ABOUT US

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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

To further strengthen existing strong India-Israel strategic partnership, External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar began five-day visit to Israel on October 17. Dr. Jaishankar is scheduled to meet Israel’s President, Prime Minister, Foreign Minister, and the Knesset (Parliament) Speaker. Further, Indian Air Force’ Mirage 2000 squadron is participating in multilateral Exercise ‘Blue Flag 2021’ that includes Israel, Germany, Italy, United Kingdom, United States, France, and Greece. The primary objectives of the exercise include “strengthening strategic cooperation, and deepening the coordination of fifth and fourth generation airplanes in a challenging operational environment, with an emphasis on bolstering the operational capabilities of the [participating] air forces”.

Abraham Accords have fundamentally changed the geopolitical landscape of the Middle East in the past year. Israel wants India to play a greater role in this emerging strategic calculus. In light of this, Foreign Ministers of Israel, India, US, and UAE will hold their maiden quadrilateral virtual meeting on October 18 eyeing to “enhance coordination and economic partnership in the Middle East”.

As India-Israel ties flourish, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan asserted that on Kashmir “India is drawing inspiration from Israel”. “India enjoys the same kind of impunity within the international community over its attempts to change the demographic balance of Kashmir that Israel has in the occupied Palestinian territories”, he added. Pakistani PM believes “India has not been challenged on the international stage [for abrogating art. 370] as its western allies view India as a bulwark against China”. He also warned about the possibility of nuclear escalation between the two countries.

India is likely to host a National Security Advisor (NSA) level regional conference on developments in Afghanistan on November 10-11. At this conference Russia, China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and Pakistan have been invited. India will also participate in ‘Moscow Format Dialogue’ on Afghanistan scheduled to be held on October 20. Amidst growing concerns about Afghanistan becoming a fertile ground for global terrorism, Russian President Vladimir Putin has warned about battle-hardened militants from Syria and Iraq “actively” entering Afghanistan.

Following the recovery of almost three tonnes of heroin, India’s Adani Ports will not handle cargo from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran beginning November 2021.
Iran has conveyed its displeasure to India describing the banning of its consignments as an “unprofessional and imbalanced move”.

Future of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPoA) still remains uncertain. US, Israel, and the European Union are collectively increasing diplomatic pressure on Iran to re-start the stalled dialogue. US Secretary of State Blinken reiterated Washington’s intent to “consider all options if Iran failed to revive the 2015 nuclear deal”, while Israel stressed its “right to act against Tehran's nuclear program”. On its part, “Iran and Syria’s UN missions warned regarding growing threat of Israeli nuclear weapons to the Middle East while calling on Tel Aviv to support a regional nuclear-free zone”. In another development, Israel assassinated ‘Midhat Saleh’ in the Golan Heights. Saleh was reportedly assisting Iranian military in operations against Israel; Tel Aviv has refused to allow any Iranian military presence in Syria and has allegedly carried out scores of air-strikes on Iranian arms shipments and military targets in Syria.

The chaotic US withdrawal from Afghanistan has raised questions about Washington’s security commitments in the Middle East. Addressing Saudi concerns, Secretary of State Blinken assured the Saudi Foreign Minister of America’s continuing commitment. Meanwhile, Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi also spoke with his Saudi counterpart stressing Riyadh’s key position in Beijing’s Middle East diplomacy. While commenting on the Iranian nuclear issue, Chinese FM stressed Beijing’s “commitment to nuclear non-proliferation and safeguarding the security and stability in the Middle East, without any self-interest or geopolitical considerations”.

Hezbollah’s protest against the lead judge investigating last year’s massive blast at Lebanon’s Beirut port turned violent on October 14 leading to bloodshed on streets. Hezbollah and The Lebanese Forces, a right-wing Christian political party pointed fingers at each other for deadly skirmishes that led to the death of six people and wounded 30 others.

