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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.

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Abstract

Chief of the Army Staff, Gen. MM Naravane has embarked on a five day visit to Israel from November 15. During his visit he will meet senior military and civilian leadership of Israel to further enhance existing defence cooperation between the two nations. Importantly, India’s Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) signed a bilateral innovation agreement with Israel’s Directorate of Defence Research and Development (DDR&D). As part of which, “Start-up's and defence industry from the two countries will collaborate for development of next-generation technologies including drones, robotics, artificial intelligence, quantum technology, photonics, biosensing, brain-machine interface, energy storage, wearable devices, natural language processing, etc.” In another major development, Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar during visit to ‘Expo 2020 Dubai’ spoke about the West Asian Quad comprising India, Israel, US, and UAE holding a session in the coming weeks as a follow-up from the October 18 meeting.

Earlier, Indian External Affairs Minister met Secretary-General of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) in New Delhi. The two leaders discussed growing political, trade and investment relationship; Dr. Jaishankar highlighted “India’s attractiveness as a destination for foreign direct investment (FDI) including sovereign wealth funds from GCC countries”. India and GCC agreed on the “need to further securing supply chains, including in energy security, food security, and healthcare”. Dr. Jaishankar also held a bilateral meet with Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan to discuss ways to further boost strategic partnership.

India hosted NSA level ‘Delhi Regional Security Dialogue on Afghanistan’ attended by Iran, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan. The Dialogue called for “closer coordination and joint efforts to tackle terrorism emanating from Afghanistan as also to address country’s humanitarian crisis”. Amidst this, Taliban’s acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi addressing a Pakistani think tank asserted that “the Taliban already has an inclusive government in Kabul with representatives from all ethnic groups including Tajiks, Balochs, Turkmens, Nuristanis, Uzbeks, and a number of other groups”. He called upon the international community to “define human rights while expressing concerns over US’ move to freeze Afghanistan’s funds, forcing the country into a humanitarian crisis, which no one considers to be a human rights violation”. In
another development, Qatar has agreed to act as diplomatic representative of the US Government in Afghanistan.

With Vienna talks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) scheduled to re-start on November 29, Iran wants guarantees from the United States that it will not abandon JCPOA 2015 again, if talks succeed in reviving the agreement. Amidst French foreign minister’s remark that “Vienna talks should pick up where they left on June 20, Iran’s Chief Negotiator asserted that “we do not have nuclear talks, because the nuclear issue was fully agreed in 2015 in the form of the JCPOA. The main issue we are facing is the consequences of the US withdrawal from the agreement and imposition of illegal sanctions on Iran”, he added. However, it remains to be seen as to what action is taken against Iran’s breach of the JCPOA, which had limited uranium enrichment to 3.67 percent. Atomic Energy Organization of Iran had earlier revealed that the country has 120 Kilograms of 20 percent enriched uranium. 90 percent enriched Uranium is considered to be weapons grade. Prior to resumption of Vienna talks, US Special Envoy for Iran, Robert Malley is on a tour of the Middle East to coordinate Washington’s approach with that of Israel, Saudi Arabia, UAE, and Bahrain. In another development, US, Israel, UAE, and Bahrain launched joint naval drills in the Red Sea.

On the cyber security front, US and Israel announced a new partnership to combat growing ransomware threat. The agreement will lead to information sharing on financial sector, joint training and exercises on cyber security. Meanwhile, US Commerce Department has blacklisted Israeli spyware company NSO Group as Washington determined that company’s signature spyware – ‘Pegasus’ had acted against foreign policy and national security interests of the United States.

