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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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## **Biden Administration to Proceed with Weapon Sale to UAE**

According to a statement made by a spokesperson of the US State Department on 13 April 2021, the Biden administration has informed the Congress that it will proceed with the US\$ 23 billion weapon sale to the UAE. The sale was approved as a side deal to the Abraham Accords but was under review after the new administration took charge. The deal contains supply of products from General Atomics, Lockheed Martin Corp and Raytheon Technologies Corp including transfer of 50 F-35 Lighting II aircraft, up to 18 MQ-9B Unmanned Aerial Systems and a package of air-to-air and air-to-ground munitions. The statement noted that the weapons must be adequately secured and used in a manner that respects human rights and fully complies with the laws of armed conflict.

## **US and Iraq Hold Strategic Dialogue**

On 7 April, the US and Iraq held a strategic dialogue and reaffirmed their strong partnership encompassing political, security and economic cooperation. The US reiterated its respect for Iraqi sovereignty and territorial integrity while Iraq welcomed the US support for parliamentary elections through funding for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Iraq. The two sides expressed mutual intent to work together to promote clean energy and combat climate change, and the Biden administration expressed its support for Iraq's power sector reforms. They also emphasised on greater cooperation to combat the Covid-19 pandemic and the management of water resources. The

dialogue affirmed the importance of the strategic relationship and the continued efforts to enhance cooperation to achieve security, stability and prosperity in the region.

## **Egypt Joins Combined Gulf Maritime Forces Led by the US**

On 14 April, Egypt became the 34<sup>th</sup> member of the Combined Maritime Forces (CMF) led by the US. The Commander of the US Navy's 5<sup>th</sup> Fleet, Vice Admiral Samuel Paparo Jr., said that Egypt brings a wealth of operational experience in the region and will add to the maritime capabilities of the combined forces. He added that Egypt's membership will improve mutual awareness and ability to operate in the central and northern Red Sea. The CMF was organised post-9/11 to secure the major waterways around the Suez Canal and the Strait of Hormuz, and consists of three multinational task forces. Task Force 150 is led by Canada and focuses on counterterrorism and counter-smuggling operations in the Red Sea, Indian Ocean, Gulf of Oman and Gulf of Aden. Task Force 151 is currently under the command of Pakistan's navy and Task Force 152 is led by Saudi Arabia and operates in the Persian Gulf and secures the waterway for oil shipments.

## **Russian Foreign Minister Visits Iran**

Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov visited Iran and reiterated the importance Russia attaches to Iran. During the visit, Lavrov condemned any attempt to isolate Iran internationally. He called for lifting of the unilateral US sanctions and underlined

the need for continuation of the negotiations among Russia, Britain, Germany, France and China in Vienna for revival of the JCPOA. Lavrov mentioned that there is no alternative to the JCPOA and that all the sides should abide by their commitments under the deal endorsed by the UN Security Council Resolution 2231. In Tehran, Lavrov held wide-ranging talks with Iranian officials on different issues including the situation in Syria, Yemen, Afghanistan, Gulf security and the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

### **Greece-Saudi Arabia Patriot Missile Deal**

On 20 April 2021, Greece and Saudi Arabia signed a deal for lending a Patriot air defence system to Saudi Arabia in order to enable the kingdom to protect its critical energy facilities. The Greek Foreign Minister Nikos Dendias said that the deal is a big step forward for Greece to enhance cooperation with the Gulf countries and will also contribute to the wider security of the energy sources in the region. The Patriot system is designed mainly to counter high-altitude ballistic missile attacks, which the kingdom has often had to deal with due to the ongoing conflict in Yemen.

### **Kuwait and China to Promote Digital Economy**

At a virtual forum held on 6 April, Kuwait and China discussed promotion of digital economy through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) projects. China has been aggressively promoting investments in the Gulf region through the BRI. Kuwait, which has been struggling to boost its

economy, is among the foremost regional countries to embrace the BRI with the hope that it will help overcome its economic challenges. The deputy chairperson of the Kuwait Chamber of Commerce and Industry, Abdulwahab Al Wazzan, said that Kuwait is the first Gulf country to have embraced BRI as far as digital economy is concerned. He added that the initiative is in line with Kuwait's efforts to launch mega-development projects with high returns including projects such as Silk City, the Kuwaiti Five Islands development and Mubarak Al Kabeer Port.

### **Israel and Morocco Sign Multi-Million Dollar Deal**

Israel and Morocco signed a multi-million dollar deal for promotion of bilateral trade and business in Rabat on 1 April. Those present during the signing of the deal included the heads of the Israel Manufacturers' Association, the Israel Farmers' Federation, and the Israeli Federation of the Chambers of Commerce (FICC) while Morocco was represented by the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM). The deal represents the ambitions of the two countries to develop trade in various industrial sectors. Chakib Alj, the president of CGEM said that Moroccan and Israeli private sectors have infinite investment opportunities in tourism, industry and innovation. Zeev Lavie, the director of international trade at FICC said that Israel and Morocco are looking forward to developing cooperation in exchange of technologies in the renewable energy, water treatment, agriculture and health.

### **Bahraini Foreign Minister visits India**

Dr. Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani, the Foreign Minister of Bahrain, visited India on 6 April to co-chair the third meeting of the India-Bahrain High Joint Commission (HJC) with India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar. India appreciated Bahrain for providing free Covid-19 vaccination to the Indian community in Bahrain and expressed gratitude for its facilitation of repatriation flights under *Vande Bharat* mission. The Bahraini side appreciated India for keeping open the supply chains of essential items including food and medicines during the Covid-19 pandemic to Bahrain and for gifting 100,000 doses of 'made in India' vaccine to Bahrain. The two sides emphasised on the need for closer economic and commercial cooperation once the Covid-19 situation subsides and expressed satisfaction on working of the temporary air bubble arrangement between the two countries to facilitate travel between the countries.

### **India-Saudi Arabia Naval Exercise in the Gulf**

Indian and Saudi Arabian navies carried out a joint naval exercise 'PASSEX' (passage exercise) in the Gulf on April 7. PASSEXs are conducted regularly by the Indian Navy with units of friendly foreign navies, whilst visiting each other's ports or during rendezvous at sea. India has deployed INS Talwar in the Persian Gulf for its maritime security operations that commenced in 2019 as Operation Sankalp. The security operations began to ensure safe passage of Indian flag vessels transiting through the

Strait of Hormuz in the wake of attacks on merchant ships in the Gulf of Oman and deteriorating security situation in the Gulf region. Indian Naval Ship INS Talwar and the Royal Saudi Arabian Navy's ship HMS Khalid participated in the exercise. The joint exercise marks the growing multifaceted defence cooperation between India and Saudi Arabia.

### **Terror Suspect deported by Kuwait to India**

On 8 April, Shahid Navid, a terrorist who was allegedly running a terror module from Kuwait, was deported to India by the Kuwaiti authorities and was arrested by the National Investigation Agency (NIA) upon landing in Jammu. Navid came under the NIA suspicion following the killing of two Pakistani terrorists affiliated with the JK Ghaznavi force in an encounter in Surankor at Poonch. India had taken up the deportation of Navidd with Kuwait and had sent a detailed dossier regarding the same. Navid has been identified as a close associate of Sher Ali who is considered the main coordinator and facilitator of terrorist groups active in Jammu and Kashmir.