



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
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मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

- **Biden visits Israel, Palestine and Saudi Arabia**
- **Israel, India, US and UAE (I2U2) group meets virtually**
- **Russia, Turkey and Iran hold Astana process meeting in Tehran**
- **Lavrov addresses the Arab League**
- **Israeli Prime Minister visits Jordan**
- **Constitutional referendum held in Tunisia**
- **Arab League foreign ministers meeting held in Lebanon**
- **Indian Air Force concludes Tactical Leadership Programme in Egypt**
- **Saudi Arabia and Jordan hold a joint naval exercise**
- **Iraq alleges Turkey of artillery attack on Dohuk**

Biden visits Israel, Palestine and Saudi Arabia

US President Joe Biden was on his first visit to West Asia (Israel, Palestine and Saudi Arabia) from July 14-16, 2022. On July 14, 2022, he met with Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid and discussed bilateral and regional issues, especially Iran and the nuclear deal. Lapid expressed his opposition to reviving the nuclear deal with Iran. Both the leaders acknowledged the significance of the Negev Forum and increasing cooperation “in the framework of regional architecture”. In addition, the two leaders also adopted a joint declaration on the US-Israel Strategic Partnership. They also stressed expanding the “circle of normalisation” and exchanged views on the Palestinian issue.

On July 15, 2022, Biden met with the Palestinian Authority President Mahmoud Abbas and expressed his support for a “two-state solution on the 1967 lines with land swaps mutually agreed by the Israelis and Palestinians”. Furthermore, he reiterated that “Jerusalem is the capital of Israel”. On July 16, 2022, Biden visited Saudi Arabia and met with the leaders of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), Egypt, Iraq and Jordan (known as the GCC+3) for the Jeddah Security and Development Summit, which was the first of its kind with the Arab countries. He set forth five key principles such as partnership, deterrence, diplomacy, integration, and values – to guide the US engagement in West Asia for the future. In addition, leaders also agreed to ensure food security for the region’s most vulnerable

populations. Amidst the visit, Saudi Arabia also announced to open its airspace to Israeli Airlines.

Israel, India, US and UAE (I2U2) group meets virtually

On July 14, 2022, Israel, India, the US and the UAE had a virtual meeting of the “I2U2” group, aiming at enhancing joint investment and new initiatives in energy, water, transportation, space, health and food security. The meeting focused on clean energy and food security. It was agreed by the members that the UAE will invest US\$ 2 billion in India to develop a series of integrated food parks across the country. India will provide land, and the US and Israeli private companies will provide innovative solutions for the project. Furthermore, it was also decided that the I2U2 group will start a “hybrid renewable energy project” in Gujarat comprising 300 megawatts of Solar and Wind capacity accompanied by a battery storage system. Regarding the project, a feasibility study has been funded by the US Trade and Development agency. The countries also welcomed India’s interest in being a part of the Agriculture Innovation Mission for Climate initiative.

Russia, Turkey and Iran hold Astana process meeting in Tehran

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan visited Tehran for the 7th round of the Astana peace process on Syria. They reiterated to coordinate on preserving the sovereignty and

territorial integrity of Syria and continue their fight to destroy all the individuals, groups, and terrorist organisations in the country. They also stated that the crisis in Syria can only be resolved through dialogue and negotiation between the Syrian groups with active facilitation by the UN. Putin's visit to Iran also holds significance in terms of its timing as it came a few days after Biden's visit to West Asia.

Lavrov addresses the Arab League

Russian Foreign Minister, Sergei Lavrov, visited Egypt and addressed the Arab League meeting in Cairo on July 24, 2022. Lavrov praised the "balanced, fair, responsible position" taken by the League for not siding with either Russia or Ukraine in the war. He identified the illegal Western sanctions against Russia as a major reason for the crisis. During a meeting with his Egyptian counterpart, Sameh Shoukry, Lavrov assured that the orders for cereal products placed by Egypt shall be met completely. The visit came as a follow-up to the deal signed by Russia and Ukraine with the UN and Turkey to relieve the global food crisis. Lavrov recognised that Egypt was heavily impacted since 85 per cent of its wheat imports came from Russia and Ukraine.