As noted in last week’s West Asia Review, Iraq held parliamentary elections on October 10. Shia Muslim cleric Muqtada al-Sadr’s party is set to be the biggest winner in this election with initial results showing his bloc winning 70 out of 329 assembly seats. Muqtada al-Sadr had positioned himself as an Iraqi nationalist and staunch opponent of both the US and Iranian presence in Iraq. Despite poor showing by Iran-backed political parties in Iraqi elections, analysts claimed that
Muqtada al-Sadr will still have to work with pro-Iran Shia parties linked to the Hashed al-Shaabi network of paramilitary forces to ramp up functional majority.

On the energy front, crude prices climbed to USD 85 per barrel owing to skyrocketing gas and coal prices, which have increased demand for oil. Amidst this, Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke about oil prices reaching USD 100 per barrel even as the OPEC+ seeks to stabilise the market.

In terms of arms procurement, Turkish President Erdogan informed that “US has proposed the sale of F-16 fighter aircrafts to Ankara in return for its investment in the F-35 programme”. Turkey had ordered 100 F-35 fighter aircrafts but the US removed Ankara from F-35 program citing concerns about Turkey’s acquisition of Russian S-400 missile defence system.

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

**Ex-Bahrain Cop Held For Drug Trafficking From Kerala**
October 06, 2021, Hindustan Times

The Narcotics Control Bureau (NCB) arrested a 50-year-old man, from Kerala, who was allegedly trafficking hashish to the Gulf countries with bases in metro cities across the country.

**US Senators Urge State Dept to Confront Bahrain's 'Repression'**
September 24, 2021, AL Jazeera

A bipartisan group of US senators has called on Secretary of State Antony Blinken to press the Kingdom of Bahrain to end what it calls the “violent, systemic repression” of its population.
Egypt

[Hyperlink: Indian Car Rental Platform Zoomcar Begins Operations in Egypt]

October 03, 2021, Egypt Today

Zoomcar, a car rental company based in India, has announced the expansion of its business in the Middle East to include Egypt.
Iraq

Muqtada al-Sadr Set To Win Iraq Vote, Former PM al-Maliki Second
October 11, 2021, AL Jazeera

Shia Muslim religious leader Muqtada al-Sadr’s party is set to be the biggest winner in Iraq’s parliamentary election, increasing the number of seats he holds, according to initial results, officials and a spokesperson for the Sadrist Movement.

Despite Iraq Election Win, Sadr Still Has To Work With Pro-Iran Groups
October 15, 2021, The Arab Weekly

Shia cleric Moqtada al-Sadr may be Iraq’s big election winner but he will still have to haggle with his opponents, linked to armed pro-Iranian groups, to forge a new government.

Iraq, Syria Militants ‘Actively’ Entering Afghanistan: Russian President Putin
October 14, 2021, Hindustan Times

Russian President Vladimir Putin said that battle-hardened militants from Iraq and Syria are "actively" entering Afghanistan and could further destabilise the region.

Russian President Putin Predicts Oil at $100 Even as OPEC+ Seeks To Stabilise Market
October 13, 2021, Reuters

Oil prices could reach $100 a barrel, Russian President Vladimir Putin said, adding that Moscow and its partners in the OPEC+ group are seeking to stabilise the global market.

Iraq Oil Minister Says Oil Prices Reaching $100/Barrel Unsustainable
October 03, 2021, Reuters

Iraq’s oil minister said that oil prices reaching $100 a barrel will not be sustainable and that OPEC wants stable markets.
Iran

India Confirms Participation in October 20 Moscow Format Meet on Afghanistan
October 14, 2021, Hindustan Times

India confirmed its participation in a meeting of the Moscow Format dialogue on Afghanistan on October 20 that is set to be joined by representatives of the Taliban setup in Kabul.

India Likely To Host NSA Level Talks on Afghanistan in November, Pakistan Invited
October 17, 2021, Business Standard

India is all set to soon host a national security advisor (NSA) level regional conference in New Delhi on Afghanistan. This will be the first-of-its-kind dialogue to be hosted by India. Those invited to the NSA-level meeting include countries in the neighbourhood of Afghanistan - Russia, China, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan.

India’s Adani Ports To Shun Cargo From Afghanistan, Pakistan, Iran
October 12, 2021, AL Jazeera

India’s largest port operator has said it will not handle cargo from Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran from next month following the seizure of almost three tonnes of heroin.