President Biden has insisted on re-opening US Consulate for Palestine in Jerusalem since he took office in January 2021. However, Israel’s Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has told Democratic Party’s US Congress members that he won’t allow Washington to reopen its consulate in Jerusalem. Earlier, Israel had suggested that US can open a consulate for Palestine in West Bank (Ramallah). It must be noted that, US had recognized Jerusalem as the Capital of the State of Israel under the Trump administration on December 06, 2017, moving US Embassy from Tel Aviv to Jerusalem. In another development, Palestinian Authority (PA) Prime Minister, Mohammad Shtayyeh told US Congress delegates that Israel was destroying the ‘two-state solution’ systematically through its “illegal settlements” across the West Bank.
In a major sign of improving relations between UAE and Syria, Emirati foreign minister Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed al-Nahyan met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus. As UAE’s FM stressed Abu Dhabi’s “support for all efforts to end the Syrian crisis, consolidate stability in the country and meet aspirations of the brotherly Syrian people”, US and Qatar strongly denounced efforts to rehabilitate “brutal dictator”.

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

Covid-19: Bahrain Approves Emergency Use of India's Covaxin
November 12, 2021, Hindustan Times

Bahrain has become the latest country to approve Covaxin, the made-in-India vaccine against the coronavirus disease (Covid-19), as the country’s National Health Regulatory Authority (NHRA) has given its permission for the emergency use of the jab.

Bahrain Lawmaker Condemns Violence Against Muslims in India, Threatens Trade Boycott
November 10, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Bahraini lawmaker, Abdulrazzaq Hattab, has issued a scathing condemnation of India for the violence against Muslims which has increased in the country over the years, threatening to start a boycott of trade between the two countries.
Egypt

**Egypt's Ban of Tuk-Tuk To Hit India's 3-Wheeler OEMs**

November 13, 2021, The Hindu BusinessLine

Egypt’s decision to ban the import of three-wheelers (tuk-tuks), citing safety concerns, can have major implications for India’s three-wheeler-makers including Bajaj Auto. Egypt accounts for about 5 percent of three-wheelers exported by Indian OEMs.

**US, Egypt Conclude Strategic Dialogue**

November 10, 2021, Arab News

Washington and Cairo called for resumption of negotiations on Ethiopia’s Renaissance Dam. Both sides reaffirm commitment to boost economic, defence, and climate cooperation.

**Egypt-Israeli Deal on Sinai Troop Deployment Caps Years of Improved Ties, Analysts Say**

November 12, 2021, The National

Egypt’s deal with Israel to permanently station troops along a troubled stretch of their border in the Sinai Peninsula represents a qualitative leap in relations that caps years of growing security co-operation between the former foes.

**Egypt, China Sign New Economic, Technical Cooperation Agreement To Enhance Joint Cooperation Efforts**

November 08, 2021, Egypt Today

Minister of International Cooperation, Rania A. Al-Mashat, and Chinese Ambassador to Egypt Liao Liqiang, signed a new Economic and Technical Cooperation agreement, within the framework of the strategic relations between both countries, alongside the joint development efforts.
Iraq

Iran Likely Did Not Order Drone Attack on Iraqi Prime Minister, Current, Former U.S. Officials Say

November 13, 2021, NBC News

Iran likely did not sanction a recent drone attack on the Iraqi prime minister though it was almost certainly carried out by Shiite militia forces that Tehran has armed and supported, current and former U.S. officials.

US: Iraq is Not Afghanistan and We Are Here To Stay, Says Top Official

October 27, 2021, The National

“Iraq is not Afghanistan, we are here in the long term, we view Iraq as a key strategic partner and we are committed to this partnership,” Jennifer Gavito, the deputy assistant secretary of state for Iran and Iraq, said.
Iran

8 Nations Call For Joint Efforts To Tackle Terrorism Emanating from Afghanistan
November 10, 2021, Hindustan Times

Top security officials of eight countries, including India, Iran and Russia, called for closer coordination and collective efforts to tackle threats such as terrorism emanating from Afghanistan and to address a looming humanitarian crisis.

Taliban Have All-Inclusive Government in Afghanistan, Claims Acting Foreign Minister
November 12, 2021, Middle East Monitor

A top Taliban official dismissed the idea of integrating opposition leaders in the interim Afghanistan administration, stressing that no state has the authority to force them to accept former governments' representatives into the governance system.

