



# PROJECT *on* Middle East Democracy

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Weekly Digest 12/17 – 12/24

## *Legislation*

On Tuesday, S.AMDT.3875 to [H.R.2764](#), sponsored by **Sen. Russell D. Feingold** (D-WI), to provide for the safe redeployment of United States troops from Iraq, was withdrawn in the Senate after failing to achieve the required 60 votes in the affirmative.

On Tuesday, S.AMDT.3876 to [H.R.2764](#), sponsored by **Sen. Carl Levin** (D-MI), to express the sense of Congress on the transition of the missions of United States Forces in Iraq to a more limited set of missions as specified by the President on September 13, 2007, was withdrawn in the Senate after failing to achieve the required 60 votes in the affirmative.

On Tuesday, [H.RES.889](#), sponsored by **Rep. Alcee L. Hastings** (D-FL), condemning the December 11, 2007, terrorist bombings on the people of Algeria and United Nations personnel, and expressing sympathy to the victims of these terrorist attacks, was introduced and referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

On Tuesday, [H.CON.RES.272](#), sponsored by **Rep. Jeff Fortenberry** (R-NE), urging the United States Government to initiate a diplomatic surge to foster security and stability in the Middle East by engaging international stakeholders and governments throughout the region to curtail destabilizing influences, help prevent the spread of violence, address humanitarian concerns, and enhance prospects for security, political, and economic progress in Iraq, was introduced and referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. This resolution:

- Urges the President and Secretary of State to engage Iraq's neighbors to assist in securing Iraq's borders and engage regional stakeholders in an effort to prevent terrorist organizations or elements from de-stabilizing the region.
- Expresses concern for the burgeoning number of Iraqi refugees and declares that the US should engage other countries and international organizations in organizing programs addressing their needs

- Urges the President to promote international interest in the success of Iraq as an independent sovereign nation

On Wednesday, [H.CON.RES.274](#) [text not yet available], sponsored by **Rep. Wayne T. Gilchrest** (R-MD), expressing the need for a more comprehensive diplomatic initiative led by the United States, Republic of Iraq, and international community, was introduced and referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Armed Services.

On Wednesday, [H.CON.RES.276](#), sponsored by **Rep. Robert E. Andrews** (D-NJ), expressing the sense of Congress regarding Jordanian institutions, was introduced and referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs. This resolution says that the Secretary of Education should support and encourage the formation of a consortia between one or more prominent US institutions of higher education and a Jordanian institution for the establishment of joint undergraduate and graduate programs and should assist any such consortium in overcoming any legal, diplomatic, or administrative obstacles to the establishment of such programs.

On Wednesday, [H.RES.911](#), sponsored by **Rep. Adam Smith** (D-WA), expressing the sense of the House that the United States should increase United States forces in Afghanistan and responsibly redeploy forces from Iraq, was introduced and referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs and the Committee on Armed Services.

On Wednesday, [H.R.1585](#), sponsored by **Rep. Ike Skelton** (D-MO), to authorize appropriations for fiscal year 2008 for military activities of the Department of Defense, for military construction, and for defense activities of the Department of Energy, to prescribe military personnel strengths for such fiscal year, and for other purposes, was presented to the President.

On Wednesday, [H.R.2764](#), sponsored by **Rep. Nita M. Lowey** (D-NY), the Consolidated Appropriations Act, was cleared for the White House. [Division J](#) of the bill contains the State-Foreign Operations appropriations. This omnibus spending bill provides funding for all government programs for fiscal year 2008 other than the Department of Defense, for which appropriations were passed and signed into law last month. The President now has until December 31 to sign this omnibus bill into law, which he is expected to do. See POMED's [full report](#) on the State and Foreign Operations portion of the bill for more detail.

