



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week was a busy week in the Middle East, with the Arab Summit in Doha, the aftermath of last weekend's municipal elections in Turkey, and President Obama arriving in Ankara last night following his call for Turkish EU accession earlier Sunday. Meanwhile, before adjourning for a 2-week recess, the House and Senate each passed FY2010 budget resolutions. The amended Senate version included \$53.8 billion for international affairs as requested by the President, while the House version fell \$5.3 billion short of that amount. Secretary Clinton and Ambassador Susan Rice also made news with the announcement that the U.S. will seek a seat on the UN Human Rights Council. This week, all eyes will be on Obama's public appearances in Turkey, while democracy activists in Egypt hold strikes and protests on today's 1-year anniversary of widespread public demonstrations of April 6, 2008. On Thursday, Algerians will vote in a Presidential election widely viewed as a noncompetitive and unfree, with opposition leaders calling for a boycott.

The Weekly Wire

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Legislation

On Tuesday (3/31), [H.Res.282](#), sponsored by **Rep. Jeff Fortenberry** (R-NE) a bill which recognizes the importance of the peace treaty signed in 1979 between Israel and Egypt, was passed in the House by a vote of [418-1](#). The bill recognizes the treaty as an unprecedented example of reconciliation which other nations can use as a mechanism in overcoming longstanding barriers.

On Thursday (4/2), [H.R.1886](#), sponsored by **Rep. Howard Berman** (D-CA), a bill which would authorize democratic, economic, and social development, and security assistance for Pakistan, was introduced and referred to the House Committees on Foreign Affairs and Rules.

On Thursday (4/2), [H.Con.Res.94](#), sponsored by **Rep. John Conyers** (D-MI), a bill which would encourage the negotiation of an "Incidents at Sea Agreement" between

the United States and Iran, was referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The bill calls for negotiations on not interfering with ship formations, maintaining safe distances, not permitting simulated attacks, as well as other measures. Such an agreement would mark formal engagement between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran, and decrease the likelihood of an accidental military incident between the two in the Persian Gulf.

On Thursday (4/2), [H.Con.Res.85](#) and [S.Con.Res.13](#) were passed by the House and Senate respectively. The House version was passed without amendment and fell \$5.3 billion short of the President's \$53.8 billion request for international affairs, while the Senate passed by unanimous consent **S.Amdt.732**, the **Kerry-Lugar Amendment**, restoring the full \$4 billion cut from President's request for international affairs by the Senate Budget Committee's initial version of the resolution. In presenting the Amendment, **Senator Kerry** (D-MA) cited the importance of diplomacy and development abroad, particularly in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and the Arab world. The two budget resolutions were both passed on Thursday, by a [233-196](#) vote in the House and a [55-43](#) vote in the Senate.

Committee Hearings

On Thursday (4/2), the House Committee on Foreign Affairs met for a hearing titled "U.S. Strategy for Afghanistan: Achieving Peace and Stability in the Graveyard of Empires". [Rep. Gary Ackerman](#) (D-NY), chairman of the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia, wholeheartedly endorsed the **President Obama's** new strategy for Afghanistan in his opening statement. He specifically lauded the surge in troop levels. Testifying at the hearing were [Karen von Hippel](#), [Seth Jones](#), and [Anthony Cordesman](#). To view a full webcast of the hearing, [click here](#).

In Washington

Engaging the Muslim World from Turkey: It was argued that President Obama should use his [trip to Turkey](#) to deliver his promised [speech to the Muslim world](#) as "Turkey's ability to retain a secular democracy with an Islamic party in power is no small point for an American administration that seeks to promote the compatibility of democracy and Islam." Some advocated that Obama should use the occasion to discuss the [common values](#) of Western and Muslim civilizations. While others cautioned "with Turkey poised for potential breakthroughs on several issues that have long plagued its democratic evolution, the president will [need to successfully navigate multiple obstacles](#) in order to claim the visit as a success." There is [concern](#) among some analysts that Obama's "broad theater" diplomacy may stretch a little too thin.

U.S. Will Seek Seat on UN Human Rights Council: Last week, **Hillary Clinton** and **Susan Rice** [announced](#) that the U.S. will seek election to one of the 47 seats on the UN Human Rights Council. In announcing the decision, Secretary Clinton affirmed that "human rights are an essential element of American global foreign policy," perhaps intending to signal her commitment to [critics](#) who have accused her of downplaying human rights concerns. The Obama administration and many human rights organizations have [argued](#) that the council, which replaced the Human Rights

Commission in 2006, has [done too little](#) to stop human rights violations.

And in other news, the Human Rights Council recently [approved its tenth resolution](#) calling on states to limit criticism of religions, particularly Islam. One commentator [argued](#) that while these resolutions stir up notions of harmony and tolerance they "only give lip service to these values. In reality they are calling for laws and actions that prohibit dialogue by declaring certain topics off limits for discussion."

