



Delhi Policy Group

Advancing India's Rise as a Leading Power



DPG WEST ASIA REVIEW



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Delhi Policy Group

Core 5A, 1st Floor, India Habitat Centre, Lodhi Road, New Delhi- 110003

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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

Owing to the rising cases of Omicron variant of COVID-19, Prime Minister Narendra Modi postponed his visit to the United Arab Emirates; the visit is now likely to take place in February 2022. In another development, UAE's Mubadala Investment Company, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA), and Singapore's GIC are reportedly exploring investment opportunities in India's Reliance Industries (RIL) clean energy unit. "Reliance Industries has unveiled an INR 75,000 crore push into clean energy over three years through Reliance New Energy Solar Ltd".

To provide a boost to West Asia Quad, Israeli Foreign Minister Yair Lapid stressed that four members comprising India, Israel, US, and UAE "will work together on infrastructure, transport, ports, maritime security, digital infrastructure, and clean energy". Importantly, FM Lapid revealed that "India and Israel are negotiating a free trade agreement (FTA); Tel Aviv and New Delhi's bilateral cooperation represents Israel's continuing interest in the Indo-Pacific including: overcoming the pandemic, fighting terrorism, expanding trade, and addressing the threat posed by climate change". Meanwhile, Indian Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, highlighted "high level of mutual trust between the two countries in the fields such as medicine, trade, defence, tourism, and education".

India welcomed Egypt as a member of BRICS 'New Development Bank' (NDB) underscoring that "expansion of NDB membership will help position it as a premier development institution for emerging economies". Earlier, India had also welcomed the admission of UAE, Bangladesh, and Uruguay to the NDB.

Eighth round of Vienna talks on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) aimed at curbing Iran's nuclear program resumed on December 27. As Iran and Russia made upbeat comments about salvaging the 2015 agreement, Washington stressed that "it was still too soon to say if Iran had returned to the negotiations with a constructive approach". Open-source intelligence reports point toward, "Russia and China persuading Iran to moderate some of its demands, including an insistence that Vienna talks focus on sanctions rather than the nuclear issue". Russian Ambassador, Mikhail Ulyanov, on December 30 suggested that "first half of February is a realistic target for achieving agreement on how to revive the 2015 nuclear deal". This is in sharp contrast to Tehran's insistence that "there would be no deadline" to achieve an agreement.

Amidst growing regional tensions, Iranian rocket launch failed to put payloads into the orbit. "France condemned the launch calling on Tehran to not launch ballistic missiles capable of carrying nuclear weapons or space launchers". Importantly, Israeli Foreign Minister in a warning to Iran, claimed that his country has "capabilities, some of which the world and even the experts in the field, cannot even imagine". Without reference to the Biden administration, Lapid indicated that "Israel does not need anybody's permission to protect its security and will do whatever it takes for the purpose". Meanwhile, Israel signed USD 3.1 billion deal with United States to buy 12 Lockheed Martin CH-53K helicopters and two Boeing KC-46 refuelers.

Demonstrations and rallies were held in Iraq and Iran to mark second anniversary of the targeted killing of IRGC Quds Force Commander Gen. Qassem Soleimani. Chanting "Death to America" Iran-backed Popular Mobilisation Forces (PMF) in Iraq called for expulsion of US forces from the country. Meanwhile, in a letter to the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), Iran called for "all legal initiatives in its power, including issuing a resolution to condemn the US government to discourage similar moves in the future".

In another sign of diplomatic shift in the Middle East post-US withdrawal from Afghanistan, Bahrain has appointed its first Ambassador to war-torn Syria since downgrading diplomatic relations with the Assad regime in 2011. However, the United States, continues to maintain that "Washington will not rehabilitate Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

On the energy front, Kuwait's 'Haitham al-Ghais' is expected to be elected as the next Secretary-General of the 'Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries' (OPEC).

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

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Bahrain

[Bahrain Authorizes Use of Pfizers Anti-Coronavirus Drug Paxlovid For Emergency Use](#)

January 01, 2022, Arab News

Bahrain's health authorities authorized Pfizer's Paxlovid COVID-19 drug for emergency use in adults aged 18 and over.