Fully Utilise Chabahar Port, Iran Tells India
November 11, 2021, Tribune India

Iran has expressed dissatisfaction over its economic ties with India, the Iranian media reported after the meeting between National Security Adviser Ajit Doval and the visiting Secretary of Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) of Iran Rear Admiral Ali Shamkhani on the side lines of the Delhi Dialogue on Afghanistan.

Iran Wants U.S. Assurances It Will Never Abandon Nuclear Deal If Revived
November 09, 2021, Reuters

Iran said that the United States should provide guarantees that it will not abandon Tehran's 2015 nuclear deal with world powers again, if talks to revive the agreement succeed.

Iran’s Bagheri Rules Out Nuclear Negotiations, Says Talks Only Focused On U.S. Sanctions
November 10, 2021, Tehran Times

Iran’s top nuclear negotiator has said that there will be no nuclear negotiations at the Vienna talks later this month and the talks would only focus on the implications of the U.S. withdrawal from the 2015 nuclear deal between Iran and the major world powers.
US Envoy Visiting Middle East Allies Ahead of Iran Nuclear Talks

November 11, 2021, AL Jazeera

Robert Malley, the United States’ special envoy for Iran, is travelling to the United Arab Emirates, Israel, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain ahead of crucial nuclear talks with Tehran set for the end of the month.

Iran Claims Its Air Defense Confronted Two US Drones During Recent Drill

November 09, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Iran claimed that a US Reaper and Global Hawk drone approached Iran’s airspace during a recent drill and that Iran switched on its sophisticated air defences to warn the drones not to continue on their flight path.

Iran Tells Russia West Must Be ‘Realistic’ In Nuclear Talks

November 06, 2021, The Times of Israel

Iran told Russia that Western governments should be “realistic” when nuclear talks resume later this month and not exceed the bounds of a 2015 deal they are seeking to revive.

Russia To Insist On Restoring JCPOA in Full – Foreign Minister Lavrov

November 13, 2021, TASS (Russian News Agency)

Russia will insist on the resumption of full implementation of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) on the Iranian nuclear program and on lifting sanctions off Iran, Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov said.
Israel

Indian Army Chief Gen. Naravane Leaves For Israel on 5-Day Visit
November 14, 2021, India Today
Indian Army Chief General MM Naravane left for Israel on a five-day visit to further strengthen India’s defence and security cooperation with the Jewish state. He will be meeting the country’s senior military and civilian leadership where he will discuss avenues for further enhancing Indo-Israel defence relations.

Israel, India Agree To Develop Bilateral Defense Technology
November 11, 2021, The Jerusalem Post
Just weeks after Israel and India agreed to identify new areas in defence cooperation, the two countries signed an agreement to develop bilateral technology such as drones, artificial intelligence and more.

India, UAE, US and Israel To Hold ‘Quad’ Meet In Next Few Weeks: EAM Jaishankar
November 14, 2021, DNA
Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar has said that India, UAE, US and Israel or also termed as West Asian Quad will be meeting in the coming weeks.

US Announces Partnership With Israel To Combat Ransomware
November 15, 2021, The Times of Israel
The US Treasury Department announced a new partnership with Israel to expand bilateral cooperation in combating ransomware.

US, Israel, UAE, Bahrain Launch Joint Naval Drills In Red Sea
November 11, 2021, AL Jazeera
The United States, Bahrain, Israel and the United Arab Emirates have begun joint naval training in the Red Sea, the US Navy announced.

US Says Could Hold Joint Air Drill With Israel, UAE, Bahrain Amid Iran Tensions
November 13, 2021, The Times of Israel
The top US Air Force general in the Mideast said that the US could hold a joint air drill with Israel, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain after the nations carried out a Red Sea exercise in an apparent threat to their shared adversary, Iran.
Israel Won’t Let US Reopen Jerusalem Consulate for Palestine, PM Bennett Said to Tell Visiting Delegates of the Democratic Party

November 11, 2021, The Times of Israel

US President Joe Biden’s administration has said it will reopen the diplomatic mission in Jerusalem historically responsible for Palestinian affairs. Prime Minister Naftali Bennett has reportedly reiterated to visiting Democratic US Congress members that he won’t allow Washington to reopen the US consulate.

