



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



Volume III, Issue 51 | December 20, 2021

Delhi Policy Group

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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

In a move that could further deepen India's strong trade partnerships in the Gulf, "all GCC (Gulf Cooperation Council) countries have approached New Delhi for a free trade agreement (FTA)". As India negotiates and finalises, FTA with UAE, Union Minister for Commerce and Industry, Piyush Goyal, stressed that "highly favourable outcomes can be expected from the India-UAE, FTA". In addition to the FTA, "India and UAE are also looking at striking deals in the fintech sector".

India, Iran, and Uzbekistan held a trilateral meeting to discuss the joint use of strategically important 'Chabahar port'. The three countries "underlined the role played by Chabahar port during humanitarian crises [in Afghanistan] as well as in enhancing regional connectivity".

The seventh round of Vienna talks on Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program concluded in the past week. Reportedly, some progress was made in the negotiations, but an agreement still remains elusive. Amidst this, a number of former senior US officials including, Howard Berman, Michèle Flournoy, Jane Harman, Leon Panetta (Former CIA Director), Gen. David Petraeus (Former Commander, CENTCOM), Dennis Ross, and Robert Satloff, urged President Biden to restore Iran's fear without which diplomacy is unlikely to yield any positive outcome.

Further, a senior official from the Biden administration expressed concerns over Iran's "really short breakout time to producing enough highly enriched uranium for one nuclear weapon". In another development, if Israel were to exercise strike option against Iranian nuclear sites, Boeing KC-46 Pegasus aerial refuelling tankers are likely to play a critical role in any such planned operation. However, United States has informed Israel that, the "aircraft is unlikely to be delivered until 2024".

As the future of JCPOA still remains uncertain, former Israeli National Security Advisor, Meir Ben-Shabbat, revealed that "Russian position on Iran is closer to Israel's than what is publicly exposed". In another development, Even as the United States tightens sanctions on Iran, reportedly, China has ramped up crude purchases from Tehran.

UAE has expressed concerns over security requirements the U.S. has put forth to safeguard high-tech US weaponry from Chinese espionage. Reacting to United States demands, UAE has threatened to pull out of the USD 23 billion deal for F-35

fighter aircrafts and Reaper drones. United States, however, remains committed to move forward with sale of weaponry as planned.

Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) held its 42nd summit in Riyadh. GCC countries agreed to "develop strategic cooperation and economic integration among themselves to fulfil the aspirations of their citizens". Further, the communiqué highlighted "importance of strengthening opportunities for women and young people and digital transformation in the GCC countries". Gulf countries also condemned Iran's nuclear advances, and Tehran's interference in Yemen. On its part, Iran rejected GCC statement as "unconstructive" and a reflection of "wrong attitude held by some GCC members" toward Tehran.

With regards to developments in Afghanistan, Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has pledged to set up a humanitarian trust fund for the war-torn country.

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

Bahrain

[FTA Talks With Canada Next Year; GCC Wants Trade Pact With India: Piyush Goyal](#)

December 17, 2021, The Economic Times

Commerce and Industry Minister Piyush Goyal said that India will launch talks for a free trade agreement with Canada next March or April and that all countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) have approached New Delhi to begin negotiations on behalf of the grouping.

[Vande Bharat Mission: Over 7 Lakh Workers Back from Gulf Nations, Says Indian Govt](#)

December 11, 2021, Business Standard

About 7,16,662 workers came back from six Gulf countries under the Vande Bharat Mission, the Centre said, asserting that the Indian missions are pursuing with these nations the return of Indian workers, the realisation of payments due to them and new recruitment in the light of economic recovery.

Egypt

[Egypt-U.S. Relations at 100 Years: A Partnership That is More Vital Than Ever](#)

December 13, 2021, The Hill

While many other nations have raised doubts about the U.S. and voiced their need to reassess their partnerships in lieu of changing global dynamics, Egypt has reinforced its strong bonds with Washington and coordinated joint responses to new global economic and environmental challenges, as well as increasing threats in the Middle East.

Iraq

[Rockets Fired At Baghdad's Green Zone: Iraqi Military](#)

December 19, 2021, AL Jazeera

Two Katyusha rockets have struck Baghdad's heavily fortified Green Zone, which houses several Western embassies, the Iraqi military has said.