[Bahrain Appoints First Ambassador To Syria in Over a Decade](#)

December 30, 2021, AL Jazeera

Bahrain has appointed its first ambassador to Damascus since it downgraded ties early in the conflict in Syria.

Egypt

[India Welcomes Egypt as Member of New Development Bank of BRICS](#)

December 29, 2021, The Economic Times

India welcomed Egypt's entry as the fourth new member of the New Development Bank (NDB) that was established by the BRICS countries six years ago.

[Egypt, China Discuss Enhancing Cooperation in Covid-19 Vaccine Production](#)

December 28, 2021, Daily News Egypt

Egypt's Minister of Higher Education and Acting Minister of Health and Population, Khaled Abdel Ghaffar, has met with the Director-General of the Chinese company Sinovac, Zhao Quang, to discuss enhancing cooperation in the production and development of COVID-19 vaccines.

Iraq

[Thousands Rally in Baghdad to Mark 2020 Killing of Iranian General Qassem Soleimani](#)

January 01, 2022, AL Jazeera

Thousands of people have rallied in the Iraqi capital to mark the second anniversary of the killing of a revered Iranian commander and his Iraqi lieutenant in a drone attack by the United States.

[Time is Up For the United States in Iraq](#)

December 31, 2021, Tehran Times

The date for the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq was scheduled for December 31. However, no troops will be evacuated. Only the occupation forces will be renamed. The same combat troops will be assigned an "advisory" role, with no soldiers being removed. This was confirmed by Pentagon officials, who stated that the departure will take place primarily on paper.

[After Iraqi Election Ratification, Sadr Calls For Gov't Formation](#)

December 28, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Leader of the Sadrist movement, Muqtada Al-Sadr, called for the formation of a "majority government" in Iraq, a day after a federal court approved the results of the country's parliamentary elections.

[1st Chinese Language Learning Institute Opens in Iraq's Capital](#)

December 29, 2021, Xinhua

The first institute to teach the Chinese language in Baghdad was opened by the Iraq-China Friendship Association to promote cultural exchange between the peoples of the two countries.

Iran

[Iran Calls For UN Action on the US Over Killing of Gen. Qassem Soleimani](#)

January 02, 2022, AL Jazeera

Iran has called on the United Nations to take formal action against the United States for the assassination of its top general two years ago.

[Iran Space Launch Fails To Put Payloads Into Orbit, Official Says](#)

January 01, 2022, Reuters

Iran's space launch failed to put its three payloads into orbit after the rocket was unable to reach the required speed, a defence ministry spokesman said.

[France Claims Iran's Space Rocket Launch Violates UN Rules](#)

January 01, 2022, Middle East Monitor

France has condemned Iran's space rocket launch, describing it as "regrettable" amid Iran's ongoing nuclear talks with world powers.

[US Sounds Caution Against Optimism By Iran, Russia Over Nuclear Talks](#)

December 29, 2021, Reuters

The United States expressed caution over upbeat comments by Iran and Russia about talks in Vienna to salvage the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, saying it was still too soon to say if Tehran had returned to the negotiations with a constructive approach.

[Iranians Wary of Russia's Proactive Role In Nuclear Talks](#)

January 01, 2022, Iran International

Russia's role in the Vienna nuclear talks splits Iranians. Some accuse Moscow of pressuring Tehran, while others see Russia negotiating on Iran's behalf. Russian Ambassador Mikhail Ulyanov said this week that Russia and China had persuaded Iran to moderate some of its demands, including an insistence that talks focus on sanctions rather than the nuclear issue.

[New Chinese Consulate Looks To Expand Foothold In Iran's South](#)

January 01, 2022, Iran International

An ex-Iranian ambassador has said a new Chinese consulate in Bandar Abbas port city will foster Beijing's economic presence on Iran's Gulf of Oman coastline.

Israel

[West Asia Quad To Work on Infrastructure, Clean Energy: Israeli Foreign Minister](#)

December 28, 2021, The Times of India

The West Asia Quad will “work together on infrastructure, transport, ports, maritime security, digital infrastructure, clean energy... all of the issues that preoccupy us, said Israeli FM Yair Lapid.

