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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

Continuing India’s growing defence engagement in West Asia-North Africa (WANA), Indian Air Force conducted a two-day joint exercise ‘Desert Warrior’ with their Egyptian counterparts at El Berigat Air Base on October 30-31 aimed at “enhancing mutual understanding” and to “share operational experience”. In another development, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Israeli counterpart Naftali Bennett held their first face to face meeting on the side lines of COP26 summit in Glasgow. They exchanged views on “expanding cooperation in high-tech and innovation” sectors. Further, reportedly Bengaluru-based SSS Defence has bagged a contract to upgrade AK-47s of the Indian Army’s Special Forces Unit, defeating Israeli firm Fab Defense in the process.

With regard to NSA’s level meeting being hosted by India on November 10, to discuss developments in Afghanistan, Russia, Iran, and Central Asian republics confirmed their participation. Response from China and Pakistan is awaited. Going by a press statement of Pakistan’s NSA, it is unlikely to attend.

On India – Iran bilateral relations, Iran’s Ambassador to India expressed a belief that under President Raisi the two countries will open a “new chapter” and expects New Delhi to soon resume oil imports from Tehran. Importantly, he highlighted Iran’s past oil exports and purchase of other commodities from India in ‘Rupee’ instead of the USD, as a recognition of Indian Rupee as an international currency. Meanwhile, amidst rising crude prices, OPEC+ has decided to stick to its current oil production plan. As OPEC refused to increase production, ‘The White House’ reiterated that the group “risks imperiling global economic recovery” while warning that the US was prepared to use “all tools necessary” to cool oil markets.

In an important development, Vienna talks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) between P5+1 and Iran are likely to re-start on November 29. Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani, who is also Tehran’s chief negotiator in Vienna, confirmed the date after a phone call with EU’s senior diplomat Enrique Mora. Amidst this, Iran claimed that the IRGC thwarted an attempt by US to detain an oil tanker carrying the Islamic Republic’s oil in the Sea of Oman. Washington rejected Tehran’s claims as “bogus, totally false and untrue”. Further ratcheting up regional tensions, Iran is holding sea, land, and air military drills east of the Strait of Hormuz, Sea of Oman, and northern parts of the Indian Ocean.
Iraq remains highly destabilized in the aftermath of recently concluded parliamentary elections. Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi’s home in Baghdad’s Green Zone was targeted with three armed drones. US, UAE and Saudi Arabia condemned the incident as “terrorist act”. On the other hand, “Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah dismissed suggestions that Iraqi groups were behind attack on PM Kadhimi”.

Even as President Biden emphasizes centrality of human rights in foreign arms sales, “US State Department has approved the sale of AIM-120C Advanced Medium Range Air-to-Air Missiles (AMRAAM) and related equipment for an estimated cost of USD 650 million to Saudi Arabia”. Washington stressed that “proposed sale will support Saudi Arabia’s Eurofighter Typhoon, F-15C/D, F-15S, and F-15SA programs while further strengthening interoperability between the United States and Saudi Arabia”. In another development, Turkey test-fired its high-altitude long-range air defence missile system, ‘Siper’ – reportedly a rival to Russian S-400 system.

With a view to enhance investments in Chinese companies, Saudi Arabia’s Public Investment Fund (PIF) has applied for a qualified foreign institutional investor license in China. Till now, PIF had limited its holdings in foreign markets mostly to the US and Europe. PIF has ambitious plans to control assets worth USD 2 trillion to become global investment powerhouse. In another development, China continued its outreach to war-torn Syria. Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke with his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad and called for “joint efforts to safeguard common interests of developing countries” while “defending international justice and equity”.

United Arab Emirates has drafted a new law and established a court dedicated to non-Muslim family matters including marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance. This move is in line with Abu Dhabi’s recent policy measures to attract talent from abroad to position UAE as a global business and investment hub. As regards trade and economy, India’s gold trade with the UAE shone brightly in October 2021.