Israeli Prime Minister visits Jordan

Israeli Prime Minister Yair Lapid visited Jordan and met with Jordanian King Abdullah II. During the meeting, both discussed various opportunities which can be explored based on their peace agreement and agreed on improving the "long-standing link

between their people and strengthening the two countries' common interests". They observed that ties between the two countries are important in maintaining regional stability in West Asia. Furthermore, both also discussed in length on Biden's visit to Israel and the opportunities it has created for both countries. They also discussed ways to speed up several bilateral projects such as the Jordan Gateway Industrial Park, building facilities for solar energy in Jordan, desalination in Israel and joint tourism in the Gulf of Eilat-Aqaba. These projects may prove significant in strengthening relations between the two countries.

Constitutional referendum held in Tunisia

Tunisia witnessed a constitutional referendum in the country on July 26, 2022, which further strengthens the powers of the President. There are concerns that the new constitution will consolidate executive, legislative and judicial powers in the hands of the president. Saied celebrated the victory and assured the people of the country that now Tunisia will start a new phase after facing a decade-long political deadlock. However, the opposition groups are worried that a wide range of powers to the president in the new constitution will bring back authoritarian rule in the country. They also questioned the legitimacy of the referendum citing the low voter turnout, which was around 30.5 per cent and was boycotted by the main opposition parties.

Arab League foreign ministers meeting held in Lebanon

A Summit of Foreign Ministers of the Arab League was held in Lebanon which saw the participation of delegates from 20 countries and representatives of Palestine. The leaders assured their support for a politically and economically struggling Lebanon in overcoming its problems. Ahmed Aboul Gheit, Secretary-General of the Arab League, said that “we came to say that there’s a problem and you must seek to resolve it”. The ministerial delegation also met with the President of Lebanon, Michel Aoun, who underlined the importance of Arab unity to the delegation. During the meeting, discussions were held on the Russia-Ukraine war, the Palestinian issue, the issue of Syrian refugees, the food and energy crisis and the issue of Somalia where people are on the threshold of famine.

Indian Air Force concludes Tactical Leadership Programme in Egypt

An Indian Air Force (IAF) contingent completed a Tactical Leadership Programme (TLP) at the Egyptian Air Force (EAF) Weapon School in Egypt. The programme was a unique exercise, wherein IAF participated as instructors. It provided a wonderful opportunity for IAF to showcase its capability and reach an opportunity to further strengthen defence ties between the two countries. IAF participated in the day and night missions comprising air-to-ground and air-to-air combat scenarios along with Combat Search and Rescue (CSAR) activity alongside Egyptian F-16, Rafale and MIG 29 aircraft.

Saudi Arabia and Jordan hold a joint naval exercise

The Royal Saudi Naval Forces and Jordanian Special Operation Forces held a joint naval exercise named “Abdullah 8” in July 2022. The objective of the exercise was to improve the counter-terrorism capabilities, share the knowledge to combat terrorism and management of unexploded weapons. It also aimed at enhancing combat readiness and unifying “operational concepts in the preparation, planning, and implementation stages”. As an extension of the joint exercises between the two countries, the drill included two exercises conducted simultaneously in Saudi Arabia and Jordan.

Iraq alleges Turkey of artillery attack on Dohuk

At least nine people were killed and 23 others were wounded in an artillery attack on a popular tourist destination in the Dohuk governorate of the Kurdistan region in Iraq. The Iraqi government alleged the involvement of the Turkish military in the attacks, summoned Turkey’s ambassador to condemn the incident and described it as a heinous crime. It also alleged that Turkish military forces have been continuing their aggression on Iraq’s territory and sovereignty. Turkey has rejected the Iraqi allegations and stated that the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK) is behind the attack. Meanwhile, India has condemned the attack on Dohuk and stated that the attack is a clear violation of Iraq’s sovereignty.