[Israel Signs Deal To Buy \\$3.1 Billion in U.S. Helicopters, Tankers](#)

December 31, 2021, Reuters

Israel has signed a deal with the United States to buy 12 Lockheed Martin CH-53K helicopters and two Boeing KC-46 refuelling planes, the Israeli Defence Ministry said.

[Amid Iran Nuclear Talks, Lapid Says Israel Has Capabilities Many ‘Cannot Even Imagine’](#)

December 31, 2021, The Times of Israel

Foreign Minister Yair Lapid talked up Israel’s military capabilities amid talks between world powers and Iran on restoring the 2015 accord curbing Tehran’s nuclear program.

[Israel Carries Out Airstrikes In Gaza In Response To Rockets off Tel Aviv Coast](#)

January 02, 2022, The Times of Israel

The Israel Defense Forces carried out retaliatory airstrikes in Gaza after two rockets fired from Gaza landed off the Tel Aviv coast.

[Meeting Between Israeli Defence Minister Gantz and Palestinian Authority President Creates Uproar Within Fatah](#)

December 31, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Many Palestinian politicians including those from the Fatah – the largest faction in the multi-party Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) – have criticised the recently-held meeting between Mahmoud Abbas, the President of Palestine, and Israeli Defence Minister, Benny Gantz.

[US to Donate \\$99m in Palestinian Aid to UN](#)

December 31, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The United States (US) announced that it will donate \$99 million to the United Nations Relief and Works Agency for Palestinian Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), as the organisation suffers a major financial crisis.

[PA President Abbas Warns of 'Unstoppable' Escalation If Israel Changes Status Quo of Occupied Jerusalem](#)

December 30, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Changes to the religious status quo of the Al-Aqsa Mosque compound in occupied Jerusalem could lead to an "unstoppable" escalation, President Mahmoud Abbas reportedly warned Defence Minister, Benny Gantz.

[As COVID Outbreak Intensifies, Israel Said Mulling 'Herd Immunity' Policy](#)

December 29, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israel recorded almost 3,000 new coronavirus cases for the second day in a row, according to data released Wednesday (December 29), as the infection rate continued to climb and senior Health Ministry officials were reportedly weighing a switch to a policy of reaching herd immunity through mass infection.

[Israel Approves Fourth Covid-19 Vaccine Shot For Most Vulnerable](#)

December 30, 2021, Reuters

Israel is to go ahead with second COVID-19 vaccine booster shots for people with weakened immune systems, the top government health official said.

Jordan

[Jordanian Lawmakers Trade Punches in Parliament Amid Heated Discussion on Women's Rights](#)

December 29, 2021, CNN

Chaos erupted in Jordan's Parliament, with lawmakers throwing punches at each other after a discussion on a constitutional amendment that would afford greater rights to women got heated.

Kuwait

[Kuwaiti Candidate Has Widespread Support For Top OPEC Job, Sources Say](#)

December 29, 2021, Reuters

OPEC is expected to elect a new secretary general at its meeting on January 4; 'Haitham al-Ghais', a former Kuwaiti governor to OPEC, is reportedly the only candidate for the role of Secretary-General.

Lebanon

[Lebanon's Bassil Hits Out At Hezbollah Amid Country's Political Paralysis](#)

January 02, 2022, Arab News

Bassil, who has been an ally of Hezbollah since 2006 through the Mar Mikhael Agreement, asked Hezbollah: "Where is the consensual democracy? Is it (by) paralyzing the Cabinet and attacking the president and his rule? Is it by attacking the Constitutional Council? Where is the defensive strategy to solve problems with sister countries?".

Oman

[Oman Trade Delegation To Review Relations During Pakistan Visit](#)

January 01, 2022, Times of Oman

An Omani trade delegation will head for Karachi, Islamic Republic of Pakistan, on a five - day visit. The delegation will review enhancement of relations and investment between the private sectors of the two countries.

Qatar

[US Congress To Boost Security Cooperation With Qatar](#)

December 29, 2021, Doha News

The US Congress issued a statement calling legislators to include Qatar in the National Defense Authorization Act [NDAA] for the fiscal year 2022, reflecting the strategic importance of the Gulf state's role in the Middle East.

