



Dear Friend,

Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week was busy in Washington, with bills introduced in Congress to shift the financial responsibility for the reconstruction of Iraq onto the Iraqi government and to condemn restrictions on free speech and public media in the Middle East, along with committee hearings on foreign assistance reform and U.S. policy toward Syria. Also, President of the Palestinian National Authority Mahmoud Abbas and Jordanian King Abdullah both paid visits to the White House last week, while Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice visited the Persian Gulf. In the Middle East, Iranians went to the polls in run-off elections for 81 remaining parliamentary seats. This week, as Congress moves closer to writing the appropriations bills for FY09, POMED will hold a [discussion](#) on Capitol Hill tomorrow examining Fiscal Year 2009 Appropriations and Democracy, Governance and Human Rights in the Middle East.

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

April 28, 2008

Legislation

On Tuesday (4/22), the Senate passed resolution [S.RES.522](#) recognizing the 60th anniversary of the founding of the modern State of Israel and reaffirming the bonds of close friendship and cooperation between the United States and Israel. **Sen. Harry Reid** (D-NV) sponsored the legislation.

On Wednesday (4/23), **Rep. Gary Ackerman** (D-NY) introduced resolution [H.RES.1127](#) condemning the endemic restrictions on freedom of the press and media and public expression in the Middle East and the concurrent and widespread presence of anti-Semitic material, Holocaust denial, and incitement to violence in the Arab media and press.

On Thursday (4/24), the House passed resolution [H.CON.RES.322](#), sponsored by **Rep. Nancy Pelosi** (D-CA), recognizing the 60th anniversary of the founding of the modern State of Israel and reaffirming the bonds of close friendship and cooperation between the United States and Israel.

On Thursday (4/24), **Rep. Allen Boyd** (D-FL) introduced resolution [H.R.5899](#): to require funding under the Iraq Security Forces Fund to be provided in the form of loans and to require the Government of Iraq to provide matching funds under the Commanders' Emergency Response Program to be used for agreed-upon purposes which enable military commanders in Iraq to respond to urgent humanitarian relief and reconstruction requirements.

On Thursday (4/24), **Sen. John Cornyn** (R-TX) introduced Senate bill **S.2917** [text not yet available] to strengthen sanctions against the Government of Syria, to enhance multilateral commitment to address the Government of Syria's threatening policies, and to establish a program to support a transition to a democratically-elected government in Syria.

Committee Hearings

On Wednesday (4/23), **The House Foreign Affairs Committee** held a full committee hearing on "[Foreign Assistance Reform in the Next Administration: Challenges and Solutions.](#)" **Committee Chairman Howard L. Berman** (D-CA) presided over testimony from [Lael Brainard](#), Ph.D. Vice President and Director of the Global Economy and Development Program at the Brookings Institution. Other witnesses included [Steven Radelet](#), Ph.D., Senior Fellow at the Center for Global Development, [Raymond C. Offenheiser](#), President of Oxfam America, and [The Honorable Jim T. Kolbe](#), Senior Trans-Atlantic Fellow at The German Marshall Fund of the United States. [Click here](#) to view a video webcast of the hearing.

On Thursday (4/24), the **Middle East and South Asia Subcommittee of the House Foreign Affairs Committee** held a hearing on "[U.S. Policy and the Road to Damascus: Who's Converting Whom?](#)" Witnesses included **The Honorable Martin S. Indyk**, Director of the Saban Center for Middle East Policy at the Brookings Institution, [Ammar Abdul Hammid](#), Director of the Tharwa Foundation, and the Honorable [Peter W. Rodman](#), Senior Fellow of Foreign Policy at The Brookings Institution. **Committee Chairman Gary L. Ackerman** (D-NY) presided. For POMED's full notes on the hearing, [click here](#).

In Washington

Rice in Region to Promote Iraqi Relations: Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice [called](#) for [greater financial and diplomatic support](#) for Iraq during a Gulf Cooperation Council meeting with Arab foreign ministers in Bahrain last week while **Iraqi Prime Minister Nuri al-Maliki** [rebuked](#) neighboring states for [not doing enough](#) to strengthen ties with Baghdad. Rice also made a [surprise visit to Baghdad](#) to discuss the drafting of the new constitution.

