



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week was a very busy one in Washington, as Congress began its work for the year post-economic bailout stimulus package. The House passed an omnibus spending bill for Fiscal Year 2009, which will be taken up by the Senate this week. In addition, on Thursday, President Obama presented a blueprint outline of his FY 2010 budget request, which includes an increase for international affairs spending. Also, a new bill was introduced expressing concern for repression of human rights and political reform in Egypt, and many reacted to Obama's announcement to withdraw combat troops from Iraq by the end of 2010.

For more detailed coverage of the debates surrounding U.S. foreign policy and the prospects for democracy in the Middle East, be sure to check out POMED's blog, the [POMED Wire](#).

## The Weekly Wire

March 1, 2009

### *Legislation*

On Wednesday (2/25), [H.Res.184](#), sponsored by **Rep. David Obey** (D-WI), a bill making omnibus appropriations for the fiscal year ending September 30, 2009, was introduced and passed in the House of Representatives by a [245-178](#) vote. The omnibus appropriations bill includes \$36.6 billion for state and foreign operations, representing a 12 percent increase over last year. POMED will soon have a detailed summary of the relevant portions of this bill.

On Thursday (2/26), [H.Res.200](#), sponsored by **Rep. Frank Wolf** (R-VA), a bill calling on the Egyptian Government to respect human rights and freedoms of religion and expression in Egypt, was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The bill would call on the Egyptian government to "end all forms of harassment, including judicial measures, the detention of media professionals and, more generally, human rights defenders and activists". It also calls for the immediate release of Abdel Karim Suleiman, an Egyptian blogger imprisoned for criticizing Islam and Egyptian President Mubarak.

On Thursday (2/26), [H.Res.1206](#), sponsored by **Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL), a bill which would strengthen sanctions against Syria and establish a program to support a transition to a democratically elected Syrian government, was introduced and referred to the House Committees on Foreign Affairs, Ways and Means, Financial Services, Oversight and Government Reform and the Judiciary.

On Thursday (2/26), [H.Res.1208](#), sponsored by **Rep. Ileana Ros-Lehtinen** (R-FL), a bill which would strengthen existing legislation which sanctions persons aiding and facilitating nonproliferation activities by the Government of Iran, was introduced and referred to the House Committees on Foreign Affairs, Financial Services, Oversight, Government Reform, Ways and Means, the Judiciary, Education and Labor and Science and Technology.

### *Committee Hearings*

On Thursday (2/26), the Senate Foreign Relations Committee convened a hearing titled "[Engaging Muslim Communities around the World](#)". The hearing included testimony from two panels of experts. The first panel included testimony from former Secretary of State **Madeleine Albright** former Commander of U.S. Central Command Admiral **William J. Fallon**, USN (ret.). The second panel included testimony from **Dalia Mogahed**, Executive Director of the Gallup Center for Muslim Studies, **Eboo Patel**, Executive Director of the Interfaith Youth Core, and **Zeyno Baran**, Senior Fellow at the Hudson Institute.

In his opening statement, Chairman [John Kerry](#) (D-MA) argued for "broadening relations with Muslim nations beyond the few lightning-rod topics that have defined them since 9/11 to include combating poverty, climate change, investing in human development and creating knowledge societies." Kerry also decried the screening of an anti-Muslim film organized by Senator **Jon Kyl** (R-AZ) to coincide with the hearing. Kerry was optimistic that the hearing would continue to "deepen and improve" dialogue. Senator [Richard Lugar](#) (R-IN), the Committee's Ranking Member, expressed support for the Undersecretary of State for Public Diplomacy, a position yet to be filled. Lugar also voiced support for opening American information centers in cities with large Muslim populations.

[Secretary Albright](#) reiterated her support for four policies: increasing the use of diplomacy to resolve conflicts, supporting improved governance in Muslim-majority states, enlarging economic cooperation and increasing dialogue to enhance mutual understanding. [Admiral Fallon](#) also put forth recommendations for engaging Muslim states, including listening more, more effectively engaging in the Middle East peace process and other outreach initiatives, increased development aid, and building a sustainable respect and mutual trust.

