



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

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US approves sale of US\$ 650 Million Air-to-Air Missiles to Saudi Arabia

The Biden administration has approved the sale of Air-to-Air missiles and related equipment worth US\$ 650 million to Saudi Arabia. The deal also includes weapon support, spare and repair parts, US government and contractor engineering, technical and logistical support services to Saudi Arabia. The approval comes at a time when cross-border attacks on the Kingdom continues relentlessly by the Houthis in Yemen. By approving the arms sale, the US has only reiterated its support for the security of Saudi Arabia. This will help Saudi Arabia further strengthen its military capability and deal with the present and future security threats.

Israel, Jordan and UAE sign declaration of intent on water and energy cooperation

In order to deal with the challenges of clean energy and water crisis in the region, Israel, UAE and Jordan have signed a landmark declaration of intent on water and energy cooperation at the Dubai Expo in the presence of the US Special Envoy for Climate, John Kerry. The declaration of intent consists of two main components: Prosperity Green and Prosperity Blue. The Prosperity Green component intends to establish a 600 megawatt solar power plant in Jordan by an Emirati firm and the energy generated by this plant will be exported to Israel. Under the Prosperity Blue, a sustainable water desalination plant would be built in Israel, which would supply 200 million cubic meters of desalinated water to Jordan. It has also been agreed that the feasibility studies of the projects will start in 2022. The projects are beneficial from

the trade and climate point of view, and also from that of regional cooperation. The agreement can also be seen as a favourable by-product of the Abraham Accords, since it has provided a conducive ground for Israel to engage with the Arab countries.

Gulf countries cut off diplomatic ties with Lebanon

Saudi Arabia, UAE, Kuwait and Bahrain have recalled their envoys from Lebanon and have expelled the Lebanese envoys from their countries. This follows a statement by Lebanon's Information Minister, George Kordahi's, made prior to his appointment as minister, that Houthi rebels are "defending themselves" in Yemen from "external aggression". Saudi Arabia has also banned all imports from Lebanon which will have severe implications for Lebanese economy. The influence of Hezbollah in Lebanon's political spectrum has been a key cause of concern for Riyadh, which has also been concerned about smuggling of contraband substances to the Kingdom from Lebanon. Lebanon's economic and political crisis has deteriorated in recent months and the latest diplomatic crisis and import ban may prove a strong blow to the already suffering Lebanon economy.

Israel and Morocco sign defence agreement

Israel and Morocco signed their first defence agreement during Israeli Defence Minister Benny Gantz's first ever visit to Rabat. Both countries signed a Memorandum of Understanding that laid the foundation of cooperation in the areas of defence, intelligence and arms sales in future. The agreement allows both the

countries to exchange technology and conduct joint military training along with enhancing cooperation in the field of defence industry. Gantz stated that the agreement would help the two countries exchange ideas, collaborate on joint projects and facilitate Israeli military exports to Morocco. The agreement is a positive development in the direction of normalisation of relations between the two countries which was made possible due to the signing of the Abraham Accords.

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi visits Turkey

Crown Prince of Abu Dhabi and *de facto* ruler of the UAE, Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan, visited Turkey and met with President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on November 24. This is the first high-level meeting between Emirati and Turkish leaders in nine years since the two countries were on the opposite sides of the regional geopolitical divide created by the Arab Spring. The meeting underlines the shifting regional priorities, wherein the UAE is taking steps to recalibrate its regional policy and reengaging with its adversaries including Syria and Iran. Turkey too has been making efforts to amend ties with regional powers including Egypt, Israel and Saudi Arabia. For Ankara, a thaw with the wealthy Gulf monarchies can bring the much needed foreign investments to the struggling Turkish economy, as underlined by the signing of an investment deal worth US\$10 billion during the visit.

UAE Foreign Minister visits Syria

The UAE's Foreign Minister, Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan, visited Damascus on November 10 and met with

the Syrian President, Bashar Al Assad. During the meeting, the Syrian president appreciated the UAE's objective position with respect to Syria; and Al Nahyan expressed his support for security, stability and unity of Syria. Two days after the visit, the two countries signed an energy deal to construct a solar power plant in Damascus. The visit signals the willingness of the Arab countries to reengage with the Assad regime after being expelled from the Arab League. However, the US has expressed its concerns over the meeting stating that it does not support rehabilitating Assad who is a brutal dictator. US has also clarified that there is no change in its position towards the Assad regime.

Drone attack targets the Iraqi Prime Minister

A drone loaded with explosives targeted Iraq's Prime Minister, Mustafa Al Kadhimi at his residence on November 7. Of the three drones launched, two were shot down by the Iraqi forces, while one hit the target and wounded six people in the compound. No militia or terror group has claimed the responsibility of the attack and the Iraqi government has formed a committee to investigate the attack on the prime minister. The attack on Kadhimi seems to be a violent reaction to the defeat of the militia groups in the recently concluded parliamentary election where they lost two-thirds of their seats in the parliament.

UAE, Bahrain, the US and Israel conduct Multilateral Naval Drill

A multilateral naval exercise was conducted by the UAE, Bahrain, US and Israel in the Red Sea. The five-day long exercise included training, maritime search

and seizure tactics. The drill aimed at improving interoperability between maritime forces of the participating nations. The Exercise takes forward the essence of the Abraham Accords in the defence sector. Since the signing of the accords, the ties between UAE and Israel have improved as is evident through the increasing bilateral defence engagements. This was also reflected in the strategic agreement worth US\$650 million signed between the Emirati state-owned weapons maker EDGE and Israel Aerospace Industries to jointly design the 170M advanced modular unmanned service vessels capable of carrying out anti-submarine warfare at the Dubai Air show.

Indian Army Chief visits Israel

To further strengthen the defence ties between India and Israel, the Indian Army Chief General Manoj Mukund Naravane was on a visit to Israel from November 15-19. During the visit, he met with senior military and civilian leadership of Israel and discussed the avenues for further enhancing the military ties between the two countries. He visited the Israel Defence Forces' Special Operations Unit where he was briefed about the several "aspects of counter-terrorism operations". Naravane also visited the northern border of Israel and observed Israeli border management technologies deployed in this area. General Naravane's visit comes right after Indian External Affairs minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar's five days long visit to Israel in which the West Asian Quad (US, India, Israel and UAE) was announced. During Dr. Jaishankar's visit, the two countries had decided to form a joint task force in order to identify new areas of defence cooperation

by formulating a comprehensive 10-year roadmap.

GCC Secretary General visits India

GCC Secretary General Nayef Falah Mubarak Al Hajraf visited India and held discussions with the Indian External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar. During the meeting, Dr Jaishankar urged Al Hajraf on considering India as a major destination for foreign direct investments from the GCC countries. Both the leaders also discussed issues regarding the mutual recognition of vaccinations and easing of restrictions on air travel by the GCC.

India deploys INS Trikanth in the Persian Gulf

India deployed a naval ship *INS Trikanth* in the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman as part of Operation Sankalp. *INS Trikanth* is a state-of-the-art guided missile stealth frigate and is part of the Western Fleet operating under the Naval Command at Mumbai. It made a three-day operational turn a round at Bahrain and engaged with security agencies to enhance cooperation in maritime safety. Indian Navy commenced Operation Sankalp in 2019 with the objective to maintain a frontline ship in the region, ensure safe and secure movement of trade, instil confidence among the maritime community and contribute to regional maritime security.