Talks with Iran: As usual, **President Obama** is getting advice from a [wide range](#) of voices on [whether](#) and [how to conduct diplomacy](#) with the Iranian government. One analyst [argued](#) that the only way to solve the nuclear issue, short of military action, is to place punitive sanctions on Iran's gasoline imports. Others advocated that [talks should commence before the June election](#), including discussions between a U.S. congressional delegation and the Iranian parliament. It was also [warned](#) that Khamenei is not the pragmatist that Europe and America believe him to be, but a committed revolutionary for whom "there is no goal more divine than seeing America and her allies driven from the Middle East."

Low-key diplomatic contacts with Iran [were initiated](#) at the international conference on Afghanistan at the Hague. Some have advocated that Iranian involvement in Afghanistan may be a [critical aspect of a comprehensive Afghan solution](#).

Mixed Perceptions and Obama's Afghanistan Strategy: Some [praised President Obama's](#) new Afghanistan strategy for committing the U.S. to "[strengthening](#) Afghan civil society and governing structures" rather than taking a minimalist approach focused on counterterrorism. Others seemed to like the new strategy for [the opposite reason](#): "the policy seeks to narrow our goals...to defeat Al Qaeda and other violent groups ... not to turn Afghanistan into the country we'd like it to be." Meanwhile, [some were unhappy](#) with this shift in policy, arguing that Obama not only "doesn't call for democracy in Afghanistan," but also "no longer seeks a US victory over Al Qaeda and the Taliban. Rather, he now defines the US interest as merely preventing the Taliban from returning to power."

In other news, in a hearing before the Commission for Security & Cooperation in Europe (the U.S. Helsinki Commission), U.S. Institute of Peace advisor **Scott Worden** [said](#) that Afghanistan has made dramatic human rights improvements since it adopted a new constitution in 2004, but the country still has plenty of room for improvement, particularly in terms of reforms establishing the rule of law.

A New Policy for Egypt? Some are [concerned](#) that the Obama administration's "new realist focus may lead to a de-emphasizing of human rights and democracy promotion." Well, one analyst sees the new administration as having "already [hinted it won't hinge its relationship with Egypt on human rights](#) demands." What will this mean for U.S. democracy promotion? Some [questioned](#), "can you [effectively support democracy] when you have a strategic alliance with a repressive state?... Or when you're unwilling to reconsider over \$1bn of military aid that subsidizes your own military-industrial complex and irrigates the backbone of the regime." It was argued that perhaps it may be best to lobby against businesses involved in Egypt and "naming and shaming politicians" that support the country. Meanwhile, Egyptian police were reported to have [beaten and arrested dozens of Egyptian students](#) ahead of demonstrations expected to coincide with today's 1-year anniversary of last year's April 6 strikes across the country.

Obama on Israel-Palestine: In assessing the new administration's policy toward

Israel-Palestine, one commentator argued that Obama has [hit the ground running](#) with a renewed focus on the conflict. Meanwhile, another believed that the issue is not one of the President's foreign policy priorities, claiming he's [only paid it lip service](#). A few have touched on [the need to engage Hamas](#), explaining, "the movement's sense of self-importance aside, there is indeed [no peace in Israel-Palestine without them](#)."

Open Letter to Obama: The open letter to **President Obama**, which POMED helped coordinate, calling on his administration to support human rights and democracy in the Middle East, continues to catch [headlines](#). **Radwan Masmoudi** of the Center for the Study of Islam and Democracy (CSID), was quoted in the *Washington Times*: "We are still collecting signatures for the 'Open Letter to President Obama,' urging him to make support for human rights and democracy in the Middle East and the Muslim world one of the main priorities of his administration, as it continues to engage with the people and the governments of the Muslim world." The letter is now [available to be signed](#).

In the Middle East

Narrow Victory for AKP: One commentator argued that Turkey's [local election results](#) were a "shock" to the ruling AKP, explaining that the only way forward for **Prime Minister Erdogan** is to [court a broad coalition](#) by returning to [AKP's](#) previous agenda of political reform. Some attributed the [small margin by which the AKP won](#) to dissatisfaction with the economy and allegations of widespread corruption among AKP members. Others discussed the AKP's [lack of progress in adopting E.U. human rights and democracy reforms](#). While the AKP claims the lack of progress is due to a myriad of issues outside of their control, some asserted the real reason is the disconnect between E.U. and AKP values.

Abdelaziz Bouteflika - Algeria's President for Life? It looks like President Abdelaziz Bouteflika is one step closer to governing for life, "following the best traditions of the Arab world." One analyst [explained](#) that in reality "the result of these elections were announced on November 12, 2008, when a [review of the constitution was approved](#) by the two chambers of parliament amending Article 74 of the 1996 Constitution that restricted presidents to serving two mandates." This allowed Bouteflika to pursue a third term, which he is [sure to win](#) as there are no true challengers to his candidacy. In light of this, some [argued](#) the regime's "biggest fear" is a mass boycott by disgruntled Algerian citizens.

