



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week's debates were largely focused on reaction to and analysis of Israel's parliamentary elections, including the strong showing of Avigdor Lieberman's right-wing bloc, though as of now it remains to be seen whether Tzipi Livni or Benjamin Netanyahu will be called on to form a coalition government. In Saudi Arabia, the newly-appointed cabinet was widely hailed as more reform-oriented, and made news for including the country's first female minister. Meanwhile, more reports of repression of criticism in Egypt surfaced ahead of a rumored visit by President Mubarak to the White House in the weeks ahead. This week, the House and Senate will remain on recess commemorating yesterday's Presidents' Day holiday.

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

February 17, 2009

Legislation

On Thursday (2/12), [H.Res.164](#), sponsored by Rep. **Edward Royce** (R-CA), a bill which would officially condemn Pakistan's release of nuclear scientist **Abdul Qadeer Khan**, was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The resolution expresses concern with Khan's previous willingness to share nuclear technology with states such as North Korea, Iran and Libya. The bill would declare Khan a continued proliferation threat and ask that he be required to give a full account of his activities to the U.S. government and the IAEA. It also calls into question Pakistan's position as a NATO ally.

Congressional Hearings

On Thursday (2/12), the Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia of the House Foreign Affairs Committee met for a hearing titled ["Gaza After the War: What](#)

[Can Be Built on the Wreckage?](#)" The hearing included introductory remarks from subcommittee Chairman [Gary Ackerman](#) (D-NY) and testimony from four witnesses: [David Makovsky](#), Director for the Project on the Middle East Peace Process at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy; Dr. [Ziad Asali](#), President and Founder of the American Task Force on Palestine; [Michele Dunne](#), Senior Associate at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace; [Danielle Pletka](#), Vice President for Foreign and Defense Policy Studies at the American Enterprise Institute.

After the witnesses presented testimony, members of the committee asked questions. In one exchange, **Rep. Burton** (R-IN) asked whether the U.S. should consider influencing Hamas through engagement with Syria. Makovsky and Pletka disagreed on this front, with Makovsky arguing for it's worth and Pletka stating that we should not "engage in this fantasy." Another question also focused on Syria's potential role. **Rep. Ellison** (D-MN) mentioned potential Israeli Prime Minister **Benjamin Netanyahu's** opposition to two states. Makovsky expressed that Netanyahu may provide for some surprises, citing the fact that he met with Arafat and that meeting with Syria is not out of the realm of possibility.

For POMED's full notes on this hearing [click here](#).

In Washington

Future of U.S.-Afghanistan Policy: With **President Obama** stressing the need to strengthen our efforts in Afghanistan, a [reassessment](#) of U.S. strategy and goals was [called for](#) by [several observers](#). **Senator John Kerry** [argued](#) that the U.S. is close to wearing out its welcome in Afghanistan, that efforts there constitute "a race against time," and for a focus on bottom-up strategies that encourage good governance at the local level.

U.S.-Iran Relations: Much [discussion](#) last week on [constructive methods](#) for [engaging](#) Iran, [especially](#) with former reformist President **Mohammed Khatami** [entering](#) the Iranian presidential race. It was widely cautioned that the U.S. should keep [a safe distance](#) from Khatami, as overt support could be "the kiss of death," with Khatami already [encountered hostile](#) crowds chanting "Death to Khatami. We do not want American government." Some [focused](#) on Iran's [intense pride](#) and a so-called national [identity crisis](#), while others viewed [economic misery and repression](#) as opportunities for engagement. Still, many [remain skeptical](#) as to how [changes in rhetoric and attitude](#) will lead to [changes](#) on the ground.