Iran Slams Adani Ports Ban as Unprofessional
October 15, 2021, The Indian Express

Tehran has conveyed its displeasure to New Delhi, calling the banning of its consignments as an “unprofessional and imbalanced move”.

EU Sends Diplomat to Tehran as Uncertainty Grows Over Iran Deal
October 14, 2021, AL-Monitor

European Union’s senior diplomat, Enrique Mora, was in Tehran on October 14 to promote restarting the long-halted negotiations on restoring the Iran nuclear deal known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Iran Warns Israel Over Rising Threats To Nuclear Program
October 15, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Iranian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations, Majid Takht Ravanchi warned of Israel’s growing threats against his country’s nuclear
programme, reiterating that the threats should be condemned as a violation of international laws.

**Iran’s Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) Has Key Role in State-backed Hack Surge, Google Warns**

**October 16, 2021, The Times of Israel**

Google warned of a surge in state-backed hackers, with a report focusing on the “notable campaigns” of a group linked to Iran’s Revolutionary Guard Corps.

**Microsoft Says Iran-linked Hackers Have Targeted US and Israeli Defense Firms**

**October 11, 2021, CNN**

Suspected Iranian hackers have targeted dozens of defence technology and maritime transportation firms, successfully breaching a small number, in a spying campaign launched since July that could leave some of the companies vulnerable to follow-on hacking attempts, Microsoft announced.

**Russian Cyberattacks Pose Greater Risk To Governments**

**October 07, 2021, Microsoft**

During the past year, 58 per cent of all cyberattacks observed by Microsoft from nation-states have come from Russia. The attacks from Russian nation-state actors are increasingly effective, jumping from a 21 percent successful compromise rate last year to a 32 percent rate this year.
Israel

Indian External Affairs Minister Dr. Jaishankar To Visit Israel
October 16, 2021, The Hindu BusinessLine
Indian Minister of External Affairs S. Jaishankar will discuss various elements of the India-Israel Strategic Partnership in his meeting with Israel's Alternate Prime Minister and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid during his five-day visit to the country beginning Sunday (October 17).

India, US, Israel and UAE Coming Together To Form a 2nd Quad?
October 18, 2021, The Times of India
Israel wants India, with its transformed relationship with the Arab world, to play a greater role in the Middle East's emerging strategic landscape.

Second Quad: India, US, Israel and UAE Foreign Ministers To Meet Virtually
October 18, 2021, India Today
The Foreign Ministers of India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the US will hold a virtual meeting on Monday (October 18) to boost cooperation and coordination.

IAF's Mirage 2000 Squadron Takes Part in Blue Flag Exercise in Israel
October 17, 2021, ANI
IAF's Mirage 2000 squadron is taking part in the Blue Flag 2021 international exercise held in Israel.

U.S., EU, Israel Adopt Tough Tone on Iran, Mull Options
October 14, 2021, Reuters
US, Israeli and EU officials took a tough line toward Iran, with U.S. officials saying they would consider all options if Tehran failed to revive the 2015 nuclear deal and Israel saying it reserved the right to act.

Israel 'Reserves The Right' To Act Against Iran: Foreign Minister Yair Lapid
October 13, 2021, AL Jazeera
Israel "reserves the right" to act against Iran, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid has said, suggesting that "force" may be necessary to stop the Iranian nuclear programme.
Israel’s Nuclear Weapons Are The True Middle East Threat, Iran Warns UN
October 13, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Israel’s atomic weapons are the true threat to Middle East peace, the Iranian and Syrian envoys alleged to the United Nations as they called on the Jewish state to support a regional nuclear-free zone.

Pakistan PM Imran Khan: India Drawing Inspiration From Israel in Kashmir
October 11, 2021, Middle East Eye

India enjoys the same kind of impunity within the international community over its attempts to change the demographic balance of Kashmir that Israel has in the occupied Palestinian territories, Pakistan’s Prime Minister Imran Khan has said.