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

Bahrain Relaxes Quarantine Measures For Vaccinated Indian Travellers
November 06, 2021, ANI

Passengers travelling from India to Bahrain with COVID-19 certificate issued in India will be exempted from mandatory 10 days of quarantine.
Egypt

**Air Forces of India and Egypt Conduct Two-Day Joint Exercise**
November 02, 2021, The Times of India

Air Forces of India and Egypt conducted a two-day exercise at El Berigat air base to enhance mutual understanding and share operational experience.

**Egypt, US To Hold Talks in Washington to Boost Cooperation**
November 06, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

"Secretary of State Anthony J. Blinken will meet with Egyptian Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukri and his team in Washington, D.C., November 8-9 to participate in the US-Egypt strategic dialogue," according to the US State Department.

**The United States Provides $125 million in Economic Assistance to Egypt**
November 01, 2021, US Embassy Egypt

The U.S. Government, through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and the Ministry of International Cooperation announced seven bilateral assistance agreement amendments on November 1 worth $125 million.

**US Congressman Makes Fourth Bid To Declare Muslim Brotherhood a Terror Group**
November 05, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Republican Congressman Ted Cruz and Mario Diaz-Balart reintroduced a bill calling on the State Department to designate the Muslim Brotherhood a terrorist organisation. Several others, all belonging to the Republican party, are co-sponsors.
Fears of Wider Instability in Iraq After Attack on Prime Minister’s Home


Iraq’s Prime Minister survived a drone strike on his home, Iraqi officials said, raising fears of wider instability after disputed results in Iraq’s parliamentary elections.

Iran-backed Factions ‘Will Pay The Price’ For Drone Attack on Iraqi PM Kadhimi

November 07, 2021, Middle East Eye

The apparent attempt to assassinate Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi has been labelled by politicians, armed groups commanders and observers as a “stupid and uncalculated” operation that has caused great harm to the Iranian-backed Shia factions.

‘Cowardly Terrorist Attack’ on Iraqi PM Al Kadhimi Condemned Around The World

November 07, 2021, The National

The international community has condemned the assassination attempt on Iraq’s Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi, with the UAE describing it as “cowardly” and the US condemning it as a “terrorist” act.

Kataib Hezbollah Dismisses Suggestions That Iraqi Groups Behind Attack on PM

November 07, 2021, Reuters

A security official from the Iran-backed Kataib Hezbollah group in Iraq dismissed suggestions that Iraqi groups were behind the attack on Prime Minister Mustafa Al-Kadhimi.

Baghdad Deaths, Injuries To Be Investigated Amid Election Dispute

November 06, 2021, Reuters

An investigation has begun into the deaths and injuries of demonstrators and security forces after clashes in Baghdad.

BRI: Foreign Firm To Manage Iraq-China Oil-For-Projects Deal

November 07, 2021, Zawya

Iraq has appointed a foreign company to manage an oil-for-projects agreement it signed with China in 2019, an Iraqi official has said. Chinese companies have recently deposited nearly $1.8 billion in a fund created by the agreement and that the funds would be used by Iraq in financing the planned 1,000 schools as well as infrastructure and renewable power projects.
Iran

Russia, Iran, Central Asian NSAs Will Attend Delhi Meet on Afghanistan
November 06, 2021, The Indian Express
Days after Pakistan's NSA declared he would not be attending the conference on Afghanistan in India, New Delhi said that Russia, Iran and Central Asian countries have confirmed their participation. A response from China is awaited.

Iran Expects 'Friend' India To Resume Oil Purchases Soon, Says Ambassador Chegeni
November 01, 2021, The Print
Iran expects that India will soon resume importing oil from it, after halting the process in 2019 under pressure from the Trump administration in the US.

Iranian Claims That U.S. Tried To Detain Tanker False, Pentagon Says
November 04, 2021, Reuters
The Pentagon rejected claims by Iran's Revolutionary Guards (IRGC) that they thwarted an attempt by the United States to detain a tanker carrying the Islamic Republic’s oil in the Sea of Oman.

Iran Holds Large-Scale Military Drill After US Navy Confrontation
November 07, 2021, AL Jazeera
Iran's army is holding a large-scale sea, land and air military drill, which comes shortly after the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and United States Navy had a confrontation in the Sea of Oman over a seized oil tanker.