Assisting Afghanistan: Many have recently suggested [methods](#) to better [U.S. foreign policy](#) toward Afghanistan, with some [imploring](#) Congress to support Afghanistan's

private sector and others calling attention to the [Afghani refugee crisis](#) in Pakistan. Meanwhile, the Afghani government [ordered](#) television networks to stop broadcasting five soap operas, saying they were not in keeping with "Afghan religion and culture."

Continued Discussion on Carter and Hamas: While in the Gulf, **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice** noted last week that the Bush administration [explicitly warned](#) **former President Jimmy Carter** against meeting with members of Hamas. Some [asserted](#) that **former President Jimmy Carter** is right in engaging talks with leaders of Hamas, while others argued that Carter has become an [apologist](#) for violent religious fanatics and [committed treason](#) by his actions.

Abdullah and Abbas Visit Washington: While **King Abdullah II** of Jordan [visited](#) Washington to [meet with President Bush](#) at the White House last week, some [examined](#) the predicament of Hamas' strength in the Palestinian territories in the context of **President Mahmoud Abbas's** visit to the White House. In his meeting with President Bush, Abdullah urged the end of settlement activity in the West Bank and [called for greater U.S. involvement](#) in the peace process.

Hillary Clinton and Iran: While **Hillary Clinton's** campaign was [quick to play down](#) her recently aired opinions on Iran, her [remarks](#) promising "[massive retaliation](#)" and that [the U.S. could "obliterate" Iran](#) caused many to [denounce her remarks](#) and [wonder](#) how this can mean [anything other than using nukes](#). While [many Iranians are hopeful](#) that any of the candidates might bring more chance for detente than George W. Bush, they have [mixed feelings](#) about Hillary Clinton. [Some diplomatic repercussions](#) of Sen. Clinton's remarks were immediately felt, and the Arab press [weren't particularly enthused](#) either.

Also Worth Reading

In an article in the *Northwestern University Law Review* entitled "Democracy Promotion: Serving U.S. Values and Interests," NDI President **Kenneth Wollack** highlights the moderating force of democracy against extremism, and how supporting democratic values in other nations will ultimately benefit the long-term interests of the United States. [Read more here.](#)

In the Middle East

Iranian Run-off Vote: [Iranians headed to the polls](#) on Friday in a [run-off vote](#) to fill the remaining 82 of the total 300 seats. As results were [reported on Saturday](#), it appeared that conservatives consolidated their control over parliament, although moderate conservative opponents of **President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** appeared to bolster their standing within parliament, while the reformists had [almost no electoral success](#). Meanwhile, there were reports of uncertainty over whether Ahmadinejad [would run](#) for a second term as president amid rising [criticism](#) of his administration for its inability to deal with a variety of issues like rising inflation and unemployment.

Thoughts on Human Rights in the Arab World: [Arab sentiments toward the U.S.](#), with references to the [most recent poll](#) on the issue, cite [past torture of Middle East detainees](#) as one of many [contributing](#) factors to the debate on the Bush Administration's actions toward the region. Meanwhile, Moroccan dissident and human rights advocate **Mohamed Bougrine** received a [royal pardon](#) and became "Morocco's

oldest political detainee," while others [commended](#) the first peaceful democratic transfer of power in Pakistan's history.

Urging Inclusion in Iraqi Political Process: Many analysts highlighted the [need to include](#) Shi'ite cleric **Muqtada al-Sadr** in the Iraqi [political process](#), [shed light on the refugee problem](#), and finding non-offensive means for [moderating the PKK](#) in Iraq.

Heightened Tensions in Egypt: Many feel that [Mubarak's regime may be in some trouble](#), with [continued criticism](#) of **Hosni Mubarak's harsh sentences towards many [members of the Muslim Brotherhood](#), food woes, and the lack of democracy and basic rights.**

Also Worth Reading

Check out [this report](#) by **Faiza Saleh Ambah** in yesterday's *Washington Post* on the release from prison of **Fouad al-Farhan**, whom Ambah refers to as "Saudi Arabia's most popular blogger." Farhan had been held in jail without any charges for months after he had criticized Saudi government corruption and called for political reform in the Kingdom, and his arrest had drawn condemnation and protest from around the globe. Upon his release on Saturday, Farhan pledged, "I will be blogging soon."