



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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Ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon

A 60-day ceasefire between Israel and Lebanon came into effect on 27 November 2024. The ceasefire agreement is based on the UN Security Council resolution 1701. As per the agreement Lebanese government will prevent Hezbollah from operating in southern Lebanon and Israeli forces will not carry out any military operation in Lebanon. US President Joe Biden stated that the agreement is "designed to be a permanent cessation of hostilities." The UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres has called the ceasefire deal "the first ray of hope." Hezbollah Chief Naim Qassem stated that the agreement is being accepted "with heads held high." Earlier, on 24 November, Hezbollah fired 250 rockets into Israel. This has been the group's heaviest firing ever since the group joined the war. The firing came in as a response to Israeli strikes in Beirut which happened on the day before.

Israel severs ties with UNRWA

Israeli Foreign Ministry has officially informed the UN of withdrawing from the 1967 agreement that recognised and regulated its relations with UNRWA. The Israeli Knesset passed a legislation on 28 October 2024 to ban the UN relief organisation from having its operations in Israel as well as to cease the cooperation of Israeli authorities with the organisation. Israel has accused the UNRWA of being infiltrated by Hamas terrorists and held that some of its members have been involved in the 7 October attack on Israel last year. Israel's Ambassador to the UN, Danny Danon, remarked, "We submitted to the UN

highlighting how Hamas infiltrated UNRWA, the UN did nothing to address this reality." UNRWA Commissioner-General, Philippe Lazzarini, has stated that the adoption of the new law leaves Gaza and the West Bank at a risk of collapse.

Opposition fighters launch military offensive in Northwestern Syria

On 27 November 2024, the Syrian opposition factions spearheaded by Hayat Tahrir Al Sham (HTS) launched an offensive attack on government-held regions of Aleppo and Idlib in Northwestern Syria. By the next day, they had captured at least four towns in the province of Hama. Syria's Observatory for Human Rights has reported that at least 327 people including 44 civilians have been killed. The escalation has also caused the displacement of thousands of people in the region. This is the first time that the opposition fighters have swiftly advanced a fight of such scale and captured the areas held by the government forces. The Syrian government accused the opposition of violating the 2019 agreement that brought down the fighting in the region. Syria's armed forces have stated that they are preparing for a counterattack. President Assad has vowed that his forces would defeat "terrorists and their supporters."

Qatar orders Hamas leaders to leave

Qatar has ordered the Hamas leaders to leave the country after discussions with the US. The US held that Hamas has killed American citizens and continues to hold some Americans hostage and therefore there cannot be a 'business as usual' with

the group. The Qatari government stated that Hamas's office in Doha had ceased functioning after Qatar suspended its mediation efforts for a Gaza ceasefire, though it denied permanently closing the office. It has been reported that the Hamas leaders have relocated discreetly, likely to Turkiye, to avoid straining relations with host nations. Qatar clarified that its mediation role was paused until all parties showed a genuine commitment to peace. Meanwhile, Hamas denied reports of a shift to Turkiye. Ankara has reiterated that Hamas leaders visit the country occasionally but have not established a base in Turkiye. The US criticised the presence of Hamas leaders in its allied countries, emphasising they should face justice. Qatar, a key intermediary in the Israel-Hamas war, appears to be recalibrating its role amid evolving regional dynamics and international scrutiny.

Joint Arab-Islamic Summit held in Riyadh

Saudi Arabia hosted a joint Arab-Islamic Summit on 11 November 2024. The Saudi Foreign Ministry released a statement prior to the summit stating that the meeting would be a follow-up of the previous summit held in Riyadh on 11 November 2023. Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan iterated that the meeting reflected the unified desire of its participants to cease the ongoing war in Gaza and Lebanon. The leaders called for easing the obstructions on the flow of humanitarian aid and advocated that the two-state solution stands as the only resolution to the conflict.

Saudi Arabia and Iraq sign military MoU

On 4 November 2024, Saudi Arabia's Defence Minister, Prince Khalid bin Salman, hosted Iraqi Defence Minister Thabet Mohammed Al Abbasi in Riyadh for a high-level meeting to strengthen defence ties. The discussions focused on enhancing military cooperation, addressing regional security challenges and exploring measures to reduce tensions. Both ministers exchanged views on shared interests and signed a Memorandum of Understanding to solidify collaboration in the military field. Additionally, the talks included plans for joint training exercises between Iraqi and Saudi forces and arrangements to provide medical treatment in Saudi Arabia for injured Iraqi soldiers.

Saudi Armed Forces Chief of Staff visits Iran for talks

On 10 November 2024, the chief of staff of Saudi Arabia's armed forces, Fayyad Al Ruwaili visited Tehran and met with his Iranian counterpart, General Mohammad Bagheri. Iran's state media reported that Al Ruwaili headed a high-level Saudi military delegation and that various topics were discussed including "the development of defence diplomacy and the expansion of bilateral cooperation." Bagheri stated, "We would like the Saudi navy to join Iranian naval exercises next year, either as participants or observers." Previously in November 2023, Bagheri held a phone call with Saudi Arabia's defence minister, Prince Khalid bin Salman Al Saud to discuss defence cooperation between the two states.

Saudi Arabia, Iran and China hold follow up meeting of Joint Tripartite Committee

The second meeting between Saudi Arabia, Iran and China was held in Riyadh on 19 November to follow up on the Beijing Agreement that restored diplomatic relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran in 2023. Saudi Arabia and Iran have continued to show their commitment towards the Beijing Agreement whilst welcoming China for its continued support. China reaffirmed its solidarity for the same together and the three states welcomed the sustained progress in the bilateral relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran at all levels and sectors. The high-level meetings and visits amidst the escalated tensions in the region were also highlighted in the meeting. The consular services were commended which permitted more than 87,000 Iranian pilgrims to perform Hajj and approximately 52,000 Iranians to perform Umrah during the first ten months of this year. The two states expressed their interest to increase their political and economic cooperation with each other. The Tripartite Committee discussed the situation in Gaza and Lebanon. In addition to this, they extended their support for a political solution in Yemen.

Jaishankar visits UAE

Dr. S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, visited the UAE on November 14 and met with his counterpart Abdullah Bin Zayed Al Nahyan. Both leaders reviewed bilateral ties, commended the steady

exchange of high-level visits and discussed regional and global issues of mutual interest. Jaishankar, alongside Sheikh Nahyan Bin Mubarak Al Nahyan, Minister of Tolerance and Co-existence, inaugurated Symbiosis International University's Dubai campus, highlighting the growing educational collaboration between the two countries. At the Bharat Mart site, Jaishankar engaged with DP World's Chairman Sultan bin Sulayem on future projects. Jaishankar also visited the BAPS Hindu Mandir, lauding it as a symbol of tolerance, culture and coexistence in the UAE.

Saudi Foreign Minister visits India

Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister visited India on November 12-13, 2024 and held a meeting with Dr. S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister. They discussed ways to enhance the Strategic Partnership across trade, investment, energy, defence, security, culture and consular cooperation while exchanging views on regional and global issues of mutual interest. The two leaders co-chaired the second ministerial meeting of the Political, Security, Social and Cultural Committee under the India-Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council, reviewing progress since Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman's 2023 visit. Jaishankar commended Saudi Arabia for supporting the 2.65 million-strong Indian diaspora, emphasising their role in fostering closer people-to-people ties. The discussions underscored the deepening collaboration between the two nations.