Nuclear Talks With P5 + 1 To Resume on November 29: Iran
November 03, 2021, AL Jazeera
Iran has said it will resume multilateral talks on November 29 in Austria's capital, Vienna, aimed at reviving the country’s nuclear deal with world powers.

Russian, Iranian Foreign Ministers For Restoring 2015 Nuclear Deal To Original Form
November 06, 2021, AL Arabiya
Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian both expressed support for restoring a 2015 nuclear deal to its original form.
China Hails Iran's Return To Nuclear Talks, Urges U.S. To Take Actions

November 07, 2021, CGTN

Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said that China welcomes Iran's decision to return to negotiations aimed at reviving a 2015 nuclear deal at the end of November.
Israel

India, Israel PMs Talk Cooperation In ‘Areas of High-Tech, Innovation’
November 03, 2021, The Indian Express
Prime Minister Narendra Modi had a “fruitful” first meeting with his Israeli counterpart Naftali Bennett on the side lines of the COP26 climate summit in Glasgow during which they reviewed the bilateral ties besides exchanging views about expanding cooperation in areas of high-technology and innovation.

Bengaluru’s SSS Defence Beats Israeli Firm, Will Be First From India To Upgrade Army’s AK-47s
October 31, 2021, The Print
Indian small arms firm SSS Defence has defeated Israeli firm Fab Defense, also known as Zahal, to bag a contract to upgrade a limited number of Kalashnikov rifles with a unit of the Indian Special Forces.

Israel Doubles Down Against US, Saying There Is No Room in Jerusalem for an American Consulate for Palestinians
November 07, 2021, CNN
"There is no room for another American consulate in Jerusalem. We always present our position quietly without drama and we expect it to be understood. Jerusalem is the capital of one state and that's the state of Israel," Bennett said.

Palestinians Slam Israeli Comments on US Consulate In Jerusalem
November 07, 2021, AL Jazeera
The Palestinian Authority has slammed Israel for rejecting the promised reopening of the United States consulate in occupied East Jerusalem, a move that would restore Washington's main diplomatic mission for the Palestinians in the contested city.

Trump Tells Jewish Republicans He Was Best Ever For Israel, Biden Weak on Iran
November 07, 2021, The Times of Israel
Former US president Donald Trump returned virtually to familiar stomping grounds at the Republican Jewish Committee’s annual confab in Las Vegas over the weekend, claiming that his successor, President Joe Biden, and congressional Democrats are endangering Israel.
Pope Affirms Support For Two-State Solution To Israeli-Palestinian Conflict

November 04, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The need for peaceful co-existence among various faiths, as well as the goal of a two-state solution in the Holy Land, were discussed during a meeting with Palestinian President, Mahmoud Abbas, and the spiritual leader of the Catholic world.

New US Ambassador To Israel Pledges To Oppose BDS

November 04, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Thomas Nides, new US ambassador to Israel has pledged to fight the Boycott, Divestment and Sanctions (BDS) movement, support the Abraham Accords, strengthen bonds with Israel and replenish its Iron Dome missile defence system.

Morocco Interested in Buying Israel's Iron Dome Defence System

November 07, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The report comes amid growing hostilities between Morocco and Algeria with relations reaching a new low after three Algerian truck drivers were killed in a bomb attack in the border area between Mauritania and the disputed Western Sahara territory.
Jordan

On UK Visit, Jordan’s King Calls for Strengthening Efforts to Solve Middle East Crises
October 28, 2021, Arab News

Jordan's King Abdullah II called for strengthening regional and international efforts to reach political solutions to Middle East crises that bring stability and security for the region.

