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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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Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan sign Mutual Defence Agreement

Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan signed the Mecca Joint Defence Agreement on 7 August 2026, establishing a trilateral framework for collective defence amid escalating regional tensions. The agreement stipulated that an armed attack against any one of the three signatories would be regarded as an attack against all, with the stated objective of strengthening collective deterrence against aggression. However, the joint statement did not specify the military commitments or defence obligations each country would undertake in response to an attack, leaving the practical scope of the security guarantee unclear. Turkish officials described the pact as purely defensive and said it was not directed against any particular country or intended to replace existing defence arrangements. Saudi officials similarly stressed that it did not constitute a military axis or sectarian bloc and was unrelated to nuclear ambitions or an arms race. The agreement followed nearly a year of negotiations and was signed in Mecca by Mohammed bin Salman, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Shehbaz Sharif.

India-Kuwait Joint Defence Committee meeting takes place in New Delhi

India and Kuwait agreed to strengthen bilateral defence cooperation during the inaugural meeting of the India-Kuwait Joint Defence Committee (JDC) held in New Delhi on 28 August 2026. The discussions covered military training, exercises, military medicine, staff talks, defence industry cooperation, and research and development. The meeting was co-chaired by Joint Secretary Amitabh Prasad and Kuwaiti Brigadier General Raed Alsakran,

with representatives from India's three armed services, the Department of Defence Production, DRDO, Armed Forces Medical Services and MEA participating. The Kuwaiti delegation also visited Defence Public Sector Undertakings and engaged with Indian defence industry representatives to explore potential cooperation. The meeting aimed to operationalise the objectives of the Defence Cooperation MoU signed during India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Kuwait in December 2024. The two sides also reaffirmed the longstanding bilateral relationship, which was upgraded to a Strategic Partnership in December 2024.

US removes Syria from Terrorism Sponsor List

The US removed Syria from its list of state sponsors of terrorism on 24 August 2026, ending a designation that had been in place since 1979 and significantly constrained foreign assistance, defence-related exports, dual-use items and financial transactions. The decision followed a 45-day congressional review after President Donald Trump notified Congress in July of his intention to rescind the designation. Washington said the move reflected positive steps and commitments by President Ahmed al-Sharaa's government to distance Syria from international terrorism. Damascus viewed the delisting as a major step towards reconnecting with the global financial system, attracting investment and supporting post-war reconstruction.

Russia and Syria discuss reorganization of Hmeimim and Tartus bases

Russian President Vladimir Putin and Syrian President Ahmed al-Sharaa discussed the reorganisation of Russia's

military presence at the Hmeimim Air Base and Tartus Logistics Facility during a phone call on 26 August 2026. The two leaders reviewed bilateral relations and prospects for expanding political, trade, economic and humanitarian cooperation, while reaffirming their commitment to continued coordination over Syria and regional developments. Putin reiterated Moscow's support for Syria's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as conditions for long-term normalisation and post-conflict reconstruction. The discussions highlighted the importance of a memorandum of understanding signed by Moscow and Damascus on 9 August 2026 concerning the reorganisation of the two Russian facilities after approximately 18 months of negotiations.

Iraq and US finalise withdrawal of anti-ISIS coalition

Iraq and the United States reached a final agreement on the withdrawal of the US-led international coalition against ISIS from Iraq. On 12 August 2026, Iraq's Prime Minister Ali Al Zaidi announced that the country would be free of foreign military forces from 1 October 2026. The agreement followed discussions with US Central Command chief Admiral Brad Cooper and was expected to shift bilateral relations towards economic, developmental and security cooperation. The Operation Inherent Resolve mission was scheduled to conclude by 30 September, with US forces also preparing to withdraw from the Kurdistan region and transfer their bases to Iraqi forces. The timeline followed a 2024 US-Iraq agreement outlining the end of the coalition's military mission. Baghdad had simultaneously set 30 September as the deadline for disarming militias and bringing weapons under state control.

Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince visits France

France and Saudi Arabia strengthened their strategic partnership during Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's visit to France, with the two sides holding the first meeting of the French-Saudi Strategic Partnership Council on 24 August 2026. The leaders adopted a declaration to reinforce defence cooperation, including armaments and military training, and signed agreements and memorandums covering defence, healthcare, artificial intelligence, emerging technologies and entertainment. More than 22 agreements and MoUs were also announced following a French-Saudi investment roundtable, covering energy, industry, financial services, transport and logistics, health, culture, tourism and AI. The two countries agreed to deepen cooperation in energy, including renewables, nuclear energy, hydrogen and energy storage, and extended their Al Ula partnership until 2035. They also backed greater economic and cross-investment ties, including a dedicated financial framework for French companies operating in Saudi Arabia.

Israel's strikes on Syria

On 18 August 2026, Israel launched eight missiles at Abu al-Duhur airbase in Idlib, Syria warning against a permanent Turkish military presence and deployment of air-defence systems. Both Damascus and Ankara denied plans for a permanent Turkish base. Israel's broader interests centred on preventing hostile military buildups, restricting Turkish influence, maintaining the demilitarisation of the Syrian side of the Golan Heights, protecting Syria's Druze community, and limiting Damascus' acquisition of strategic weapons. Israeli forces also continued

operations in southern Syria, including shelling near Beit Jinn and raids in Quneitra on 27 August. Syria demanded an end to Israeli strikes and withdrawal to positions held before December 2024 and asserted its sovereign right to rebuild its military and determine alliance-building.

US-Iran tensions

On 25 August 2026, US President Donald Trump announced that US forces had cleared naval mines from the strait, while on 27 August, CENTCOM Commander Admiral Brad Cooper confirmed that Navy divers, SEALs, and air forces had cleared the main international shipping route. However, shipping companies remained cautious because unidentified explosives, seabed changes, and attacks continued to pose risks. The US also maintained a stringent naval blockade, with CENTCOM reporting that no Iranian oil had been exported since the blockade's reimposition in July. Meanwhile, Iran and Oman negotiated a temporary maritime corridor, while Qatar and Pakistan pursued diplomatic efforts to revive the June ceasefire framework. In the last week of August, the US intensified pressure through "Operation Economic Outcast," threatening sanctions against entities maintaining financial ties with Iran. Tehran is seeking to preserve its economic leverage and secure conditions for reopening Hormuz. On 30 August, the US forces struck Larak Island to destroy rocket launchers killing two people. Iran responded by launching missiles towards US bases in Jordan.

The UAE suspends trade with Iran

Following Abu Dhabi's claim that Iran had launched two ballistic missiles toward the UAE on 18 August 2026, an allegation

denied by Tehran, Abu Dhabi announced an indefinite suspension of all trade, commercial exchanges, and financial transactions with Iran on 19 August. Dubai has historically functioned as an important trading and financial gateway for Iran despite international sanctions. The UAE faced repeated attacks on ADNOC-linked shipping, including incidents on 8 and 14 August. Abu Dhabi has described the attacks as violation of freedom of navigation and accused Iran's Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) of using the Strait of Hormuz for economic coercion. The UAE demanded an immediate cessation of attacks and the unconditional reopening of the Strait of Hormuz. Washington has maintained its naval blockade, further deepening regional economic and strategic tensions.

SDF announces dissolution and integration into Syria's military

The Kurdish-led Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) announced its dissolution as an independent military force after completing its integration into the Syrian military under an agreement with President Ahmed al-Sharaa's government. SDF leader Mazloun Abdi made the announcement in Damascus on 25 August 2026, describing it as a historic transition from conflict towards peace, stability and reconstruction. The SDF, which had played a central role in the fight against ISIS, had previously controlled much of northeastern Syria but lost most of its territory during a government offensive in January. The integration agreement also provided for recognition of Kurdish cultural, civil and educational rights in Syria.