of $2.5 billion in the sector, which would be key to a ‘Self-reliant India’ and becoming a preferred global sourcing partner in textiles.

**UAE Pitches For Resumption of Normal Flight Schedule With India Amid Dubai Expo**

November 25, 2021, The Economic Times

The United Arab Emirates has urged resumption of normal flight services with India and increase the number of flights, pointing out that such a measure will help in controlling the escalating cost of travel amid the ongoing Dubai expo.

**Iran’s Top Nuclear Negotiator Holds Talks in The UAE - State News Agency**

November 24, 2021,Reuters

Iran’s top nuclear negotiator, Ali Bagheri Kani, met with senior Emirati officials during a visit to the United Arab Emirates.

**US 'Fully Committed' To F-35 Sale To UAE: American Official**

November 16, 2021, The Economic Times

The U.S. remains “fully committed” to a proposed sale of advanced F-35 stealth fighter jets to the United Arab Emirates, despite the Biden administration slowing down the deal, a senior American official overseeing arms exports said.
Yemen

At least 200 Houthis Killed in Fighting, Airstrikes in Marib, Jouf

November 28, 2021, Arab News

At least 200 Houthis were killed in heavy fighting with government forces and in airstrikes by Arab coalition warplanes during the past 24 hours in the Yemeni provinces of Marib and Jouf, as the militia pushed into Marib to seize control of strategic terrain, coalition and local military figures said.

Yemen War Deaths Will Reach 377,000 By End of The Year: UN

November 23, 2021, AL Jazeera

A new United Nations report has projected that the death toll from Yemen’s war will reach 377,000 by the end of 2021, including those killed as a result of indirect and direct causes.