Israeli Foreign Minister Misled Blinken on US Consulate in Jerusalem
October 17, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Lack of coordination between Israeli Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and Foreign Minister Yair Lapid on the issue of reopening the US Consulate in East Jerusalem was the cause of tension between Tel Aviv and Washington.

Ex-Shin Bet Chief: Israel’s Poor Dialogue with The Palestinian Authority Strengthened Hamas
October 15, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Israel’s poor communication with the Palestinian Authority had weakened the Arab government and strengthened resistance movement Hamas, former Shin Bet chief Nadav Argaman said.
Jordan

Israel Signs Deal Doubling Water Supply To Parched Jordan

October 12, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel formally agreed to double the amount of freshwater it provides to neighbouring Jordan, one of the world’s most water-deficient countries.
Kuwait

$590 Million in Ransomware Payments Reported in 2021

October 16, 2021, Kuwait Times

$590 million in ransomware-related payments were reported to US authorities in the first half of 2021 alone, setting a pace to beat the total for the whole previous decade as cyber-extortion booms. The figure is also 42 percent higher than the amount divulged by financial institutions for all of 2020, the US Treasury report said.
Lebanon

Hezbollah, Lebanese Forces Trade Blame Over Deadly Protests

October 14, 2021, Deutsche Welle

Hezbollah and the right-wing Lebanese Forces Party pointed fingers at one another after deadly skirmishes in Beirut. Gunfire killed at least six people and wounded about 30 others in the Lebanese capital as tensions flared during a protest against the lead judge investigating last year's massive blast at Beirut's port.

Iran Blames Israel for Lebanon's Unrest

October 16, 2021, Middle East Monitor

As it condemned the killing of Shia protesters in Beirut, Iran declared that the shootings are seditions backed by the "Zionist entity" (Israel).

US Gives Lebanon's Army $67m in Additional Support

October 15, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The United States will offer $67 million in additional support to the Lebanese army, bringing Washington's total support in 2021 to $187 million, US Under Secretary of State Victoria Nuland said in Beirut.
Oman

**US Hopes Abraham Accords Will Help Israeli-Palestinian Issue**

October 13, 2021, i24 News

The United States is working to expand normalization agreements between Israel and Arab nations, and hopes restoring such ties can be leveraged to advance progress on the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, senior State Department officials said. Oman has long been projected to be one of the countries potentially ready to forge diplomatic relations with Israel.
Qatar

Qatar Orders Four LNG Carriers From China, Its First Shipyard Deal With Beijing
October 03, 2021, S&P Global

State-owned Qatar Petroleum has ordered four new LNG carriers from Hudong-Zhonghua Shipbuilding Group Co. (Hudong), a unit of China State Shipbuilding Corp., its first LNG vessel deal with a shipyard from the Asian country. The cost of the order exceeds Qatari Riyals 2.8 billion ($770 million).

Qatar, US To Combat Potential Attacks Targeting FIFA World Cup 2022
October 17, 2021, Doha News

American and Qatari authorities will cooperate to combat any terrorist attacks that could potentially target the Gulf state during its hosting of the World Cup next year.

Abraham Accords Will Fail Unless Israel's Never-ending Occupation is Addressed, Says Qatar
October 14, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Qatar’s Foreign Minister, Sheikh Mohammed Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, expressed strong reservations over the so-called Abraham Accords and their potential to bring about peace without addressing the problem of Israel’s never-ending occupation.
Saudi Arabia

Saudi Arabia ‘At The Top’ of China’s Middle Eastern Diplomacy
October 18, 2021, South China Morning Post
Relations with Saudi Arabia are at the top of China’s Middle Eastern diplomacy efforts, the Chinese foreign minister told his Saudi Arabian counterpart.

India, Saudi Arabia Discuss Deal on Tax Enforcement, Trade Facilitation
October 11, 2021, Mint
India and Saudi Arabia are exploring ways to assist each other in the enforcement of customs laws under a mutual assistance deal, according to a weekly update from the Central Board of Indirect Taxes and Customs (CBIC).

Oil Prices Scale $85/barrel on Back of Supply Deficit
October 15, 2021, The Economic Times
Oil prices hit a fresh three-year high, climbing above $85 a barrel on forecasts of a supply deficit over the next few months as rocketing gas and coal prices stoke a switch to oil products.

