



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 to resume sale of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia**

The US will resume the sale of certain classes of offensive weapons to Saudi Arabia, ending a suspension imposed at the beginning of the Biden administration due to concerns over human rights violations in the Yemen war. The US State Department spokesperson announced on 12 August 2024 that while sales of defensive systems continued, the freeze on offensive weapons was conditional on Saudi Arabia's policy toward Yemen and efforts to reduce civilian harm. With Saudi Arabia meeting its commitments, the US is prepared to resume these sales, including certain air-to-ground munitions, subject to congressional notification. The suspension was initially implemented due to the high civilian toll in the Saudi-led military intervention against the Houthis.

## **Turkiye and Iraq sign MoU on counterterrorism**

On 15 August 2024, Turkiye and Iraq signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on security, military and counterterrorism cooperation. The MoU was signed by the defence ministers following the 4<sup>th</sup> Turkiye-Iraq High-Level Security Mechanism meeting in Ankara. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan emphasised significant progress in addressing the presence of the Kurdistan Workers Party (PKK) in Iraq and expressed confidence that joint coordination and training centres outlined in the agreement would elevate cooperation between the two countries. Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein noted that the MoU is the first of its kind between the two nations and highlighted that the PKK is now a banned

organisation in Iraq. The agreement includes the establishment of a joint security coordination centre in Baghdad and a joint training centre in Bashiqa in Iraq to combat terrorism.

## **Blinken visits Israel, Egypt and Qatar**

The US Secretary of State Antony J. Blinken visited Israel, Egypt and Qatar from 17-21 August 2024 to advance diplomatic efforts aimed at securing a ceasefire and the release of hostages and detainees. The US, with support from Egypt and Qatar, presented a bridging proposal on 16 August 2024 designed to achieve a ceasefire in Gaza, facilitate the release of all hostages, ensure the distribution of humanitarian aid across Gaza and lay the groundwork for broader regional stability. During his visit, Secretary Blinken emphasised the importance of avoiding escalation or actions that could jeopardise the successful conclusion of the agreement.

## **Houthis storm UN office in Sanaa**

On 3 August 2024, Yemen's Houthis stormed the United Nations' Human Rights Office in Sanaa, seizing documents, furniture and vehicles, according to UN Human Rights Chief Volker Turk. This incident is part of a broader crackdown by Houthis on individuals working with the UN aid agencies and foreign embassies, amid heightened tensions linked to the Israel-Hamas conflict. The UN then called for the immediate return of all seized assets and the withdrawal of Houthi forces from the premises. After mounting international pressure following the incident, on 26 August 2024, the Houthis handed back the office to the UN Resident and Humanitarian Coordinator for Yemen, Julien Harneis.

### **Escalation between Israel and Hezbollah**

On 25 August 2024, Hezbollah launched hundreds of rockets and drones at Israel, marking one of the largest clashes in over ten months of the war. Israel responded with airstrikes involving around 100 jets targeting Lebanon, aiming to thwart a larger attack. The exchange resulted in three deaths in Lebanon and one in Israel. Both sides indicated a preference to avoid further escalation but left the door open for future strikes. Hezbollah's attack was a retaliation for the assassination of its senior commander, Fuad Shukur, in July. The situation heightened fears of a broader regional conflict involving Iran and the US with the latter reinforcing its military presence in the West Asia region.

### **Dr. S. Jaishankar visits Kuwait**

India's External Affairs Minister Dr. S. Jaishankar paid an official visit to Kuwait on 18 August 2024. During the visit, he met with Crown Prince Sheikh Sabah Khaled Al Hamad Al Mubarak Al Sabah and Prime Minister Ahmed Abdullah Al-Ahmed Al Jaber Al Sabah. In discussions with Foreign Minister Abdullah Ali Al Yahya, both sides emphasised on further enhancing bilateral ties, particularly in trade, investments and emerging sectors like pharma, technology and education. They also discussed labour and manpower issues. Dr. Jaishankar also engaged with key members of the Indian community in Kuwait, acknowledging their role in fostering bilateral relations.

### **Turkiye hosts mediation talks between Ethiopia and Somalia**

Turkiye hosted a second round of talks on 12 August 2024, in Ankara, aiming to

mediate between Ethiopia and Somalia over Ethiopia's contentious deal with Somaliland. The dispute arose after Ethiopia signed a MoU with Somaliland in January, agreeing to lease a 20-kilometre coastal stretch for a marine base in exchange for recognising Somaliland's independence. Somalia, which views Somaliland as part of its territory, strongly condemned the deal and expressed readiness to go to war over it. Turkish Foreign Minister Hakan Fidan held separate proximity talks with his Ethiopian and Somali counterparts, Taye Atske Selassie and Ahmed Moallim Fiqi, respectively. Turkiye, which has close ties with Somalia and economic links with Ethiopia, previously hosted the first round of talks in July and proposed a compromise ensuring Ethiopia's sea access while acknowledging Somalia's sovereignty.

### **Yahya Sinwar named leader of Hamas**

On 6 August 2024, Hamas named Yahya Sinwar as its new leader following the killing of Ismail Haniyeh on 31 July. Sinwar, who is considered one of the masterminds behind the 7 October attack on Israel, has been a key figure in Hamas, known for his hardline stance and history of resistance against Israel. His selection marks a shift towards a more militant leadership, especially in the wake of Haniyeh's killing, which has escalated tensions in the region. Sinwar, who spent many years in Israeli prisons, was previously head of the Al Majd security apparatus, helped establish the Qassam Brigades, the armed wing of Hamas and became the Hamas chief in the Gaza Strip in 2017.