



**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 Volume III, Issue 31

### ABOUT US

Founded in 1994, the Delhi Policy Group (DPG) is among India's oldest think tanks with its primary focus on strategic and international issues of critical national interest. DPG is a non-partisan institution and is independently funded by a non-profit Trust. Over past decades, DPG has established itself in both domestic and international circles and is widely recognised today among the top security think tanks of India and of Asia's major powers.

Since 2016, in keeping with India's increasing global profile, DPG has expanded its focus areas to include India's regional and global role and its policies in the Indo-Pacific. In a realist environment, DPG remains mindful of the need to align India's ambitions with matching strategies and capabilities, from diplomatic initiatives to security policy and military modernisation.

At a time of disruptive change in the global order, DPG aims to deliver research based, relevant, reliable and realist policy perspectives to an actively engaged public, both at home and abroad. DPG is deeply committed to the growth of India's national power and purpose, the security and prosperity of the people of India and India's contributions to the global public good. We remain firmly anchored within these foundational principles which have defined DPG since its inception.

### 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](mailto:sanket@dpg.org.in).

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## Abstract

Saudi Arabia will host 'Middle East Green Initiative Summit' in October 2021 to promote regional efforts in combating climate change. Riyadh has invited Prime Minister Narendra Modi to participate in this event. Under the initiative, Saudi Arabia along with other Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries plans to plant 40 billion trees in the region to restore degraded land.

Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to India met Indian Petroleum Minister on July 30 and reviewed the "excellent cooperation between two friendly countries on energy and also discussed investment opportunities". Saudi Arabia's oil exports are showing a strong recovery climbing by 147 percent to USD 16 billion in May 2021, while non-oil exports rose by 70 percent. In another development, Riyadh has imposed three-year travel ban and hefty penalties on citizens who visit countries on Saudi Arabia's COVID-19 red list, including India. Meanwhile, according to the new travel guidelines issued by Doha, vaccinated visitors from India will have to undergo compulsory hotel quarantine in Qatar upon their arrival beginning August 2, 12:00 noon.

On the trade and economy, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its latest 'World Economic Outlook' projects global economy to grow by 6 percent in 2021 and 4.9 percent in 2022. IMF projects Middle East regional growth to be 4.1 percent in 2021 and 3.1 percent in 2022. Rising oil prices augur well for the region with crude prices projected to average USD 64.68/barrel in 2021, up from average of USD 41.29/barrel in 2020. Further, the IMF "warned about widening gap between advanced economies and developing economies due to coronavirus vaccine inequity and lack of fiscal support".

India's agricultural exports to UAE continued as the first consignment of vegetables sourced from farmers of Haridwar (Northern Indian State of Uttarakhand) were exported to Dubai. Importantly, Government of India held a virtual event in which agriculture exporters from India were connected to international buyers from the UAE, USA, and Japan. Amid pandemic recovery, Bahrain Economists Society has projected a major rebound in India-Bahrain trade. In another development, there appears to be subdued demand for leaf tea from Kochi (Southern Indian State of Kerala) in Iran and Russia owing to Covid cases in Russia and sanctions imposed on Iran.

Firat Sunel, Turkey's newly appointed Ambassador to India asserted that the two countries "do not need to reset their ties" rather "open new horizons". He spoke of India as a friendly country of significant importance to Ankara with its vibrant economy, human resources and increasing critical role in the international arena. In another development, "98 massive forest fires raging in the country have been brought under control by Turkey".

In a significant security development, Israel, US and UK have blamed Iran for a drone attack on Israeli-owned oil tanker 'Mercer Street' off the coast of Oman in the Arabian Sea. US Department of State in its statement asserted that "we are certain that Iran conducted this attack, which killed two innocent people, using one-way explosive UAVs, a lethal capability which is increasingly being employed throughout the region". Israel is pushing for a United Nations Security Council (UNSC) condemnation against Tehran for the attack. Iran described US and Israel's accusations as "childish" and "influenced by the Zionist lobby in US".

The United States is increasingly sceptical about returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) 2015. Washington expects new Iranian government to take a tougher approach on the JCPOA and Vienna talks. Amid rising regional tensions, US State Department has approved the potential sale of 18 CH-53K heavy lift helicopters to Israel in a deal valued at up to USD 3.4 billion.