Saudi Arabia

[Indian Envoy Highlights Key Ties Between His Country and Saudi Arabia](#)

January 01, 2022, Arab News

Dr. Ausaf Sayeed, India's Ambassador to Saudi Arabia, highlighted some of the most important partnerships between the two countries in fields such as medicine, trade, defense, tourism and education, along with the high level of mutual trust that exists.

[King Salman: Iran's Policy 'Destabilising', Hezbollah 'Hegemony' Must End](#)

December 31, 2021, TRT World

Saudi Arabia's king has said Riyadh is concerned about Iran's lack of cooperation with the international community on its nuclear and ballistic missile programmes while calling for end to Hezbollah's "hegemony" on Lebanon's state structures.

[Three Sovereign Funds Are Eyeing RIL's Clean Energy Unit](#)

December 22, 2021, Mint

Sovereign wealth funds including Singapore's GIC Holdings Pte Ltd, Abu Dhabi Investment Authority (ADIA) and UAE's Mubadala Investment Co. are exploring investments in Reliance Industries clean energy unit, two people aware of the development said.

[Chinese Reliance on Middle East Oil Increases: Report](#)

December 31, 2021, Hindustan Times

Considering China's dependence on foreign suppliers for oil remains in excess of 70 per cent, Chinese fears of such disruptions to the energy supply chain will only grow.

Syria

[Israel Said To Strike Key Syrian Port of Latakia, Causing 'Massive' Damage](#)

December 28, 2021, The Times of Israel

Israeli warplanes fired a number of missiles at the port of the coastal city of Latakia, causing large explosions and fires, in the second alleged Israeli strike in a month on the key facility.

[Russia Denies Approval of Israeli Airstrike on Syrian Port](#)

December 30, 2021, Middle East Monitor

First Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Federation to the United Nations, Ambassador Dmitry Polyanskiy, has said that his country did not agree to any military action in Syria, including the Israeli airstrikes on the strategic Latakia port.

[Russian Jets Bomb Towns, Water Pumping Station in Syria's Idlib](#)

January 03, 2022, TRT World

Sukhoi jets targeted several towns and a water station serving the overcrowded northern city of Idlib, whose wider population is more than a million, witnesses and opposition sources say.

[US Does Not Support Rehabilitating Syrian President Assad](#)

January 01, 2022, Middle East Monitor

Commenting on Bahrain's reappointment of its ambassador to Damascus, Washington declared that it does not support rehabilitating Syria's President Bashar Al-Assad.

[China Provides Grant To Syrian Nonprofit](#)

December 22, 2021, AL-Monitor

China's embassy in Damascus awarded the \$40,000 grant to the Syria Trust for Development. The Damascus-based organization focuses on fostering economic enterprise, life skills and Syrian cultural identity, per its website.

Turkey

[Turkey's Finance Minister Claims US Federal Reserve is Owned By Five Families](#)

December 31, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Turkey's Treasury and Finance Minister has claimed that the United States' Federal Reserve does not belong to the American public but is, instead, owned by five wealthy families, sparking criticism by economists.

[Putin, Erdogan Pledge To Boost Russia-Turkey Ties](#)

January 02, 2022, Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty

"The parties touched upon global issues, including the recent proposals on developing legally binding agreements that will guarantee Russia's security, the situation in the South Caucasus, and efforts to resolve the Syrian and Libyan crises," the statement added.

UAE

[PM Narendra Modi's Planned Visit to UAE Postponed](#)

December 30, 2021, India Today

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's planned visit to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the first half of January 2022 has been postponed due to rising cases of Omicron COVID-19 variant.

[India-UAE Free Trade Deal To Cover 1,000 Items Across Sectors](#)

January 03, 2022, The Telegraph

The India-UAE free trade agreement is expected to cover more than 1,000 products across sectors. Senior commerce ministry officials said the Union cabinet is likely to vet the deal as soon as the negotiations between the sides come to a fruitful end.

Yemen

[Saudi Air Strike Kills Dozen Yemeni Troops By Mistake'](#)

January 01, 2022, TRT World

An air strike by the Saudi-led coalition has mistakenly hit a camp of allied Yemeni pro-government forces, killing at least 12 troops.



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