Economy Ministers of Israel, Jordan Meet For First Time in Decade To Boost Ties
November 03, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel’s Economy Minister Orna Barlivai and her Jordanian counterpart Yousef Alshamali met in Jordan to discuss bilateral ties, the first such meeting in a decade.
Kuwait

Kuwait Nominates Former Governor as New OPEC Chief, Sources Say

November 05, 2021, Reuters

Kuwait has nominated its former governor to the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Haitham al-Ghais, to lead the oil producer group after Mohammad Barkindo’s term as secretary general.
Lebanon

Buffeted By Crises with Gulf Countries, Lebanon PM Urges Minister To Do Right Thing
November 04, 2021, Reuters
Lebanese Prime Minister Najib Mikati urged a cabinet minister who triggered a rift with Saudi Arabia to put national interests first but stopped short of asking him to resign, as he struggles for a way out of the diplomatic crisis.

US Calls For Opening Diplomatic Channels Between Lebanon, Gulf States
November 04, 2021, Middle East Monitor
The United States called for opening diplomatic channels between Lebanon and the Gulf states, after tensions mounted following the release of statements by Lebanese Minister of Information, George Kordahi.

Lebanon's Kordahi Will Resign If Gulf Guarantees Positive Positions Towards Lebanon
November 05, 2021, Middle East Monitor
Lebanese Minister of Information, George Kordahi, will resign if the Gulf countries provide guarantees that this will change their position towards Lebanon.

France Says Lebanon Should Be 'Shielded' From Middle East Crises
November 04, 2021, The Jerusalem Post
France said that Lebanon needed to be shielded from regional crises and that it was paramount that core actors across the zone needed to play their part in helping to get Beirut to implement reforms and get it out of its quagmire.
Oman

Rollout of COVID Vaccine Booster Doses Underway in Oman
November 07, 2021, Times of Oman

COVID-19 booster doses of the Pfizer-BioNTech vaccine are currently being administered to two sections of people in Oman.
Qatar

UK Asks Qatar To Become Gas ‘Supplier of Last Resort’

November 06, 2021, Financial Times

The UK has held talks with Qatar over a long-term gas arrangement that would make the Gulf state a “supplier of last resort”. Such a deal would help ensure a stable source of LNG from Qatar even when global supplies are tight.
Saudi Arabia

'Constitutional Violation': HC Slams Centre as NRI Who Took Covaxin Seeks Revaccination With Covishield to Re-enter Saudi Arabia

November 02, 2021, The New Indian Express

Expressing grief over the plight of an NRI working in a welding company in Dammam, Saudi Arabia, who cannot go back to his workplace as he was administered Covaxin, which is not approved in the Gulf country, the Kerala High Court observed that “it’s a clear case of infringement of fundamental rights of a citizen.”

President Biden Approves Arms Sale To Saudi Arabia

November 05, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The US has approved its first major arms deal with Saudi Arabia under President Joe Biden with the sale of 280 air-to-air missiles valued at up to $650 million.

Saudi Arabia's Wealth Fund Moves Closer To Direct China Stock Deals

November 05, 2021, The National

Saudi Arabia’s sovereign wealth fund could start making major investments in Chinese companies, after so far limiting its overseas holdings to mostly the US and Europe. The $450 billion Public Investment Fund has applied for a qualified foreign institutional investor licence in China.

OPEC+ Agrees To Stick To Oil Production Plan, Defying U.S. Pressure

November 04, 2021, CNBC

OPEC and its oil-producing allies have agreed to continue with their current output plan, deciding against loosening the taps in the face of multi-year highs in crude prices and U.S. pressure to help cool the market.

Jewish-American Delegation Visits Saudi Arabia To Advance Normalization With Israel

November 04, 2021, Ynet News (Israel)

Jewish-American businessman Phil Rosen, a close associate of former Israeli PM Benjamin Netanyahu, says Riyadh is ready to join Abraham accords ‘within months or year’, claiming that the kingdom admires Israeli ability to defend itself against Iran.
The U.S. Energy Secretary Has a Message For OPEC: Boost Oil Supply So People Don’t Get Hurt This Winter
November 05, 2021, CNBC

U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm has called on oil-producing nations to immediately increase crude supplies to mitigate the surging cost of living.

