



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

Continuing deepening defence cooperation with Oman, Indian Defence Minister, Rajnath Singh, held a meeting with Oman's Defence Secretary-General to identify new avenues for defence industry cooperation. Earlier, the two countries held the 11th India–Oman Joint Military Cooperation Committee Meeting (JMCC) to review progress in ongoing military-to-military engagements, including joint exercises, joint ventures enhancing defence industry cooperation, HADR exercises, and combating drug trafficking in the North Arabian Sea.

Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, held a telephonic conversation with Bahrain's Crown Prince and Prime Minister, Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa. The two leaders reviewed bilateral relations and "expressed satisfaction at the continuing progress in sectors including, trade and investment, energy, health, security, and people-to-people contacts".

In an important development, Indian security agencies arrested 'Abu Bakar' in UAE, a most wanted terrorist accused in 1993 Mumbai serial blasts. New Delhi is in the process of extraditing Bakar to India where he will face due process of law. Meanwhile, in a major counter-terror success, President Biden announced the killing of top ISIS leader, 'Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi', in a US raid in Syria.

Amidst diplomatic boycott by the West, China hosted the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics 2022. Highlighting the growing China-Middle East relations, leaders from UAE, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and Egypt attended the opening ceremony as well as the special banquet hosted by Chinese President Xi Jinping. Meanwhile, a report by Shanghai's Fudan University highlighted Iraq as being the top target of China's BRI investments in 2021.

On US-Iran relations, in a significant development, Washington waived sanctions on Tehran's civil nuclear program, a technical step reportedly necessary to return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). As per open-source intelligence, it is to be noted that "this technical step is not a sign of progress in Vienna talks". Among other things, this would permit "modification of Iran's Fordow nuclear plant to become a research centre for the production of stable radioactive isotopes used for medical purposes with Russian help". Further, "UK and China can help Iran redesign the Arak Heavy-water reactor to a light-water reactor, for generating electricity". On its part, the Iranian Foreign Minister

stressed that the “US move on sanctions is good but not enough while reiterating Tehran’s main demand that Washington guarantees it will not withdraw from the JCPoA again”.

Israel publicly joined Saudi Arabia and Oman for a US-led international maritime exercise (IMX 22) in the Red Sea. Even as the IDF claimed that the drill will “advance regional cooperation”, Lebanon’s Hezbollah stressed that “the Gulf is abandoning Arabs [Palestinians] by their growing ties with Israel”. Amidst increasing Houthi attacks on UAE, Pentagon announced plans to send guided-missile destroyer ‘USS Cole’ and a squadron of F-22 fighter aircraft to the Emirates to shore up security. Meanwhile, US CENTCOM Commander stressed that “equipment used by the Houthis to attack UAE is certainly Iranian; if Iran didn’t approve the specific attack on Abu Dhabi, they’re certainly morally responsible for the same”.

Continuing Israel’s defence modernization, Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, announced plans to “operate laser-based defence systems to intercept drones and missiles within a year”. In another development, US State Department approved possible arms deals that include F-16 fighter to Jordan, and upgrades to UAE and Saudi Arabia’s air-defence systems.

In a major boost to US-Qatar relations, President Biden “plans to designate Qatar as a major non-NATO ally” (MNNA). Qatar will join Kuwait, Bahrain, Egypt, Israel, Jordan, Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Japan, Korea Republic, Morocco, New Zealand, Pakistan, Philippines, Thailand, and Tunisia, as a designated ‘MNNA’. Meanwhile, Qatar’s Foreign Minister reiterated that “Doha will not normalize diplomatic relations with Syria and Israel.

On the energy front, Saudi Arabia raised oil prices for customers in Asia, Europe, and the US, as the crude prices surged close to USD 95/barrel.

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

Bahrain

[India, Bahrain Ties Has Seen Progress in Diverse Sectors Including Energy, Health, Trade and Investment: MEA](#)

February 01, 2022, ANI

PM Narendra Modi spoke to His Royal Highness Prince Salman bin Hamad al Khalifa, Crown Prince and PM of Bahrain, and reviewed bilateral relations.

[Israeli Defense Minister Gantz Signs Historic MoU with Bahrain](#)

February 03, 2022, The Jerusalem Post

Israeli Defense Minister Benny Gantz met with King Hamad bin Isa al-Khalifa and signed a historic public Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the Kingdom of Bahrain, officially establishing security ties between the two Middle Eastern countries.