Iran

[India, Iran and Uzbekistan Hold Discussion on Chabahar Port](#)

December 15, 2021, Hindustan Times

India, Iran and Uzbekistan discussed the further development of the transit and transportation corridor centred round the Iranian port of Chabahar during a trilateral meeting on the joint use of the port on the Gulf of Oman.

[Iran Nuclear Talks To Resume 'Soon' After Modest Gains in Vienna](#)

December 17, 2021, AL Jazeera

The seventh round of talks in Vienna to restore Iran's 2015 nuclear deal has ended and while it appears progress was made, P5+1 are not close to an agreement.

[Agreement in Vienna At Hand Only If The West Shows The Will](#)

December 18, 2021, Tehran Times

The latest round of Vienna talks came to an end with Iran underlining progress made in negotiations and the western side cautiously voicing optimism about the road ahead.

[Ex-officials Urge President Biden: 'Restore Iran's Fear' To Boost Chances of Nuclear Diplomacy](#)

December 18, 2021, The Times of Israel

A group of former US senior officials urged President Joe Biden to arrange high-profile military exercises or other actions to strike fear into Iran, amid stalled diplomatic talks on restoring the nuclear deal limiting Tehran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

[China Reaffirms Support For Iran's Legitimate Demands On Nuclear Issue](#)

December 17, 2021, CGTN

China is firmly committed to a political and diplomatic settlement on the Iran nuclear issue and will work with relevant parties to achieve early results in negotiations to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, Chinese State Councilor and Foreign Minister Wang Yi said.

[China Ramps Up Iran Oil Purchases After Getting New Quotas](#)

December 17, 2021, Bloomberg

China ramped up its buying of cheap Iranian crude last month after independent refiners were granted additional import quotas for 2021.

[IAEA and Iran Reach Agreement on Replacing Surveillance Cameras at Karaj Facility](#)

December 15, 2021, The International Atomic Energy Agency

The International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) will soon install new surveillance cameras at Iran's Karaj centrifuge component manufacturing workshop under an agreement reached by Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi and the Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, Mohammad Eslami.

Israel

[Israeli Ambassador Naor Gilon: 'Intimacy Between The Two Countries Such... Whatever India Will Ask Will Be Positively Looked At'](#)

December 06, 2021, The Indian Express

Naor Gilon talks about India and Israel coming closer post 26/11, Israel's vaccination drive and lessons it learnt from the pandemic, the Pegasus spyware and loss of privacy.

[US Tells Israel New Tanker Jets, Key To Iran Strike, Not Coming Anytime Soon](#)

December 14, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel has asked the United States to accelerate the delivery of Boeing KC-46 Pegasus aerial refuelling tankers it had purchased that could be needed to attack Iranian nuclear sites, but was told by the Biden administration the first plane likely will not be delivered until 2024.

[Just One Wrong Move!](#)

December 14, 2021, Tehran Times

An intensification of the Israeli military threats against Iran seems to suggest that the Zionist regime has forgotten that Iran is more than capable of hitting them from anywhere.

[On Iran, Russia is Closer to Israel Than 'What's Publicly Exposed,' Former Top Official Says](#)

December 08, 2021, Haaretz

Russia shares Israel's view that Iran is a destabilizing force in the Middle East, former National Security Adviser Meir Ben-Shabbat said at INSS, adding that Moscow's position on Iran is closer to Israel's than "what is publicly exposed."

[US Holding Off On Reopening Jerusalem Consulate for Palestine Amid Strong Pushback From Israel](#)

December 15, 2021, The Times of Israel

A US diplomat, a former senior US official and another source familiar with the matter told Israeli media this week that the Biden administration has effectively shelved its effort to resurrect the de facto mission to the Palestinians shuttered by former President Donald Trump in 2019.

[US, Palestinian Officials Relaunch Economic Dialogue After 5-Year, Trump-Era Hiatus](#)

December 15, 2021, The Times of Israel

US and Palestinian officials met virtually for the relaunching of the “US-Palestinian Economic Dialogue,” which failed to meet during the Trump administration when relations between Washington and Ramallah deteriorated to an all-time low.