President Biden announced the end of US combat mission in Iraq by the end of 2021 shifting US military to a training and advisory role. The Pentagon officials stressed that "they will remove a small number of the 2,500 American forces currently stationed in Iraq" and the remaining troops will advise their Iraqi counterparts. Chinese media views this as the latest phase in "US shift from the Middle East to Asia-Pacific" (Indo-Pacific).

Even as the US moves to end combat mission in Iraq, Islamic State (IS) remains resilient in the Middle East. IS attack on a funeral procession in northern Iraq claimed 11 lives, while 5 Egyptian troops were killed in ISIS attack in northern Sinai.

Israel has been carrying out frequent air-strikes in Syria on Iranian proxies. Reportedly Russia has stepped in to thwart Israeli strikes inside Syria on territory controlled by President Bashar al-Assad's regime. Importantly, Moscow plans to set out a policy framework for "delineating what is and is not permitted inside Syria moving forward".

Lebanon's political and economic conditions remain precarious. The European Union (EU) has approved a sanctions framework targeting Lebanese individuals and entities undermining democracy and the rule of law. Amidst internal turmoil, businessman 'Najib Mikati' has been appointed as Lebanon's new prime minister-designate on July 26.

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

## Bahrain

### [India-Bahrain Trade 'On Track to Top USD 1 Billion in 2021' Amid Post-Pandemic Rebound](#)

July 29, 2021, ANI

President of Bahrain Economists Society has forecasted that bilateral trade between India and Bahrain could spike by as much as USD 200 million as economies reopen following months of logistical challenges and supply chain pressures.

### [Delta Variant is Causing Fourth Wave of COVID-19 in Middle East Countries: WHO](#)

July 30, 2021, The Week

The World Health Organisation said the Delta variant of COVID-19 has led to a surge of coronavirus cases in the Middle East, causing a fourth wave and added that the infections and deaths were being reported among people who weren't vaccinated.

### [Middle East Economic Outlook Hinges on Vaccinations](#)

July 30, 2021, AL-Monitor

The IMF is projecting world economic growth of 6% this year and 4.9% in 2022, after a downturn of 3.2% in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Middle East looks likely to lag, with regional growth projections of 4.1% in 2021 and 3.7% in 2022, following a downturn of 3% in 2020.

### [IMF Warns of Growing Poverty, Unrest and Geopolitical Tensions](#)

July 27, 2021, AL Jazeera

The global economic recovery continues, but with a widening gap between advanced economies and many emerging market and developing economies due to coronavirus vaccine inequity and a lack of fiscal support, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned.

## Egypt

### [How Water Has Become a Flashpoint in the Middle East](#)

July 23, 2021, AL Monitor

The disruption of water supply has long been a potential catalyst for conflict or instability in the arid Middle East. But it's never been as prominent a risk as it is now.

### [5 Egyptian Troops Killed in Islamic State Attack in Northern Sinai](#)

July 31, 2021, The Times of Israel

Islamic State group terrorists ambushed a checkpoint in the restive northern part of Egypt's Sinai Peninsula, killing at least five troops from the security forces, officials said.

### [US Senator Murphy Sounds off Against Unconditional Aid to Egypt](#)

July 29, 2021, Middle East Eye

US Senator Chris Murphy has told the Biden administration that if it is serious about promoting human rights globally, then it must cut USD 1.3 billion military aid to Egypt.



## Iraq

### [President Biden Says U.S. Will End its Combat Mission in Iraq as its Prime Minister Visits the White House](#)

July 30, 2021, The New York Times

President Biden said that the United States would end its combat mission in Iraq by the end of the year, shifting fully to an advisory and training role as America dials down its involvement in long-term conflicts in the Middle East.

### [Blinken and Hussein Discuss Fight Against ISIS in Iraq During Washington Meeting](#)

July 24, 2021, The National News

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken welcomed his Iraqi counterpart to the State Department. Mr Blinken and Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein spoke about the importance of their countries' relationship in facing major issues affecting both, from climate change to the Covid-19 pandemic.