Egypt

[China, Egypt Hold 'Similar Visions and Strategies': President Xi Jinping](#)

February 05, 2022, AL Jazeera

China and Egypt “share similar visions and strategies in defending their own interests”, said China’s President Xi Jinping after a meeting with his counterpart Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi who attended the opening ceremony of the Beijing Winter Olympics 2022.

Iraq

[Iraq Top Target of China's Belt and Road \(BRI\) in 2021: Study](#)

February 04, 2022, Taipei Times

Iraq was the top target for China's Belt and Road infrastructure initiative in 2021, receiving US\$10.5 billion in financing for projects including a heavy oil power plant, according to a study published by the Green Finance and Development Center at Shanghai's Fudan University.

Iran

[Iran: US Sanctions Move 'Good But Not Enough'](#)

February 06, 2022, Arab News

The US State Department said it was waiving sanctions on Iran's civilian nuclear program in a technical step necessary to return to the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

[Waived Iran Sanctions Allow Redesign of Fordo Plant, Cooperation with Russia, China](#)

February 06, 2022, The Times of Israel

Israel is yet to officially respond to move by US, but sources say that relief on Tehran's civil atomic program is a technical step, not a sign of progress in nuclear talks.

[US Official Urges Direct Nuclear Talks with Iran, Warns Time Running Out](#)

February 01, 2022, The Times of Israel

Speaking about the Vienna talks, the US official said that Iran's nuclear program was nearing "breakout" toward nuclear weapons capability, leaving just "weeks" to reach a deal that would put the program on hold and ease sanctions on the country.

[Iran FM: U.S. Has Not Set Preconditions in Vienna Talks](#)

February 06, 2022, Tehran Times

Iran's foreign minister said that his country is not seeking an interim agreement, adding that the United States has not raised anything as a pre-requisite in the Vienna talks.

[TCCIMA Hosts Online Conference on Iran-India Trade](#)

February 06, 2022, Tehran Times

Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA) held a virtual Iran-India trade conference titled "Development of Iran-India trade relations: trade and investment opportunities" attended by Ambassadors of the two countries.

Israel

[Israel Participates in Huge US Mideast Naval Exercise](#)

February 02, 2022, AL Jazeera

Israel is taking part in a huge US-led naval exercise in the Middle East, for the first time publicly joining Saudi Arabia and Oman, two countries it has no diplomatic relations with despite its normalisation of ties with some Gulf states.

[Israel To Operate Laser-Based Defence System Within Year: PM](#)

February 02, 2022, Middle East Monitor

Israeli Prime Minister, Naftali Bennett, said that the nation's army will deploy a laser air defence system to intercept drones, missiles and UAVs within one year. Bennett made the announcement at the annual international conference of the Institute for National Security Studies (INSS).

[Amnesty Report on Israeli 'Apartheid' Garners Bipartisan US Fury](#)

February 05, 2022, AL Jazeera

A new bipartisan consensus appeared to emerge on Capitol Hill this week, condemning Amnesty International over its report accusing Israel of committing the crime of apartheid against the Palestinians.

[UAE and Israel Expanding "Security Cooperation"](#)

February 06, 2022, Tehran Times

Israel and the United Arab Emirates are expanding both their security and intelligence cooperation following an increase in attacks carried out by Yemen's Houthis against targets in the UAE.

[In Phone Call, PM Bennett and President Biden Discuss 'Steps to Block Iranian Nuclear Program'](#)

February 06, 2022, The Times of Israel

Prime Minister Naftali Bennett and US President Joe Biden held a rare phone call, discussing the Iranian nuclear threat, the campaign against the Islamic State, the Russia-Ukraine conflict and other security challenges.

[Russia Refuses Israeli Demand to Stop Jamming GPS of Flights into Tel Aviv](#)

February 01, 2022, Middle East Monitor

Israel sent a letter to Russia stating that the defence systems at the Russian Khmeimim Air Base in the Syrian port city of Latakia are causing electromagnetic interference in the GPS systems of planes landing in Tel Aviv.

[Israeli Army Commanders Warn Settler Attacks Could Trigger New Intifada](#)

February 03, 2022, Middle East Monitor

Senior Israeli army commanders warned that continuous attacks by Jewish settlers on Palestinian property would trigger a new intifada in the occupied West Bank.