### *Committee Hearings*

**Foreign Affairs Committee** (House 12/19): Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight held a [hearing](#) entitled “The Extension of the United Nations Mandate for Iraq: Is the Iraqi Parliament Being Ignored?” The witnesses were [Michael Rubin](#), Ph.D., Resident Scholar, American Enterprise Institute for Public Policy Research; [Issam Michael Saliba](#), Esq., Senior Foreign Law Specialist, Middle East and North Africa, Law Library of Congress; [Kenneth Katzman](#), Ph.D. Specialist in Middle East Affairs, Foreign Affairs, Defense and Trade Division, Congressional Research Service; and [Raed](#)

[Jarrar](#), Iraq Consultant, Middle East Peace Building Program, American Friends Service Committee. Chairman [Bill Delahunt](#) (D-MA) and Ranking Member [Dana Rohrabacher](#) (R-CA) both made opening statements. For POMED's notes, [click here](#).

*In Washington*

**US Pressures Lebanon to Elect President:** Last week, **President Bush** and **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** asked **Secretary of State for Near East Affairs David Welch** to return to Beirut to tell Lebanese leaders that “[The United States believes that it is time now to elect a new president](#)” and to [pressure Speaker Nabih Berri “to convene a session of Parliament...to end a three-week power vacuum.”](#) President Bush was asked whether he would talk to **Syrian President Bashar al-Assad** to work on ending [Lebanon's political crisis](#), responding that he has “[ruled out direct talks” with Assad because “he houses Hamas, he facilitates Hezbollah, suiciders go from his country into Iraq and he destabilizes Lebanon.”](#)”

**Consequences of U.S. Policy in Iraq and Turkey:** One observer argued that despite “the much-touted progress in Iraq,” “transforming thousands of anti-American Sunni insurgents into U.S.-funded Sunni militias is not without cost,” thus, “[the surge and American payoffs to Sunni tribal leaders may eventually backfire, producing more instability and possibly a regional war.](#)” However, some credited the surge for “[bolstering, ever so slightly, the advocates of conciliation and weakening the partisans of sectarian war,](#)” and maintain it has led to a compromise in the volatile city of Kirkuk where Kurds, Turkmens, and Arabs live. Others commented on the Turkish raid launched on Kurdish PKK separatists in northern Iraq and argued that despite Turkish claims that the US gave permission for the attack, “[A US official in Turkey said commanders had not approved the attacks, but had been informed before they took place.](#)” Additionally, some say that while **President Bush** has “promised **Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan** that Washington would aid Turkey's fight against terrorism,” the “[increasingly assertive State Department has embraced an ill-advised diplomatic strategy toward the PKK that will likely backfire...](#)”

**US Relations with Libya:** Some claim that “[Muammar Qadhafi provided the Bush administration with a unique post-9/11 foreign policy triumph that has endured—though it has not, as had been hoped, prompted other antagonists to follow in Libya's footsteps.](#)” Others commented on the Bush administration's “resumption of diplomatic ties with Libya,” arguing that the relationship “[is not going as smoothly as the Bush administration had hoped](#)” and that “the US should rethink normalizing relations with Libya” because “The country continues to behave like a rogue state.”

**The International Community Confronts Iran:** One commentator maintains that the [international community is “not trying to stop Iran \[from\] enjoying the benefits of nuclear power...”](#) it is only “Iran's pursuit of proliferation-sensitive activities, particularly its enrichment program...” that concerns the international community. Moreover, “The world put Iran's Islamic rulers on notice” last week when “[the 192-member United Nations General Assembly voted its ‘deep concern’ over escalating atrocities in Iran, such as stoning, repression of female dissidents, and persecution of human rights defenders.](#)” Additionally,

one observer maintains that “[Both the EU and the US should be prepared to enter into direct, comprehensive, and unconditional negotiations with Iran](#)” because “An honest offer of engagement would allow Ahmadinejad’s pragmatic opponents to show that it is Iran’s president and his controversial policies, not the West, that are at fault.”