Theatrics and Little Else at the Arab Summit: The [Arab Summit](#) concluded [last week](#) after [bouts of drama](#) and [little substance](#). In fact, the only thing the 17 heads of state [could seem to agree on](#) was ardent support for Sudanese president **Omar al-Bashir** as he faces an ICC indictment for war crimes and crimes against humanity. It was [argued](#) "[i]f the Obama administration and the rest of the civilized world needed further demonstration of why the promotion of democracy and human rights must be central to any policy for the Middle East, [Omar Bashir's reception in Doha](#) ought to suffice."

Thoughts on Israel's New Coalition Government: As **Benjamin Netanyahu** looks to be shoring up his new government, some [claimed](#) "its not as far-right as it might have been." However, others [warned us not to be fooled](#), arguing that this new coalition is "simply a desperate move by **Ehud Barak** who sought more to save

his job as defence minister than to influence the course of what is, at the end of the day, an overwhelmingly right-wing government."

Parliamentary Elections in Lebanon: One analyst provided an [analysis of Lebanon's upcoming parliamentary elections](#), highlighting the differences between the [March 8](#) and March 14 alliances. While another argued that the real issue at hand is [what comes after the election](#). Predicting that the elections will probably run smoothly, it will be the formation of a unity government and determining the appropriate role of the president that will prove difficult, and possibly dangerous.

In Iraq, Elections Don't Necessarily Mean Success: Last week, some warned of the ["disconcerting focus on Iraq's upcoming parliamentary elections"](#) as decisive proof of the country's successful recovery and the main precondition for a withdrawal," arguing that this is "ill-conceived and dangerous." It was explained that if the administration wishes to leave Iraq it must craft an exit strategy "that hinges not on parliamentary elections but on helping Iraqis fashion a series of political bargains that will provide all key actors with a stake in the new order."

Mousavi a True Reformist? Some [questioned the reform credentials](#) of Iranian presidential candidate, **Mir Hussein Mousavi**, citing the former prime minister's recent statement that Iranians should look back to the principle values of the revolution in shaping their future. It was pointed out that Mousavi "does not want to be seen as a candidate with an explicit reform mandate, so as not to alienate the conservatives. This has pushed him to introduce a different definition for reform than what **Khatami** would have offered had he stayed in the race".

The Future of the Muslim Brotherhood: In light of the announcement by **Mohammed Mehdi Akef** that he will step down as supreme guide of the Muslim Brotherhood, some took the time to consider [what this could mean for the future of moderate Islamist politics](#). The election of a new leader may provide insight into the future of the Brotherhood - if a more conservative guide emerges, it's likely the organization could shy away from political participation; however, the election of a pragmatist, such as current deputy guide **Mohammed Habib**, would result in few changes.

Is a Reactionary in Line to be Saudi Arabia's King? Last week, one analyst addressed the [general uncertainty about the Saudi line of succession](#) which could elevate "chances for instability in one of the linchpins of the Middle East." **King Abdullah** recently announced that the controversial **Prince Nayef**, who is supported by the kingdom's religious conservatives, has been appointed second deputy prime minister, a spot usually reserved for the third in line to the throne. However, **Prince Talal**, a close ally of Abdullah, released a statement implying that Nayef should not be considered a successor to the monarchy.

Also Worth Reading

Amnesty International released a [new report](#), "A Legacy of Impunity: A Threat to Algeria's Future" expressing concern over the lack of investigation into the 200,000 deaths, mostly by the hands of security forces, which occurred during the 1990s. On its website, Amnesty UK [explained](#) "[s]ince 1999 the current president **Abdelaziz Bouteflika** has instigated and promoted widespread 'amnesty' measures, effectively preventing victims and their families from obtaining truth, justice, and reparation. Most crimes that took place during the conflict have never been investigated and the

perpetrators never brought to justice."

In Case You Missed It

On Wednesday (3/1) the Center on the United States and Europe (CUSE) at the Brookings Institution hosted a discussion on the national implications of Turkey's recent local elections. The speakers were **Soli Ozel** of Bilgi University in Istanbul and **Murat Yetkin**, columnist and Ankara bureau chief for the Turkish newspaper *Radikal*. The event was moderated by the director of CUSE's Turkey Project, **Omer Taspinar**. The discussion touched on tensions between Turkish and Kurdish nationalists and between secularists and Islamists, as well as the prospects for a national opposition to the ruling AK party. For POMED's notes on the event, [click here](#).

On Thursday (4/2) the Hudson Institute hosted a panel on the upcoming national election in Afghanistan and the challenges to Afghan democracy. The speakers included **Dr. Massouda Jalal**, who in 2004 became the first woman to run for President of Afghanistan, **Virginia Williams**, producer of the documentary "Frontrunner," which chronicles that campaign, and **Mariam Nawabi**, who has served as an advisor to the Afghan Chamber of Commerce, the U.S. embassy to Afghanistan, and the Afghan Constitutional Commission. **Hillel Fradkin**, Director of the Center on Islam, Democracy and the Future of the Muslim World at Hudson Institute, moderated. For POMED's notes on the event, [click here](#).