Jordan

[Jordan's Ambitious Push for Gender Equality](#)

February 03, 2022, Deutsche Welle

Jordan's Queen Rania was one of the most prominent figures who supported the amendment of the kingdom's constitution in favour of female Jordanians. Last week, the senate approved the change of article 6. Officially, the constitution now says that "Jordanian men and women shall be equal before the law."

Kuwait

[Indian Ambassador Holds Talks on Hiring Indian Workers with Kuwait's Government](#)

February 03, 2022, Arab Times

The Public Authority for Manpower (PAM) discusses with Indian Ambassador to Kuwait Sibi George and his accompanying delegation, ways of cooperation in the field of recruitment and employment of Indian workers to the country, in addition to providing them with legal protection.

Lebanon

[Israel Sanctions Lebanese Companies Aiding Hezbollah Missile Project](#)

February 06, 2022, The Times of Israel

Defense Minister Benny Gantz signed a series of administrative orders to seize the assets of three Lebanese companies that Israel accuses of supplying materials to advance Hezbollah's efforts to manufacture precision missiles.

[Hezbollah Claims Gulf is Abandoning "Arabs" Through Israel Ties](#)

February 07, 2022, The Jerusalem Post

The Hezbollah official stated that "the participation of Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Bahrain in US-led naval exercise in Red Sea, along with the Zionist regime, is a dagger on the back of the Palestinian people.

Oman

[India, Oman to Look at New Avenues for Defence Industry Cooperation](#)

February 01, 2022, The Indian Express

India and Oman agreed to identify new avenues and examine areas of mutual interest for joint ventures to enhance the defence industry cooperation between the two countries.

Qatar

[US Will Designate Qatar as Major Non-NATO Ally, President Biden Tells Emir](#)

January 31, 2022, AL Jazeera

The United States is planning to designate Qatar as a major non-NATO ally, President Joe Biden has told Qatari Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, a move that would formally upgrade the partnership between Doha and Washington.

[Qatar Wants to Build Bridges Between US and Iran](#)

February 02, 2022, Middle East Monitor

The Qatari FM said that Doha is trying to encourage Tehran to take positive initiatives towards other regional countries. "What matters to Qatar is reaching an agreement on the Iranian nuclear file since [such an agreement] will be a stabilising factor in the region," he added.

[Qatar Rules Out Normalising Relations with Israel, Syria](#)

February 03, 2022, Middle East Monitor

Qatari Foreign Minister, Muhammad Bin Abdulrahman Al Thani, has ruled out the prospect of his country normalising relations with Israel or Syria.

[After Spat with Airbus, Qatar Airways' Mega Airplane Order Goes to Boeing](#)

February 01, 2022, WION

In a mega order, Qatar Airways agreed to buy up to 50 large cargo planes and committed to take around 50 more Boeing 737 Max jets, the US aircraft maker said.

[China, Qatar to Build Higher Level of Bilateral Strategic Partnership](#)

February 06, 2022, CGTN

Chinese President Xi Jinping called on both China and Qatar to promote their strategic partnership to a new level, noting that the relationship has new development opportunities.

[Beijing Winter Olympics: Qatar and UAE Leaders Meet for First Time Since Gulf Thaw](#)

February 06, 2022, Middle East Monitor

Qatar's emir met the de facto ruler of the United Arab Emirates during an official event at the Beijing Winter Olympics, in the first such interaction between the

two Gulf leaders since four Arab states agreed to end a dispute with Doha over a year ago.

[ICAI, IBPC Hold Summit on Qatar-India Investment Opportunities](#)

February 06, 2022, The Peninsula Qatar

India's Ambassador to Qatar Dr. Deepak Mittal, who was Chief Guest during the summit, commended the 'first of its kind' event which was of strategic importance to foster collaboration in the areas of trade and investment between Qatar and India.

Saudi Arabia

[China's Winter Olympics Guest List Highlights Tensions with West, Growing Relations with the Middle East](#)

February 03, 2022, The Wall Street Journal

China will play host to leaders from roughly two dozen countries at the Winter Olympics, highlighting a growing divide between Western democracies and those interested in showing solidarity with a power that is seeking to challenge the U.S.-led global order.

[US State Dept Backs Latest Raft of Saudi, UAE, Jordan Arms Sales](#)

February 04, 2022, AL Jazeera

The possible deals include F-16 fighter jets for Jordan and upgrades to UAE and Saudi Arabia's air defence systems.