Israel is Destroying Two-State Solution Systematically, Palestinian PM Shtayyeh Tells US Lawmakers

November 11, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The Palestinian Authority Prime Minister, Mohammad Shtayyeh, told US lawmakers that "Israel is destroying the two-state solution systematically." Shtayyeh made his comment during a meeting with a US congressional delegation in Ramallah.

CEO-designate of Israel's NSO Spyware Company Resigns

November 12, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The man due to take over as CEO of Israeli spyware company NSO Group, Isaac Benbenisti, has quit after the business was blacklisted by the US Commerce Department.
Jordan

**Jordan FM: There's No Way To Resolve Syria Crisis Except Through President Assad**

November 12, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Jordan Foreign Minister Ayman Safadi said the kingdom has resumed relations with the Syrian regime due to the absence of "any effective strategy to resolve the Syrian conflict".

**German Photographer Spills The Beans: Jordan Flew in IDF Aerial Drill**

October 29, 2021, The Times of Israel

A German military photographer posted two pictures of Jordanian fighter jets taking part in this month’s massive Blue Flag aerial exercise on social media, apparently inadvertently revealing that the kingdom had participated in the Israeli-hosted drill.
Kuwait

EAM Jaishankar Calls For Easing of Air Travel Restrictions By GCC States

November 10, 2021, Hindustan Times

External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar called for further easing of restrictions by the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states on air travel from India and mutual recognition of vaccination certificates.
Lebanon

No Point In Engagement With Lebanon, Says Saudi Arabia
November 15, 2021, Arab News

Saudi Arabia sees no point in engaging with Lebanon’s government until its politicians confront the malign influence of Hezbollah and Iran, the Kingdom’s foreign minister has said.

Hezbollah Chief Nasrallah Slams Saudi Arabia For Lebanon Diplomatic Rift
November 11, 2021, AL Jazeera

Nasrallah accused Saudi Arabia of violating Lebanese sovereignty and dismissed calls for the departure of embattled Information Minister George Kordahi.

Arab League Hails ‘Positive’ Talks With Lebanon Over GCC Row
November 08, 2021, AL Jazeera

Talks with Lebanese officials to resolve a diplomatic rift with Saudi Arabia and other Gulf countries have been “positive”, Arab League Assistant Secretary-General Hossam Zaki says.
Oman

Right Time For Businesses To Tap Investments in Oman and India: Indian Ambassador to Oman

November 13, 2021, Times of Oman

The Embassy of India, Muscat organised a round-table on November 9 that was attended by CEOs and heads of prominent Indian business houses and Indian public sector undertakings in Oman.
**Qatar**

**Qatar To Act As US Diplomatic Representative In Afghanistan**

November 12, 2021, AL Jazeera

The United States and Qatar have agreed that Doha will represent the diplomatic interests of the US in Afghanistan, the first official representation for the US in Kabul since its troop withdrawal in August.

**US, Qatar ‘Deeply Concerned’ About West Bank, Gaza**

November 13, 2021, The Times of Israel

The United States and Qatar said that they remain “deeply concerned” about the West Bank and Gaza and vowed to continue working together to “improve humanitarian and economic conditions for all.”

**India To Seek Higher Volume, Better Price For Qatar LNG Deal Renewal**

November 10, 2021, Reuters

India’s top gas importer Petronet LNG (PLNG.NS) will seek higher volumes at better prices from Qatar Gas during negotiations for an extension of its long-term liquefied natural gas (LNG) deal beyond 2028, its head of finance said.

**Former Qatar PM: 'Israel, Arab State Planned Sudan Military Coup'**

November 13, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Former Head of Qatar’s Ministerial Council Hamad Bin Jassim Al-Thani revealed that Israel and an Arab state [UAE] had planned the latest military coup in Sudan.
Saudi Arabia

**COP26: OPEC's Saudi Arabia, UAE Push Emissions Reduction, Not Fossil Fuel Extinction**

November 10, 2021, S&P Global

While highlighting their green investments, core OPEC members Saudi Arabia and the UAE on Nov. 10 defended the embattled oil industry to the UN Climate Change Conference, saying environmental policies should be balanced with energy security and economic development.