### *Also Worth Reading*

**Souheila Al-Jadda** in *USA Today* asks if *Al-Jazeera* belongs in the United States, arguing that the English-version of the channel “[provides a different view of the world and an opportunity to bridge the East-West divide](#).” According to Al-Jadda, the station “gained world renown as the first Arab news channel to broadcast dissenting views in the Middle East” and pushed “the envelope of free speech in the region.” Moreover, Al-Jadda notes that although “Al-Jazeera Arabic is aimed at the Middle East, not all countries welcome its probing reports. Saudi Arabia refuses to allow Al-Jazeera Arabic to operate in its country,” and that “It’s ironic that content concerns would also keep AJE from operating in the USA.”

In the *Washington Post*, **Senator Richard Lugar** (R-IN) and **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** called for Congress to follow through on legislation that would [establish a Civilian Reserve Corps](#). This reserve would serve as “a volunteer cadre of civilian experts who can work with our military to perform the urgent jobs of post-conflict stabilization and reconstruction.”

### *In the Middle East*

**Despite Delay, New Amendment Allows Election of General Suleiman:** Last week, “[Speaker Nabih Berri postponed a parliamentary session to elect a new Lebanese president for the ninth time](#).” And Prime Minister Siniora’s government has today [proposed a draft law](#) for a constitutional amendment to elect army chief Michel Suleiman as president, and has “[approved a motion calling for an extraordinary legislative session by parliament as of January 1, to tackle the amendment bill](#).” Meanwhile, [Lebanon’s opposition has threatened to boycott the presidential vote](#) “unless the ruling coalition agrees to the shape of a future government ahead of the vote.” Also, one analyst describes Lebanese Christians as being in a “debilitating dilemma,” concluding that “[For Christians to survive as a community, they must accept that the only way to do so is through reform of the confessional arrangement...](#),” and “Unless Christians grasp the necessity of deconfessionalizing Parliament, they may find themselves facing a new reality where the Sunni, Shiite and Christian communities are each represented by a third of parliamentary seats,” meaning that the “Christians would be the ones surrendering the most power; but more significantly national solidarity would be lost.”

**Sectarianism and Instability in Iraq:** Last week, there were reports that [Muqtada al-Sadr may extend the cease fire](#) he declared in late August. One observer noted that “[Sadr’s stand-down order was consistent with a pattern he had set over the last few years, in which he periodically pulled back to allow rogue elements of his militia to be picked off by coalition forces](#).” Another observer addressed “the concrete walls which have been erected between

new [Sunni and Shia neighborhoods](#) throughout Baghdad...” and argued that [the walls are “making permanent the ethnic cleansing of the last few years](#), and ensuring that resentments will continue to stymie [Iraqi political reconciliation](#) for the foreseeable future.” Also, one analyst argued that in Mosul the [“calm is now gone”](#) because “al-Qaeda in Iraq and rejectionist Sunni insurgents have opted to abandon surge-bloated Baghdad and Anbar” for Mosul and “with both insurgents and foreign terrorists set up in Mosul, [Kirkuk](#), and their surrounding provinces...the next powder keg of the Iraq War is due to ignite.” Additionally, al-Qaeda’s [Ayman al-Zawahiri released a new video last week in which he “identifies Iraq as the primary field for jihad...”](#) Moreover, an Iraqi government spokesman announced that [“Iraq will need foreign troops to help defend it for another 10 years,”](#) but he maintains that Iraqis “will not accept U.S. bases indefinitely.”

**Turkey Takes on the Kurdish PKK:** Last week, [“Turkish troops crossed into northern Iraq overnight and carried out a small-scale operation against Kurdish separatists”](#) as a result of “public pressure to act after [PKK attacks](#) on its security forces...” In response to the raid, [the Iraqi Parliament condemned the attack](#). One pundit argued that [“in the larger picture, this operation does not provide a solution to Turkey’s Kurdish dilemma.”](#) Also, some say that [“The raid represents the ‘stick’ side of the two-pronged Turkish policy effort](#) mounted in recent weeks...that holds the promise of success after several years of enduring PKK attacks that have had mounting success.” Others argued that [Turkey’s actions “whether within Turkey, Iran or the Kurdish Autonomous Region represents a sustained effort by the Turkish military that violate the sovereignty of other nations and the human rights of the Kurdish peoples.”](#) Also, [“Turkish military authorities arrested Nurettin Demirtas, the leader of the Kurdish Democratic Society Party,](#) with Demirtas’ supporters claiming that his arrest was political. In addition, some are concerned about [a new press bill approved by the Kurdistan Regional Government’s \(KRG’s\) parliament](#) containing restrictive provisions, “including amendments that would allow the government to suspend newspapers...” and require “that editors in chief be members of the Kurdistan Journalists’ Syndicate (KJS).”