In the second panel discussion, [Dalia Mogahed](#) referenced Gallup polling to support her general recommendation that the U.S. embrace what she calls the "three R's": resolution of conflicts, reform and respect. [Eboo Patel](#) explained that if we do not engage Muslim youth, others, including Bin Laden, will. Patel recommended the U.S. alter from a "clash of civilizations" paradigm to a "pluralism vs. extremism" paradigm. He also called for interfaith cooperation and prioritizing citizen diplomacy. [Zeyno Baran](#) recommended two priorities in potential engagement with Islamist groups: a commitment to liberal democracy and the empowerment of women.

## *In Washington*

**The Budget and Foreign Policy:** On Thursday, **President Obama** [submitted](#) an outline for his first budget request, for Fiscal Year 2010, which includes \$51.7 billion for the International Affairs Budget, a 9.5% increase over the expected level of funding for FY09. One commentator [highlighted](#) the lack of details in terms of State Department spending. While the budget appears to provide increased funding for elements of U.S. soft power, it is unclear how long increases will last and how many new jobs may be created. Meanwhile, many reacted to the [passage](#) by the House of a \$410 billion omnibus spending bill ([H.R. 1105](#)) for Fiscal Year 2009, of which [\\$36.6 billion](#) would be set aside for the State Department, USAID, and foreign military and economic aid. This would represent a 12 percent increase over last year's levels.

**Democracy Promotion and Development:** While the **Obama** administration has articulated specific policies on a number of fronts, democracy promotion is not among them. One commentator focused on the three D's of defense, development, and diplomacy and the [need to reevaluate the development aspect](#). Others offered words of advice to **Hillary Clinton** ahead of her trip to Egypt [next week](#), emphasizing that [economic assistance will not solve political problems](#) and aid will only prove [fruitful](#) if it is accompanied by [development](#) of democratic institutions.

**Withdrawing Troops from Iraq:** Many [discussed](#) **President Obama's** announcement that combat troops will be withdrawn from Iraq by the end of 2010, with some [wondering](#) if this may be too fast. Others [argued](#) that the timeline for withdrawal is out of our hands, pointing to the Status of Forces Agreement and the role the Iraqi parliament will play in this decision. Some [believe](#) the proposed troop withdrawal, if managed appropriately, can provide the conditions for long term stability in Iraq. In light of the troop withdrawal, two [key issues](#) will need to be addressed: control of the city of Kirkuk and reconciling control of oil reserves. A number of experts [weighed in](#) on the President's plan.

**Advice on Iran and Syria:** In engaging Iran, it was recommended that **Obama** take a [low-key approach](#) focused on a stated respect for Iran and its people and acknowledgement of its security concerns. One commentator argued that Obama [missed an opportunity](#) to pressure Iran and the EU during his address to Congress, urging the president to couple his rhetoric on U.S. engagement with equally public statements urging the EU to tighten financial pressure on Iran. Meanwhile, in approaching [engagement with Syria](#) the "[three R's](#)" of respect, reciprocity, and rights were outlined.

**Debate Over Ross Title:** On Monday, the State Department [announced](#) that **Dennis Ross** had been [appointed](#) to the position of [Special Adviser](#) to the Secretary of State for the Gulf and [Southwest Asia](#). One analyst [pointed out](#) that this is a step down from earlier rumors which suggested Ross would be "the President's special envoy to Iran [and] basically a super envoy ranking above others for the entire Middle East region." While some were [pleased](#) with the decision, others were [concerned](#) that Ross' hawkish views will not bode well for engagement with Iran.

**U.S.-Egyptian Relations:** There has been much speculation about how United States policy towards Egypt will change given the surprise release of former

Presidential candidate **Ayman Nour**. Some analysts [argued](#) that the release of Nour revealed that "at least one Arab autocrat is no longer worried about the post-9/11 drive for democratization in the Middle East." Others were more [optimistic](#), saying, "Obama will be able to succeed where Bush failed in Egypt," by adopting a wise and intelligent policy of democratization in the Middle East.