More Middle East Appointments: It was reported that long-time staffer on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, **Puneet Talwar** [will move to the National Security Council](#) as a senior director with responsibilities for Iran, Iraq, and the Gulf countries. And sources say **Jeffrey Feltman** has been [slated to fill](#) the post of Assistant Secretary of State for Near East Affairs. With regard to Egypt, it was noted that [Obama's high popularity](#) (based on symbolic gestures) is waning, as his silence on Gaza has eroded support and he will ultimately be [judged by his ability](#) to address injustices in the Middle East. Some argued that getting off to a [good start with Saudi Arabia](#) should be a first priority for the new administration, while others claimed "the key to the future of the Middle East" is [improved relations](#) with Syria.

Meanwhile, there was an interesting analysis on improving America's image in the Middle East by [revamping public diplomacy](#) in the region. Additionally, CSIS held a meeting on [supporting democracy assistance](#) abroad.

Biden Addresses Europe: A few weighed in on the vice president's address at the Munich Conference, [arguing](#) that he "went to great lengths in his speech to avoid offending America's enemies." It was [also stressed](#) that the administration should reassess foreign policy not on its tactics but on the goals of potential adversaries.

Also Worth Reading

While the fate of U.S. democracy promotion has come under scrutiny in the past few years, [new research](#) provides encouraging data about the development of young democracies. The study explains that democracies with turbulent births still have the potential to flourish with proper policies and assistance.

Additionally, the International Crisis Group has a new detailed [report](#) examining the prospects of American engagement with Syria. The report assesses that as President Obama presses for more diplomacy in general, engaging with Syria will not be easy. Nevertheless the report offers some specific recommendations for success, including a clear articulation of guiding principles, appointing an Ambassador to Damascus, and a rethink of the use of sanctions.

In the Middle East

Israeli Elections: Days after the election it remains unclear who will be Israel's next prime minister. At this [point](#), there are several [scenarios](#) that could [emerge](#) to [decide](#) Israel's next leader. Most [agree](#) this was a [victory](#) for the Israeli [right](#). Others [addressed](#) the alarming popularity of **Avigdor Lieberman** in spite of (and possibly because of) his anti-Arab ideals. But, regardless of who the next prime minister is, it's clear that no party has a governing [mandate](#) in Israel, and [gridlock](#) to form a coalition could go on for weeks.

Many [questioned](#) what [this all means](#) for [Arab-Israeli peace](#). One analyst [concluded](#), "Israel's prospects of charting a clear path out of the present impasse with the Palestinians look dim; indeed it is not clear that its leaders or its citizens particularly want to." And while [fewer peace makers](#) now make up the Knesset, **Shimon Peres** [argued](#) why a two-state solution is [still viable](#). Another [saw](#) the Israeli elections as an affirmation of wide disillusion with Oslo and of any potential quick fixes, while others see [an Israeli public](#) ready for a "divorce" from Palestinians through the peace process. Some reacted [with dismay](#) to news of major West Bank [settlement expansion](#).

Trouble in Egypt: The past 18 months have seen an escalating crackdown on Egyptian bloggers and Facebook dissidents in the name of national security. Last week, Egyptian authorities [arrested Philip Rizk](#), a German-Egyptian [graduate student](#) of the American University in Cairo who had been [critical](#) on his [blog](#) and elsewhere of Egypt's reaction to the Gaza crisis. [He was released](#) after being held for nearly five days in an undisclosed location. Rizk [spoke with](#) the *Associated Press* on Thursday, saying that he was not hurt, only interrogated and threatened. In the wake of Rizk's arrest, some [advocated](#) for America to pursue more innovative diplomacy, supporting democracy through the cyber-world rather than through

traditional means alone.

A new book by **Galal Amin** entitled *Egypt and Egyptians in Mubarak's Era, 1981-2008* has recently been published, offering a harsh critique of **Mubarak's** rule. The entire *LA Times* review can be found [here](#). And speaking of Mubarak, one analyst [reflected](#) on just how essential (if at all), American support of Egypt's ruler is, and on whether things would really be any different if the Egyptian government lacked American support. Meanwhile, a *Washington Post* editorial calls on **President Obama** to [not welcome](#) Mubarak to the White House unless key political prisoners are released.