[Ukrainian Ambassador: We Could Recognize Jerusalem As Israel's Capital in Coming Months](#)

December 16, 2021, The Times of Israel

Ukraine's Ambassador to Israel said that his country could recognize Jerusalem as Israel's “one and only capital” soon, and hopes to open a branch of its embassy in the city in the coming year, during a visit by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

[Israel-Palestine Risks Plunging Into New Violence, Warns UN Envoy](#)

December 01, 2021, Business Standard

The UN Mideast envoy has warned that without quick and decisive action to address the key drivers of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict the region risks plunging into another deadly escalation of violence.

Jordan

[Jordan's 'Serious' Water Scarcity Requires Immediate Action – US Ambassador](#)

December 20, 2021, Jordan Times

The US Ambassador to Jordan said that addressing the Kingdom's serious water supply shortage, which is a fundamental issue to the country's stability and economy, is of key interest to Washington.

[Palestinian Refugees in Jordan Struggle Amid UNRWA Funding Cuts](#)

December 18, 2021, AL Jazeera

Descendants of Palestinian refugees from Gaza live in Jordan without citizenship or rights, relying on the UN refugee agency.

Kuwait

[Kuwait Extends Oil Supply Deal For Indian Refiners to March: Sources](#)

December 20, 2021, The Economic Times

Kuwait has extended oil supply contracts for Indian refiners by three months to March 2022 due to a delay in the commissioning of its 615,000 barrel-per-day Al-Zour refinery, according to people with knowledge of the matter.

[First Eurofighter Typhoons Arrive in Kuwait](#)

December 15, 2021, Arab News

The first two of 28 Eurofighter Typhoons made in Italy for the Kuwait Air Force were recently delivered.

Lebanon

[UN Chief Calls For Unity Among Lebanese Leaders, Affirms Solidarity With Citizens](#)

December 19, 2021, UN News

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres on a tour of Lebanon urged the country's leaders to work together to solve multiple crises plaguing the nation.

Oman

[ITEC Courses Have Further Strengthened Oman-India Friendship: Dr. Saidi](#)

December 15, 2021, Times of Oman

About 100 officials and professionals from diverse sectors participated in the 'Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation' event organised by the Embassy of India, Muscat, on December 14. Dr. Ahmed bin Mohammed Al Saidi, Minister of Health, Sultanate of Oman was the Chief Guest on this occasion.

[Middle East Economy Rebounds To Pre-Pandemic Level](#)

December 15, 2021, Times of Oman

The Middle East economy has recovered from pandemic-related losses, aided by higher oil output and the lifting of COVID-19 related restrictions in some countries, a new report said.

Qatar

[Qatar-India Bilateral Trade Totals \\$9bn in First Nine Months of 2021](#)

December 20, 2021, Gulf Times

India is now Qatar's third-largest trading partner; Qatar is home to about 55 companies wholly owned by the Indian side operating, and more than 15,000 companies jointly owned by the Qatari and Indian sides.

Saudi Arabia

[Skinny Jeans, Dance, Music: Giant Rave Breaks Saudi Arabia's Old Boundaries](#)

December 19, 2021, Business Standard

The electronic music festival in Saudi Arabia this weekend highlighted the changes catapulting through the conservative kingdom under its crown prince, Mohammed bin Salman.

[Security, Strategic Ties Top Agenda At 42nd GCC Summit in Riyadh](#)

December 14, 2021, Arab News

The final communique, read by Nayef Al-Hajraf, the GCC general-secretary, said further teamwork would be necessary to meet future challenges and highlighted the importance of strengthening opportunities for women and young people and for digital transformation in the GCC countries.

[Iran Rejects 'Unconstructive' Joint GCC Summit Statement As Nuclear Talks Adjourn](#)

December 19, 2021, Doha News

Iran has rejected as "unconstructive" statements made during the 42nd Gulf Cooperation Council [GCC] summit's final communique on Tehran's nuclear activity and military role in the region.

[OIC Nations Pledge Fund To Prevent Afghanistan's Economic Collapse](#)

December 19, 2021, AL Jazeera

The Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) has pledged to set up a humanitarian trust fund for Afghanistan as millions face hunger and poverty.