### [Islamic State Resilient as Ever in Iraq, Syria](#)

July 26, 2021, Voice of America

Intelligence agencies studying the fate of the Islamic State in Iraq fear the terror group is not going anywhere, even as U.S. combat forces in the country prepare to "recede deep into the background" and leave the brunt of the work to Iraqi forces.

### [Iraq: At Least 11 Killed in ISIS Attack on Funeral Procession](#)

July 31, 2021, The National News

An attack on a funeral procession in northern Iraq has claimed the lives of at least 11 people, Iraq's military have said.

### [Iraq Troop Withdrawal Deal Marks Latest Phase in US Shift to Asia-Pacific](#)

August 01, 2021, South China Morning Post

The agreement to pull all combat soldiers out of the country comes as the Biden administration focuses on China. The Middle East will still play an important role in Washington's strategic thinking and the armed forces maintain a large presence in other parts of the region.

[21 Coalitions to Run in Iraq Parliamentary Elections](#)

August 01, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Twenty-one electoral coalitions will run in Iraq's upcoming parliamentary elections in October, according to the country's election commission.

## Iran

### [US, UK and Israel Blame Iran for Ship Attack; Tehran Denies](#)

August 01, 2021, Associated Press

The United States and the United Kingdom joined Israel in alleging Iran carried out a fatal drone strike on an oil tanker off the coast of Oman in the Arabian Sea, putting further pressure on Tehran as it denied being involved in the assault.

### [Blinken Says US 'Confident' That Iran Behind Attack on Israeli-linked Ship](#)

August 01, 2021, The Times of Israel

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken says the Biden administration is "confident" that Iran was behind a deadly attack on an Israeli-operated merchant ship near Oman, joining Israel and Britain in blaming Tehran for the strike.

### [Israel's Accusation of Iran's Involvement in Ship Attack 'Childish', Influenced by Zionist Lobby: Foreign Ministry](#)

August 01, 2021, Press TV (Iran)

The spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry said recent accusations levelled against Tehran by Israel and the United States about attacking an Israeli-owned merchant ship in the Sea of Oman are "childish" and influenced by the Zionist lobby in the United States.

### [US Increasingly Sceptical Return to Iran Nuclear Deal is Possible](#)

August 01, 2021, The Times of Israel

US officials are increasingly pessimistic on the prospects of returning to the 2015 nuclear deal with Iran. Officials expect the new government in Tehran, set to enter office on Thursday (August 05), to take a tougher approach that could doom chances of reaching an agreement.

### [Rouhani Says His Gov't Tried to Lessen Effects of US Sanctions](#)

August 01, 2021, Islamic Republic News Agency

Rouhani made the remark during his last cabinet meeting, noting that the 12th administration has tried to lessen the negative consequences of the economic war imposed on Iran by the United States since 2018, and that the country has suffered from high inflation and difficulties in trade exchanges with the world.

[Leaked Iranian Intel Sheds Light on Proxy War with Israel](#)

July 28, 2021, Haaretz

Sky News obtained five top secret reports by Iranian Revolutionary Guards intel unit potentially revealing plans by Iran to use possible cyberattacks to target ships. However, sources say it may be more defensive than offensive.

[Russia Marks Navy's 325th Anniversary, Iranian Ship Joins in](#)

July 25, 2021, Associated Press

Russia marked the 325th anniversary of the founding of its navy with ship parades at major ports. Russian President Vladimir Putin attended the main parade of more than 50 vessels in St. Petersburg, which included ships from the navies of Iran, Pakistan and India.

[Subdued Demand from Iran, Russia Hit Leaf Tea Prices at Kochi](#)

July 30, 2021, The Hindu BusinessLine

Traders attribute the decline in export due to the surging Covid cases in Russia and Iran sanctions.

[Germany Signals Growing Impatience with Iran](#)

July 30, 2021, Asharq AL-Awsat

German Foreign Minister Heiko Maas has signalled growing impatience with Iran, saying that a revival of the 2015 nuclear accord with world powers won't be possible "forever."

## Israel

### [Israel Pushes for UNSC Condemnation of Iranian Maritime Terrorism](#)

August 01, 2021, The Jerusalem Post

Israel is pushing for a United Nations Security Council condemnation against Tehran for attack on Israeli-managed petroleum products tanker attacked off the coast of Oman, which it believes was carried out by Iranian drones.