**India Pitches For Securing Gulf Sovereign Funds**

November 10, 2021, The Economic Times

India and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) agreed on the need for further securing supply chains, including in the areas of energy security, food security and health care. India on its part has pitched its attractiveness as a destination for FDI, including for sovereign wealth funds in GCC countries.

**Saudi Arabia Recognises Covishield, Exempts Quarantine For Those Vaccinated With It**

November 12, 2021, The Indian Express

Saudi Arabia has recognised Serum Institute of India’s Covishield as an approved Covid-19 vaccine for entry into the country.
Syria

UAE Foreign Minister Meets Syrian President Assad, US Slams Visit To ‘Dictator’
November 10, 2021, France 24
The United Arab Emirates foreign minister met Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus in a sign of improving ties between Assad and a US-allied Gulf state, triggering US denunciations of efforts to rehabilitate a "brutal dictator."

Qatar Calls To Halt Normalisation With Assad Regime in Syria
November 13, 2021, Middle East Monitor
Qatari Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Foreign Affairs Mohammed Al-Thani called to halt normalisation with Syria’s Bashar Al-Assad regime.

US Military Hid Airstrikes That Killed Dozens of Civilians in Syria: Report
November 14, 2021, Hindustan Times
The US military reportedly covered up 2019 airstrikes in Syria that killed up to 64 women and children, a possible war crime, during the battle against Islamic State.

Water Scarcity Reaches Crisis Point In Northern Syria
November 12, 2021, AL Jazeera
Climate change-induced water shortages in northern Syria are exacerbating existing vulnerabilities caused by economic instability, conflict, and the pandemic.
Turkey

Israeli Couple Arrested in Turkey on Espionage Charges
November 13, 2021, The Indian Express

An Israeli married couple were arrested for espionage late after taking photographs of the Turkish President’s residence in Istanbul, Turkey’s official news agency said.

Israel Denies Espionage Charge Against Couple Arrested In Turkey
November 14, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Israel is working for the release of an Israeli couple being held in Turkey, denying allegations carried by Turkish state media that the two were spies, the Israeli Prime Minister said.

Turkish Lira Slides To New Low Against The US Dollar
November 11, 2021, AL Jazeera

The Turkish lira continued its dive into uncharted territory, touching a new low of 9.975 to the dollar after a jump in United States inflation exacerbated worries for a currency already hobbled by the central bank’s unorthodox rate cuts.

After China and Turkey, Russia Begins Supplying S-400 Air Defence Systems to India
November 14, 2021, Zee News

Russia has started delivering the S-400 surface-to-air missile systems to India, the deliveries are going as planned according to Russian officials.
UAE

Israeli Arms Contractor Elbit Systems Launches New Venture in UAE

November 14, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israeli weapons-maker Elbit Systems launched a new venture in the United Arab Emirates, an announcement that comes ahead of visits to Dubai by senior Israeli military officials.

UAE: Mohamed bin Zayed Receives Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. S Jaishankar

November 14, 2021, Khaleej Times

The two leaders discussed the strategic ties between two countries and ways to boost them.

Dubai Airshow: IAF’s Tejas Flaunts Superior Flying Skills on Opening Day

November 15, 2021, Times Now

An aerobatics team and the Tejas aircraft of the Indian Air Force (IAF) showcased their superior flying skills on the opening day of the famed Dubai Airshow in the United Arab Emirates (UAE).
Yemen

Yemen’s Houthi Forces Breach U.S. Embassy Compound, Detain Local Employees

November 12, 2021, The Washington Post

Yemeni security employees of the U.S. government have been detained in Sanaa, Yemen, after the compound that once housed the American Embassy was breached by Iran-backed Houthi forces, the State Department said.