



MANOHAR PARRIKAR INSTITUTE FOR
DEFENCE STUDIES AND ANALYSES

मनोहर पर्रिकर रक्षा अध्ययन एवं विश्लेषण संस्थान

WEST ASIA DIGEST

Monthly Compilation of News Items from West Asia

- **MoU signed to establish India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor**
- **India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council meeting held**
- **Houthi delegation holds first direct talks with Saudi Arabia**
- **Syrian President Bashar Al Assad visits China**
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- **US and Bahrain sign Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement**

MoU signed to establish India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor

India, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, France, Germany, Italy, the US and the European Union have jointly signed a MoU on 9 September 2023 to establish the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). This initiative comprises two distinct corridors: one connecting India to the Gulf (east corridor) and another linking the Gulf to Europe (northern corridor). Central to IMEC is creating a reliable railway network, facilitating cross-border ship-to-rail transit to enhance trade and connectivity between India, the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan, Israel, and Europe. This route will also accommodate infrastructure for electricity, digital connectivity and clean hydrogen export. The IMEC's goals encompass reinforcing regional supply chains, improving trade accessibility, enhancing trade facilitation and prioritising environmental and social considerations. The initiative aims to boost efficiency, lower costs, promote economic integration, create jobs and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, thereby fundamentally transforming economic ties among partners.

India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council meeting held

India and Saudi Arabia held the first Strategic Partnership Council (SPC) meeting during the Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's state visit to India in September when he also participated in the G20 Summit. He also co-chaired the meeting of the SPC with Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and both leaders expressed satisfaction at the progress made through various ministerial committees and

joint working groups. Both the leaders held talks focusing on deepening bilateral strategic partnership as well as regional and international issues. Several MoUs were signed during the visit, covering fields such as energy, digitisation and electronic manufacturing, anti-corruption, archival cooperation, investment, banking and seawater desalination, further enhancing cooperation between the two nations.

Houthi delegation holds first direct talks with Saudi Arabia

A Houthi delegation visited Saudi Arabia for a discussion with the Saudi authorities to find a solution to the ongoing situation in Yemen. The delegation met with the Saudi Defence Minister Khalid bin Salman. This marks the first direct talks between the two sides as the previous talks were held indirectly in Oman. The discussion focused on key issues such as lifting the blockade on Sanaa airport and Houthi-controlled ports, salary payments for public servants and the withdrawal of foreign troops from Yemen. The UN envoy to Yemen, Hans Grundberg, welcomed the talks.

Syrian President Bashar Al Assad visits China

Syrian President Bashar Al Assad visited China on 21 September 2023 and met with China's President Xi Jinping. Both leaders announced a joint declaration on strategic partnership in Hangzhou and pledged unwavering support for each other on their core interests and major concerns. Assad expressed his support for the One-China principle, recognising the People's Republic of China as the sole legitimate government representing all of China and affirming Taiwan as an integral part of Chinese territory. In return, China supports

Syria's pursuit of independence, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Both nations reject foreign interference in Syria's internal affairs, illegal military presence, operations and resource exploitation. China also called for immediately removing all unilateral and unlawful sanctions on Syria. Both sides committed to extending partnerships in various domains such as economy, trade, agriculture, culture, youth and media, with China committed to aiding Syria in its reconstruction and recovery endeavours.

India participates in 'Exercise Bright Star-23' in Egypt

A contingent of 549 personnel from the Indian Army, Indian Navy and Indian Air Force participated in 'Exercise Bright Star-23' which took place from 31 August to 14 September 2023 in Egypt. The Exercise is a multinational tri-services joint military exercise led by the CENTCOM of the US and the Egyptian Army. A unit from the 23rd JAT Battalion of the Indian Army, the Indian Navy's INS Sumedha and the Indian Air Force contingent consisting of five MiG-29, two IL-78, two C-130 and two C-17 aircraft participated in the exercise. The Exercise encompassed diverse training activities focused on countering emerging unconventional threats and strengthening regional partnerships for maintaining global peace, including field exercises, live firing drills and panel discussions on contemporary topics like cybersecurity, where the Indian Armed Forces played a leading role. The Exercise serves as a valuable platform for sharing best practices and experiences while enhancing defence cooperation with partner nations.

US and Saudi Arabia conduct combined counter-UAS exercise

The US and Saudi Arabia conducted the second joint military exercise Red Sands 23.2 to counter Unmanned Aircraft Systems (UAS) in Hafar Al Batin, Saudi Arabia. The exercise represented a significant milestone in the collaborative efforts of the US and Saudi Arabia to combat the UAS threats posed by adversaries. Red Sands 23.2 encompassed training, operational demonstrations and rigorous testing of distinct systems, employing a diverse range of kinetic and non-kinetic techniques to neutralise or disable UAS threats. This exercise demonstrates a shared commitment of both countries to regional security and highlights the value of CENTCOM component innovation task forces in addressing common security concerns.

US and Bahrain sign Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement

The US and Bahrain signed the Comprehensive Security Integration and Prosperity Agreement (C-SIPA) during the visit of the Crown Prince and Prime Minister of Bahrain, Salman bin Hamad Al Khalifa, to Washington. The C-SIPA focuses on reinforcing deterrence, security and economic integration between the two countries. It aims to foster cooperation across various domains, encompassing defence, security, science, technology, and trade. It also formalises cooperation to deter conflict, enhance regional stability, de-escalate tensions, and boost trade and economic collaboration.