[Crude Oil Tests \\$95 Per Barrel; Saudi Arabia Increases Oil Prices](#)

February 07, 2022, Business Standard

Saudi Arabia raised oil prices for customers in Asia, the US and Europe after crude's surge to almost \$95 a barrel.

[Saudi Space Commission's Latest 'Space Talk' Event Will Explore India's Achievements](#)

February 05, 2022, Arab News

The Saudi Space Commission will host the sixth of its Space Talk events on Feb. 5, during which it will explore the evolution and accomplishments of India's space program.

[Saudi Arabia Partners with China's Huawei on Talent Development](#)

February 03, 2022, AL-Monitor

The Saudi Digital Academy signed a memorandum of understanding with Huawei on developing local talent. To this end, the two entities aim to sponsor 8,000 Saudis to learn information technology and communication at Huawei-accredited centres. They will specifically study artificial intelligence, cloud computing, cybersecurity and 5G internet uses, the official Saudi Press Agency reported.

Syria

[ISIS Leader Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurayshi Dead After U.S. Raid in Syria, President Biden Says](#)

February 03, 2022, The Washington Post

U.S. troops carried out a raid in northwest Syria that led the Islamic State's top leader to kill himself and his family as American forces closed in, President Biden said, capping months of secretive planning for an assault designed to minimize the risk to innocent bystanders.

[Oman's Foreign Minister Calls Syria 'a Cornerstone of Joint Arab Action'](#)

February 01, 2022, Middle East Monitor

The Foreign Minister of Oman has called Syria "a cornerstone of joint Arab action", further signalling the Arab world's increasing acceptance of Bashar Al-Assad's regime after a decade of conflict.

[UN Watchdog OPCW Says Chlorine Gas Was Used in 2016 Attack in Syria](#)

February 02, 2022, Middle East Monitor

The UN Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) has said that chlorine gas was used in an attack on Syria's northern rebel-held town of Kafr Zeita on 1 October, 2016.

Turkey

[Turkey Will Now Be Known as 'Turkiye'](#)

February 06, 2022, The Times of India

Turkey will now be known as 'Turkiye'. Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan recently released a statement and announced tweaking the country's internationally recognised name to Turkiye.

[Turkey and China Keep Relations on Track Despite Uighur Dispute](#)

February 05, 2022, Middle East Eye

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan has been engaging in a friendly dialogue with his Chinese counterpart, Xi Jinping, encouraging China to invest in Turkey. Turkey's economy is in serious need of cash, and Ankara's relations with the West are on the rocks.

[Turkey, Israel Can Supply Gas to Europe, President Erdogan Says](#)

February 04, 2022, Middle East Monitor

Turkey and Israel can work together to carry natural gas from Israel to Europe and the two countries will discuss energy cooperation during talks next month, Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan said.

UAE

[Abu Bakar, One of India's Most Wanted Terrorists and 1993 Mumbai Blast Accused, Held in UAE](#)

February 04, 2022, India Today

In a major operation overseas, Indian agencies have succeeded in apprehending one of India's most wanted terrorists involved in the 1993 Mumbai serial blasts case.

[U.S. Looks to Build on Security Guarantees to UAE After Houthi Missile Attacks](#)

February 06, 2022, The Washington Post

The head of U.S. Central Command arrived in the United Arab Emirates to build on recent measures announced by the Pentagon to help reinforce the UAE's defences after attacks by Iranian-affiliated Houthi rebels.

[France To Reinforce UAE's Defence Systems](#)

February 04, 2022, Middle East Monitor

France said it had agreed to participate in the reinforcement of the United Arab Emirates' defence system, including the deployment of Rafale jets, following Houthi attacks.

[China, UAE To Develop Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for The New Era](#)

February 06, 2022, CGTN

President Xi said China regards the UAE as a good friend, partner and brother and is willing to work with the UAE to grasp the general direction of friendship between the two countries and build a comprehensive China-UAE strategic partnership for the new era.

Yemen

[Month Later, 7 Indians Still Hostage in Yemen](#)

February 07, 2022, The Tribune

Over a month later, the fate of seven Indians, who were part of the crew of a UAE-flagged ship kidnapped by Houthi rebels on January 2, remains uncertain.

[Yemeni Forces Recapture Strategic Area Held by Houthis](#)

February 05, 2022, Middle East Monitor

The Yemeni army announced recapturing the district of Harad in the Hajjah governorate, north of the country, after fierce fighting with the Houthi rebels.



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