**State of Emergency Lifted in Pakistan:** [“President Pervez Musharraf](#) lifted the six-week-old state of emergency and [restored the Constitution](#)...after passing a flurry of constitutional amendments and decrees to ensure his recent actions would not be challenged by any court.” Prior to the reversal of emergency law, opposition leaders had [questions for President Musharraf and President Bush](#). Also, opposition leader and former [Prime Minister Benazir Bhutto](#) said that she and others are still [“worried that the elections are going to be rigged in favor of the ruling party...”](#) Moreover, according to one analyst [“The picture of Pakistan today is bleak”](#) and [“the political situation will likely get much worse before it gets better.”](#)

**Despite Mubarak’s Crackdowns, Egyptian Democracy Movement Lives:** According to one analyst, “9/11 and the vaguely defined ‘war on terror’” were “the perfect opportunity” for **Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak** [“to summon up his trusty narrative about fighting terror at all costs, especially in justifying his exceptional powers, not to mention his government’s growing crackdowns on its own citizens.”](#) Yet, another observer noted that [“Facebook and YouTube are where the young Egyptian democracy movement lives”](#) and that “There are more than 60 Facebook groups devoted to liberal Egyptian causes” and “many of them have thousands of members.” Also, one observer comments on “the movie that

everyone is talking about in Cairo these days: [Heyya Fauda \(It's Chaos\)](#),” which “has been predictably championed by the opposition press and criticized by state hacks” and is said to open “with actual footage of the many street protests and altercations between demonstrators and riot police that shook Cairo in the last few years.”

**Women and Islamic Societies:** One analyst highlighted the debate about the state of Muslim women and posed hard questions like: “[What can be done about stoning in Muslim countries? Is honor killing a crime of passion or a crime of religion?](#)” Others commented on the “extraordinary case” in Saudi Arabia in which “a rape victim was condemned for associating with a man not her relative,” and made a “[comparison of Saudi and South African apartheid](#)”, and noting differences in Western attitudes toward the two. More recently, **Saudi King Abdullah** pardoned the rape victim, but pundits say [the pardon “was a direct response to an international outcry rather than an effort to reform the kingdom’s Islamic sharia courts.”](#) Others have “mixed” reactions to the pardon and say that while they are “relieved that the sentence won’t be carried out, [“this is not the end” because “there are other injustices still taking place in the Saudi courts.”](#) Moreover, others noted that “One must ask these Islamic majority societies to be more consistent with their own values and to stick to justice by refusing to abuse Islam” and that “[They must protect the independence of the judicial system and protect innocent people, poor or rich, Muslims or non-Muslims, men and women equally.](#)” Lastly, one analyst addressed the notion of “Damsels in distress” and argued that “[The west should stop using the liberalization of Muslim women to justify its strategy of dominance.](#)”

#### *Also Worth Reading*

In *U.S. News and World Report*, **Fouad Ajami** [argues that oil wealth leads to increased state confidence](#) and authoritarianism, “casting aside popular will” and leading to “irrational” results in countries including Qatar, Libya, Iran and Saudi Arabia.

At the *Washington Realist*, **Nicolas Gvosdev** responds to an earlier article by **Robert Kagan**, in which Kagan argued that the world was [experiencing an autocratic resurgence](#) which called for a new alliance of democracies. For his part, Gvosdev contends that [global entanglements](#) of national and economic interests lead to a more complicated world than any “league of democracies” would admit.