Afghanistan and Pakistan: As the Taliban gains strength in FATA and with [signs of an impending attack](#) on Islamabad, some argued that Pakistan is becoming the [new Afghanistan](#). It was advised that the [U.S. must support Pakistan](#) "in its long term struggle to integrate the Pashtun areas into the national system, not only militarily but politically, ideologically, and culturally in order to neutralize the Taliban challenge inside Pakistan."

As far as [Afghanistan](#) is concerned, one commentator [pointed out](#) that "lasting security requires democratic development." And even though Afghans are dissatisfied with their current leadership, this has not caused them to become disillusioned with democracy as a form of governance. Meanwhile, 64 percent of Afghans say the government should strike a deal with the Taliban, allowing their officials to hold political posts if they agree to stop fighting.

Iraq, Elections, and Relations with the U.S.: While many continue to [stress](#) that the United States should be in a "proceed with caution" mode, the [debate continues](#) over the [success of Iraq's elections](#). As much has been written about the recent elections, it is also important to remember that not *all* of Iraq has voted. Four provinces that [did not hold elections](#) will be vote later this spring. On another note, during a [recent visit with](#) French president **Nicolas Sarkozy**, Prime Minister **Maliki** "signaled a desire to gradually diminish American power over Iraqi politics and increase ties with other Western powers."

Khatami Enters Iranian Elections: Former President **Mohammad Khatami** recently [announced](#) he will be [running against](#) **Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** in Iran's presidential election. Many [speculated](#) on what this could mean for [Iranian society](#) and the future of relations with the U.S.

Elections, Economic Woes, and Reform on the Arabian Peninsula: The new cabinet appointed by Saudi King Abdullah was [widely praised](#) as more reform oriented, and notably included the [first Saudi woman](#) appointed as Minister. An article [addressed](#) the [flaws](#) of [jihadist rehabilitation](#) in Saudi Arabia, with an emphasis placed on reforming Saudi society to cope with its high level of extremist inhabitants. One observer [provided analysis](#) of the upcoming parliamentary elections in Yeme, which could be uncharacteristically tranquil, due to the potential boycott of the main opposition party, the Joint Meeting Parties (JMP). Meanwhile, amid the global economic crisis, [Dubai is witnessing a particularly steep downturn](#), with the government responding by tightening media censorship.

Also Worth Reading

RealClearWorld has compiled an interesting [ranking](#) of the five most important elections of 2009. To no surprise, elections in three countries of the region are among the five included: Afghanistan, Iran, and Israel, each of which is examined, while a number of other important upcoming elections in the region (such as those in Yemen and Lebanon) did not make the list.

In Case You Missed It

On Tuesday (2/10), the Conflict Prevention and Resolution Forum held a discussion examining the options for a systemic change of the U.S. foreign policy and development bureaucracy. Participants included **Wendy Chamberlin**, President of the Middle East Institute; **Richard Moose**, former Under Secretary of Management for the State Department; **Samuel Lewis**, former Director of Policy Planning for the State Department; **Karen DeYoung**, Associate Editor for *The Washington Post*; and **Susan Collin Marks**, Vice President of Search for Common Ground as moderator. All agreed that in tackling the problems of interagency coordination and formulation of coherent policies a special focus should be placed on ensuring strong leadership and effective management. For POMED's notes on this event [click here](#).

On Wednesday (2/11) Freedom House held an event marking the release of its recent survey *Women's Rights in the Middle East and North Africa: Gulf Edition*. The study examines the state of women's rights in the six member states of the Gulf Cooperation Council from 2004 to 2008. Participants included **Sanja Kelly**, Senior Researcher and Managing Editor at Freedom House; **Lubna Al-Kazi**, Kuwait University Professor; **Eleanor Doumato**, Visiting Fellow at Brown University; **Rafiah Al-Talei**, Arab journalist; and **Her Excellency Houda Nonoo**, Ambassador of the Kingdom of Bahrain to the U.S. For POMED's notes on this event [click here](#).