#### *Also Worth Reading*

The Washington Institute for Near East Policy has a new [report](#) out called "Rewriting the Narrative: An Integrated Strategy for Counterradicalization" which argues that democracy assistance should play a primary role in efforts to confront radicalization. The report argues that democracy assistance should not be linked with counterterrorism and national security policies, as this fuels the perception that U.S. efforts are aimed at regime change rather than truly supporting democratic reform. The report calls for doubling the amount of funding allotted to the National Endowment for Democracy and the Middle East Partnership Initiative. The report is the final work of the Task Force on Confronting the Ideology of Radical Extremism convened by **Scott Carpenter**, **Michael Jacobson**, and **Matthew Levitt**.

#### *In the Middle East*

**Steps toward Fatah-Hamas Reconciliation?** As many question how Israel's election will affect the peace process, some [focused our attention](#) to Fatah and Hamas, declaring "before they can make peace with Israel, Palestinians must be united." Small steps were taken on that front as Fatah and Hamas came to an [agreement](#) in Cairo this week to commence national reconciliation talks. Meanwhile, another highlighted Egypt's [incremental strategy](#) toward Gaza and the peace process.

**Pakistan and the Swat Deal:** In light of the recent agreement to institute Sharia law in Pakistan's Swat Valley, some argued that the Pakistani government is [continuing its retreat](#) from the war on terror. Others agreed, [citing a previous deal](#) struck by **Musharraf** in 2006 which "created a Taliban sanctuary and led to sharp increases in terrorist attacks, both in Afghanistan and the Pakistan heartland."

**How to Win in Afghanistan:** Former Afghan interior minister **Ahmad Jalali** [put forth](#) his assessment of the state of affairs in Afghanistan and the potential path forward. According to Jalali, Afghanistan is on the verge of failure caused by a lack of government legitimacy which has led to challenges from multiple insurgencies. Jalali argues for promotion of good governance, economic growth and self-perpetuating security.

**Israel and the Peace Process:** Some [discussed](#) the various political options and challenges faced by **Benjamin Netanyahu** in building a coalition government. Many [agreed](#) that a broad coalition is in the best interest of Netanyahu, Israel, and the peace process. One analyst [emphasized](#) that while a coalition excluding Kadima and Labor may seem incompatible with peace, the [relationship](#) between Israel and the Obama administration may serve as the ultimate check. In light of the "profound divisions that exist in Israel and the dysfunctional state of its political system," it was [argued](#) that Arab leaders should establish themselves as the "partners for peace, pushing Israel and the U.S. to make the next moves." On another note, one commentator [argued](#) that Israel needs to start handling its Arab minority with better

care, noting with alarm the recent success of **Avigdor Lieberman** and his Yisrael Beitenu party. In a *Washington Post* [interview](#), Lieberman defended his call for a loyalty oath for all Israelis.

**Jordanian Government Shake Up:** One analyst weighed in on the [recent cabinet reshuffle](#) in Jordan, claiming that the changes don't mean much for reforming Jordanian foreign policy as "the King is really his own Foreign Minister." However, this move does seem to signal the King's intentions, namely taking a harder stance on Hamas and preparing the government for Israel's new right-of-center coalition.

#### *Also Worth Reading*

Human Rights Watch released a [report](#) on Syria's prosecution of those it deems a threat to the state. HRW calls for Syria to abolish the special court charges with this responsibility; it has been known to prosecute Kurdish activists, bloggers, so-called "Islamists," and citizens accused of insulting the president. Since January 2007, 153 defendants have gone before the court "on the basis of vague charges that criminalize the freedom of expression."

#### *In Case You Missed It*

On Thursday (2/26), POMED and the Friedrich Ebert Stiftung hosted a discussion on developing practical strategies for engaging political Islam. Panelists included **Ruheil Gharaibeh**, Deputy Secretary General of the Islamic Action Front in Jordan; **Shadi Hamid**, Director of Research for POMED; **Zoe Nautre**, Visiting Fellow at the German Council on Foreign Relations; **Mona Yacoubian**, Special Advisor for the Muslim World Initiative, Center for Conflict Analysis and Prevention at USIP; and with **Nathan Brown**, Director of the Middle East Institute at George Washington University, moderating. For POMED's notes on this event [click here](#).