White House Says OPEC Risks Imperilling Economic Recovery
November 05, 2021, Financial Times

The White House has said OPEC+ risks imperilling the global economic recovery by refusing to speed up oil production increases and warned the US was prepared to use “all tools” necessary to lower fuel prices.
Syria

Xi Jinping: China To Work With Syria To Promote Common Values of Humanity
November 05, 2021, CGTN
Chinese President Xi Jinping said that China is ready to work with Syria to promote the common values of humanity and facilitate dialogue between civilizations.

Syrians Face Deportation From Turkey Over Banana Videos
October 30, 2021, AL Jazeera
Several Syrians face deportation from Turkey after posting videos of themselves eating bananas as part of a “provocation” while “inciting hatred” following tensions between the host community and refugees over their financial wellbeing.
Turkey

Turkey Successfully Test-Fires Air Defense Missile Siper, Rival to S-400

November 06, 2021, Daily Sabah

Turkey has successfully test-fired its high-altitude long-range air defense missile system, Siper, a top defense official said. Turkey will continue to produce new weapons and will have up to six different air defense systems.

TAI Completes Production of 1st Part of 5th-Gen Combat Aircraft

November 05, 2021, Daily Sabah

Turkish Aerospace Industries (TAI) has produced the first part of its National Combat Aircraft (MMU), a long-awaited domestic defense industry project.

US Lawmakers Call For Biden To Not Sell F-16 Fighters To Turkey

October 27, 2021, Daily Sabah

Democratic and Republican U.S. lawmakers urged President Joe Biden’s administration not to sell F-16 fighter jets to Turkey and said they were confident Congress would block any such exports.

Russian Fighter Jets Still In The Game If Turkey-US F-16s Talks Fail

October 19, 2021, Daily Sabah

Turkey is ready to still consider fighter jets made by Russia as an option in case the latest talks between Ankara and Washington over a deal that includes the delivery of F-16 fighters break down, according to Ismail Demir, the head of the Presidency of Defense Industries (SSB).

Istanbul Hosts First International China-Palestine Conference

October 31, 2021, Hurriyet Daily News

Experts and academics from around the world on Oct. 30 gathered in the Turkish metropolis Istanbul to discuss, for the first time, relations between China and Palestine as well as the country’s role and impact on the Palestine-Israel conflict.

Turkey’s UN Ambassador Slams China’s Call For Human Rights Violations

October 28, 2021, Daily Sabah

Turkey will not listen to lectures from those who violate international human rights laws, the country’s United Nations permanent representative said, rejecting Chinese claims of Turkey’s violations of human rights in Syria.
FM Çavuşoğlu: Turkey Wants Closer Ties With Sri Lanka

November 07, 2021, Hurriyet Daily News

The Turkish foreign minister on Nov. 6 said Turkey wants to develop holistic relations with Asia that has become the center of global economic power.
India’s gold trade with UAE shone brightly in October, with imports more than doubling to $5.1 billion and exports of gems and jewellery rising by over 44 percent to $4.2bn over the corresponding month of 2020, according to the latest official data.

Abu Dhabi drafts new law on marriage, divorce, custody and inheritance for non-Muslims

The law has established a new court dedicated to non-Muslim family matters. Equal legal rights for men and women, joint custody and the expediting of divorce procedures are some of the changes announced for non-Muslims in Abu Dhabi.

Saudi Arabia, UAE, UK, US urge return of Sudan civilian-led rule

Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, the United Kingdom and the United States have urged the restoration of the civilian government in Sudan following last week’s coup.

Emirates set to launch Tel Aviv flights in December as UAE-Israel ties deepen

Dubai airline says move comes as the UAE and Israel continue to develop greater economic cooperation.

Russia, UAE ink inter-governmental space exploration deal

The agreement will enable two countries to develop cooperation in satellite navigation and Earth’s remote sensing, space monitoring, satellite telecommunications, space rocket creation, manned cosmonautics and space research.
Yemen

More Than 150 Houthis Dead in Yemen Raids, Says Saudi Coalition

November 07, 2021, WION

Saudi Arabia-led coalition in Yemen said that it had eliminated more than 150 Houthi rebels within last 24 hours in raids around Marib, a pro-government bastion.