[Saudi Arabia Rejects UN Resolution on Gender Identity, Sexual Orientation](#)

December 19, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Saudi Arabia has rejected a United Nations' draft resolution on "gender identity" and "sexual orientation," stressing that the terminology contradicts the kingdom's history and values.

[US Sees Iran Nuclear Breakout Time As Really Short, Claims Senior Official](#)

December 18, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The United States believes Iran's breakout time to producing enough highly enriched uranium for one nuclear weapon is now "really short" and alarming, a senior Biden administration official told reporters.

Syria

[Pentagon Downplayed Civilian Death Toll In Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan in US Airstrikes: Report](#)

December 19, 2021, ANI

US airstrikes conducted with imprecise targeting and deeply flawed intelligence killed thousands of civilians in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan.

[Western Coalition in Syria Shoots Down Menacing Drone](#)

December 16, 2021, Arab News

A drone that threatened a base with US and partner forces in southern Syria was shot down by a British fighter jet with the Western anti-Daesh coalition, the Pentagon said.

Turkey

[Turkey is Ready To Export Unmanned Aerial Vehicles To India](#)

December 13, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Turkish Unmanned Aerial Vehicles, developed by Ankara-based Zyrone Dynamics, is ready to be exported after the company attracted international investment.

[Turkey's Currency Crisis Deepens After Erdogan's Latest Rate Cut](#)

December 17, 2021, CNBC

Turkey's currency crisis accelerated as it plunged 8 percent to a new record low, gripped by concerns over an inflationary spiral brought on by President Tayyip Erdogan's unorthodox plan to slash interest rates in the face of soaring prices.

UAE

[Highly Favourable Outcomes Can Be Expected From India-UAE FTA: Goyal](#)

December 19, 2021, Mint

"There is a lot of good news coming up, across several sectors, as we negotiate and finalize the FTA with the UAE," the minister said during an interaction with the captains of Indian industry and heads of export promotion councils in Mumbai.

[Working on The Prospect of India Mart in Dubai: Goyal at FICCI](#)

December 17, 2021, Business Today

Union Minister for Commerce & Industry Piyush Goyal said that the central government is working on the prospect of an India Mart in Dubai along with the free trade agreement (FTA) with the UAE.

[UAE, India Will Be Looking To Strike Deals in Fintech Space, Says Indian Official](#)

December 13, 2021, Gulf News

The next set of business agreements between the UAE and India will be in the emerging technology space, according to Indian Foreign Secretary Harsh Vardhan Shringla.

[Past FTAs 'Very Tough' on India, Have Discomfort With 'Old Mantras' of Globalisation: EAM Jaishankar](#)

December 17, 2021, The Print

The free trade agreements that were signed in the last 25 years have had a "tough experience" for India as they adversely impacted the domestic supply chains while even getting hollowed-out in some cases, External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar said.

[United Arab Emirates Threatens to Pull Out of \\$23 Billion F-35, Drone Deal With U.S.](#)

December 14, 2021, The Wall Street Journal

The Emirati government told U.S. officials that it intended to halt the deal because Abu Dhabi thought security requirements the U.S. had laid out to safeguard the high-tech weaponry from Chinese espionage were too onerous, and the country's national sovereignty was in jeopardy.

[U.S. Says It Is Ready To Move Forward With Fighter Jet Sale To UAE](#)

December 15, 2021, Reuters

The United States said it was ready to move forward with the sale of F-35 fighter jets and drones to the United Arab Emirates after Abu Dhabi told Washington it would suspend talks on the \$23-billion deal that also includes munitions.

[UAE Says French Rafale Fighter Jets Not A Substitute For US F-35 Warplanes](#)

December 05, 2021, Hindustan Times

The United Arab Emirates defence ministry said its purchase of French Rafale fighter jets would complement its planned deal to buy American F-35 warplanes, which has slowed due to Washington's concerns over Abu Dhabi's relationship with China.

Yemen

[Yemen: 100 Houthis Killed, Vehicles Destroyed in Coalition Air Raids in Marib](#)

December 19, 2021, Arab News

The Arab coalition announced that it had carried out 19 air raids over the past day, killing 100 Houthi fighters and destroying 14 military vehicles in Marib province.



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