### [U.S. Approves Potential \\$3.4 Billion Helicopter Sale to Israel](#)

July 30, 2021, Haaretz

The U.S. State Department said that it has approved the potential sale of 18 CH-53K heavy lift helicopters to Israel in a deal valued at up to \$3.4 billion.

### [Ismail Haniyeh Re-elected as the Chief of Palestinian Islamist Group 'Hamas'](#)

August 01, 2021, Middle East Monitor

Ismail Haniyeh has been elected to a second term as head of Hamas, the Palestinian Islamist group that controls the Gaza Strip.

### [US Republican Senators Back Bill to Label Settlement Products 'Made in Israel'](#)

July 31, 2021, Middle East Monitor

A number of Republican senators are backing a bill that would see the products of illegal Israeli settlements labelled as "Made in Israel". The bill has no chance of passing due to the Democrats' domination over the Senate.

### [Israeli Forces Wound More Than 250 Palestinian Protesters in Nablus](#)

July 30, 2021, AL Jazeera

About 270 Palestinian protesters have been injured, mostly by tear gas, in confrontations with Israeli troops in the occupied West Bank, the Palestinian Red Crescent said.

## Jordan

### [Foreign Assistance to Jordan Reached \\$301m in First Half of 2021 – Planning Ministry](#)

August 01, 2021, Jordan Times

Total foreign assistance committed to Jordan in the first half of 2021 reached about \$301 million, the Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation disclosed.

## Kuwait

### [Secretary of State Blinken Talks Relocation of Afghan Allies in Kuwait](#)

July 29, 2021, Associated Press

The United States is negotiating with Kuwait and other countries whether they can host Afghans who supported the American war effort and could face Taliban revenge attacks if they stay in Afghanistan, America's top diplomat in Kuwait.

### [Expats Allowed Back into Kuwait After Months Long Travel Ban](#)

August 01, 2021, Gulf News

After seven months of not being allowed into Kuwait, expats are now free to travel to the country as long as they have two doses of an approved vaccine and a valid residency permit.

## Lebanon

### [Lebanon: Najib Mikati Named New Prime Minister-Designate](#)

July 26, 2021, AL Jazeera

Billionaire businessman Najib Mikati was appointed as Lebanon's new prime minister-designate following binding parliamentary consultations with President Michel Aoun.

### [EU Approves Lebanon Sanctions Framework](#)

July 31, 2021, Middle East Monitor

The European Union (EU) announced that it had approved a legal framework for a sanctions mechanism targeting Lebanese individuals and entities. This comes following a year-long crisis that left Lebanon reeling from financial collapse, massive inflation and food and fuel shortages.



## Oman

[India's Flight Ban Till August 31, Oman Travel Ban on Arrivals from India Upset Diaspora](#)

July 31, 2021, Gulf News

The news of India extending international flight ban till August 31 has further dampened the spirits of the Indian diaspora in Oman.

## Qatar

### [COVID-19: Qatar Sets Rules for Arrivals from India, Pakistan, Other Asian States](#)

August 01, 2021, Gulf News

Qatar has updated its travel policy for passengers arriving from six Asian countries including India and Pakistan, instituting mandatory hotel quarantine for them. Starting from Monday (August 2), arrivals from Bangladesh, India, Nepal, Pakistan, the Philippines and Sri Lanka who have got vaccinated or recovered from COVID-19 in Qatar will go into two-day hotel quarantine.

## Saudi Arabia

### [Saudi Arabia Invites PM Modi to Participate in the Middle East Green Initiative Summit](#)

August 01, 2021, DNA

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been invited to Saudi Arabia to participate in the Middle East Green Initiative Summit, which will take place in October. The country aims to acknowledge and promote regional efforts in combating climate change.

### [Saudi Arabia's Ambassador to India Meets Indian Petroleum Minister](#)

July 30, 2021, Saudi Embassy in New Delhi

Ambassador Dr. Saud Al Sati and Indian Petroleum Minister Hardeep Singh Puri reviewed the excellent cooperation between the two friendly countries on energy and also discussed investment opportunities between the two countries.