US Committed To The Defense of Saudi Arabia: Secretary of State Blinken
October 15, 2021, Arab News
The US sees Saudi Arabia as a vital partner and America is committed to the defence of the Kingdom, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said during a meeting with Saudi FM Prince Faisal bin Farhan.

Saudi Foreign Minister Warns of ‘Dangerous’ Iran Nuclear Acceleration
October 15, 2021, Reuters
In a meeting with US Secretary of State Blinken, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said that Iran’s acceleration of its nuclear activities is putting the world in “a very dangerous place” amid efforts to bring Tehran back into a 2015 nuclear deal.

Saudi Arabia ‘Serious’ About Talks with Iran
October 15, 2021, Financial Times
Saudi Arabia’s foreign minister has said the kingdom is “serious” about talks with Iran, signalling Riyadh’s desire to repair relations between the two rivals that accuse each other of stoking tensions and instability across the Middle East.
Sun, Sea and The Opposite Sex as Saudi Arabia Slowly Loosens Up

October 16, 2021, The Times of Israel

At Pure Beach near Jeddah, there is music, dancing and an inflatable water park, while some women even wear once unthinkable bikinis, a sign of change in Saudi Arabia.
Syria

Shooting in Syria Could Mark New Phase in Israeli Campaign
October 17, 2021, The Washington Post

Syria’s state-run news agency said that ‘Midhat Saleh’ was fatally shot in Ein el-Tinneh, a village along the Israeli frontier in the Golan Heights where he ran a Syrian government office. Israeli media said Saleh had been assisting the Iranian military against Israel.

Russia Explains Failure in Responding to Israeli Raids in Syria
October 16, 2021, Asharq-AL Awsat

A Russian military statement said that civil aviation over the Syrian airspace prevented regime forces from confronting Israeli raids on sites near Palmyra a few days ago. Experts in Moscow have warned of the increased risk of Israeli offences over Syrian territory.

Syrian Government, Opposition Agree on Drafting New Constitution
October 17, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The United Nations Special Envoy for Syria said that the government and opposition co-chairs of the Syrian Constitutional Committee had agreed to start the process of drafting a new constitution.
Turkey

US Proposes F-16 Sales To Turkey in Return For Its F-35 Investment: President Erdogan

October 17, 2021, TRT World

Turkey’s President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has said that the United States had proposed the sale of F-16 fighter jets to Ankara in return for its investment in the F-35 programme.

Turkish Trade Delegation Meets UAE Officials on Trade Ties

October 17, 2021, Middle East Monitor

A Turkish trade delegation held talks with officials in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) on ways of boosting trade cooperation between the two countries.

UK May Buy Turkish Drones, Industry Minister Says

October 16, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The United Kingdom may consider the purchase of Turkish drones, Turkey’s minister of industry and technology revealed.
UAE

UAE's Mubadala Chief Rejects That US-China is a 'Zero-sum Game'
October 08, 2021, The National News
The head of the UAE's strategic Mubadala Investment Company stressed the need for the Emirates to balance ties with the US and China, despite the rising rivalry between the powers.

Concerns Over US Commitment Prompt UAE To Drop Regional Rivalries
October 04, 2021, The Arab Weekly
The United Arab Emirates is trying to manage long-running rivalries with Iran and Turkey through dialogue to avoid any new confrontations in the region as the Arab Gulf state homes in on its economy post COVID-19.
Yemen

Coalition ‘Kills 160’ Houthi Rebels as Marib Battle Intensifies

October 17, 2021, AL Jazeera

The Saudi-led coalition supporting Yemen’s government says it has killed 160 Houthi rebels in air raids south of the strategic city of Marib, where loyalists say rebels have made advances.

Yemen’s Humanitarian Crisis Growing as Economy Collapses: UN

October 14, 2021, AL Jazeera

Yemen’s economy is collapsing, its humanitarian crisis is worsening, and the conflict in the Arab world’s poorest nation is growing more violent, the United Nations’ deputy humanitarian chief has said.