### [Saudi Arabia's Oil Exports Climb 147 Per Cent to USD 16 Billion in May](#)

July 28, 2021, Reuters

The value of Saudi Arabia's oil exports in May increased 147% to just over 60 billion riyals (\$16 billion) from a year earlier while non-oil exports rose by 70%, official data showed.

### [Iranian President-elect Ebrahim Raisi Breaks the Ice of Iran-Saudi Arabia Relations](#)

July 25, 2021, Tehran Times

"As for Saudi Arabia, I say that there is no obstacle to having a dialogue with Saudi Arabia and relations with all countries. We are ready to reopen embassies," the president-elect said in his first presser after he won the Iran June presidential election.

### [Saudi Arabia Imposes Three-year Travel Ban for Citizens Visiting 'Red List' Countries, Including India](#)

July 30, 2021, The Economic Times

Saudi Arabia has announced a three-year travel ban and hefty penalties on citizens who visit countries on the kingdom's COVID-19 red list, including India.

[Saudi Arabia to Allow Tourists; Travel Ban from India Remains](#)

July 31, 2021, The Siasat Daily

With the COVID-19 situation under control in many countries around the world, governments are lifting travel bans on tourists. Saudi Arabia's tourism ministry announced that they will reopen their borders starting August 1, 2021, only for fully vaccinated tourists excluding India.

## Syria

### [Senior Russian Official Confirms Moscow Thwarting Israeli Attacks on Syria](#)

July 28, 2021, Israel Hayom

Moscow has been acting of late to change the rules of the game and limit Israeli strikes inside Syria on territory controlled by Syrian President Bashar Assad's regime, a senior official with close ties to the Russian Defense Ministry confirmed.

### [Syria Receives 150,000 Doses of Chinese COVID-19 Vaccines](#)

July 30, 2021, Xinhua

The Syrian Health Ministry received a batch of Chinese COVID-19 vaccines provided by the Red Cross Society of China.

## Turkey

### [Turkey and India Do Not Need a Reset - Turkish Ambassador](#)

July 28, 2021, Ahval

Turkey and India do not need a diplomatic reset because partners can share opposing views, said the new Turkish ambassador to New Delhi.

### [98 Massive Forest Fires Under Control: Turkish Official](#)

August 01, 2021, Anadolu Agency

Ninety-eight of 107 forest fires in Turkey are under control, the nation's Agriculture and Forestry Minister said.

### [China, Turkey More Closely Linked by Rail](#)

July 21, 2021, Hellenic Shipping News

The China-Europe Railway Express, which runs across the Eurasian continent, has experienced considerable progress during the past 10 years, and will continue to see strong momentum in the future, said a Turkish official.

## UAE

### [First Consignment of Vegetables from Uttarakhand Exported to UAE](#)

July 26, 2021, Mint

In a major boost to agricultural exports from Uttarakhand, the first shipment of vegetables, sourced from farmers of Haridwar, was exported to Dubai, UAE.

### [UAE's Golden Visa Scheme a Boon for Indians](#)

July 29, 2021, The Times of India

The UAE's golden visa scheme is being increasingly availed by a large number of Indians who, it appears, are eager to settle down in Dubai, a world-class city.

### [Agri Exporters from India Connect to International Buyers from USA, UAE, Japan](#)

July 31, 2021, The Economic Times

For the first time, Agri Exporters from the remote districts of India were connected to international buyers from USA, UAE, Japan through a virtual outreach event organised by Government of India.

## Yemen

### [Daniel Hale, Who Leaked Information on U.S. Drone Warfare, Sentenced to 45 Months in Prison](#)

July 27, 2021, The Washington Post

U.S. District Judge sentenced Hale, 33, of Nashville, to 45 months in prison for violating the Espionage Act, saying his disclosure of documents went beyond his “courageous and principled” stance on drones.

### [U.S. Envoy Back in Gulf to Push Yemen Truce as Battles Spread](#)

July 28, 2021, Reuters

Senior U.S. diplomats are holding talks in the Gulf region in a renewed push for a ceasefire in Yemen as fierce ground battles spread and the Iran-aligned Houthi group resumed cross-border attacks on Saudi Arabia after a brief lull over Muslim holidays.





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