



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week, debate in Washington continued to focus on speculation on U.S. policy in the Middle East under the new Obama administration, with questions surrounding his approach to democracy promotion, domestic human rights issues, and relations with Arab regimes, as further administration appointments were announced. Discussions also focused on Turkey's recent offer to mediate talks between the U.S. and Iran. Congress returned for a brief session, focused primarily on the economic crisis, but with a House hearing on the future of the U.S. military presence in Iraq and the Status of Forces Agreement recently passed by the Iraqi cabinet.

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

November 24, 2008

### *Committee Hearings*

**Renewing the UN Mandate for Iraq:** On Wednesday (11/19), the Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs held a hearing on the U.S.-Iraq Status of Forces Agreement and the prospects of renewing the UN mandate. Witnesses were **Oona A. Hathaway**, Professor of Law at UC-Berkeley; **Raed Jarrar**, Iraq Consultant; **Thomas Donnelly**, Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute; and **Michael J. Matheson**, Visiting Research Professor of Law at GWU Law School. The witnesses discussed the constitutionality and content of the recently-signed Status of Forces Agreement, Congress's right to consult on and approve the accord, and the feasibility of renewing the UN mandate. Prepared statements of [Oona Hathaway](#), [Raed Jarrar](#), [Thomas Donnelly](#), [Michael Matheson](#), and subcommittee Chairman [William Delahunt](#) (D-MA) can be found at the committee's website, and POMED's hearing notes can be found [here](#).

## *In Washington*

**Democracy Promotion in U.S. Foreign Policy:** Last week **Secretary Rice** gave a [wide-ranging interview](#) in which she addressed the administration's legacy on democracy promotion, reform in Iran, and Israel-Palestine. Also, scholars [debated the question](#): "How central is the promotion of liberal democracy to a liberal foreign policy?" Some commentators argued that ignoring the promotion of democracy in the Middle East [will not be an option](#) for **Barack Obama**, as he will be forced to either support the agents of reform, or remain complicit in their suppression with his silence.

**Surging: Donald Rumsfeld** recounted the factors leading up to the Surge in Iraq, and warns that while additional troops in Afghanistan may be needed, it [will not be enough](#) to lead to the results seen in Iraq.

**The Fate of Gitmo Detainees:** Much debate last week on the status of enemy combatants held at Guantanamo Bay. Attorney General **Michael Mukasey** [weighed in](#) on the ruling to [release five Algerian detainees](#) from Gitmo. Also, the Bush administration [argued](#) that the President has the sole power to authorize any detention that he believes would "prevent another September 11." Unsurprisingly, some commentators [disagreed with that interpretation](#), and urged President-elect Obama to [close Gitmo](#) and restore the image of the United States.

**Arab Regimes Divine Obama's Intentions:** Last week analysts disagreed on how pro-U.S. Arab regimes view **Barack Obama's** election. Some wrote that the regimes fear his election will lead to a [de-escalation of the War on Terror](#) and a renewed focus on their democracy and human rights abuses. Others argued that Arab autocrats [feel emboldened](#) by Obama's election, citing apparent government involvement in the [burning of Al-Ghad party offices](#) in Cairo as an example. Another piece argues that autocrats in the region [sensed the death knell](#) of the freedom agenda long ago.

**Is Bin Laden Irrelevant?:** Last week some argued that it is [largely irrelevant](#) whether **Osama Bin Laden** is alive or dead, as **President Obama** will have "more important enemies to deal with, from Iran to Russia." Others disagreed, and noted that regardless of Bin Laden's status, "al-Qaeda and like-minded groups [remain a threat to the United States](#)" in ways that Iran and Russia do not.

## *In the Middle East*

**Sofa Debate Gets Heated...:** Last week the Iraqi Cabinet [approved](#) the U.S.-Iraq [Status of Forces Agreement](#), yet in an ominous sign, Iraqi lawmakers got into a [physical altercation](#) while they debated the accord in Parliament. The outcome remains [uncertain](#), as some parliamentarians plan to delay the vote to make pilgrimage to Mecca - a plan that [has angered Grand Ayatollah al-Sistani](#), who has called for an immediate vote on the agreement. Some commentators addressed other [potential roadblocks](#) in the process, and others meticulously laid out the [current stance of each Iraqi faction](#). Finally, some were simply [amazed at how uncontroversial](#) the idea of withdrawal has become in America.

**...And Its Effects are Already Being Felt:** The SOFA is already having an effect, with reports that some U.S. military units will [begin obtaining warrants](#) from Iraqi legal authorities next month before making arrests or searching homes. Other reports noted that thousands of private service employees [will lose immunity](#) and be subject to Iraqi law under new security arrangements, while private security contractors [could face prosecution](#) for acts committed when they supposedly had immunity from Iraqi law.

**Gaddafi Still Rules a Police State:** Last week came a stark reminder of the Libyan government's miserable human rights record. As Libyan president **Moammar Gaddafi** rejoins polite society, [receives congratulatory phone calls](#) from the U.S. president, and son Saif [gets an audience](#) with **Secretary Rice**, Libya remains a police state and [democracy advocates languish](#) in Gaddafi's prisons.

**Turkey Joins the Fray:** Turkey recently [offered to mediate](#) talks between Iran and the Obama administration, with Iran saying it would [welcome Turkish mediation](#). Some commentators believe Turkey is [uniquely positioned for such a role](#) due to its ability to bridge - both geographically and ideologically - the Western and Muslim worlds. Others argued that the constructive role played by Turkey's AKP [belies the notion](#) that "Islamist parties and U.S. national security interests don't necessarily go together." Another piece offers [some suggestions](#) for Obama's Turkey policy. Finally, the U.S., Iraq, and Turkey [condemned the PKK](#) as a terrorist organization and formed a joint committee to combat it.

**Talking with the Taliban:** [Reactions abound](#) to the offer by Afghani President **Hamid Karzai** of [open negotiations](#) to Taliban commander **Mullah Omar last week**. Some wrote [forcefully against](#) the prospect of negotiating with the Taliban.

**The Military and Democracy in Turkey and Pakistan:** A very interesting article last week found [parallels in the struggles of Turkey and Pakistan](#) to reconcile issues of religion, secular governance, and military intervention in domestic politics. It traces the efforts of Turkey's AKP and Pakistan's PPP to overcome the legacy of their countries' founding ideologies.

**Pakistani Challenges for the New Administration:** Some warned that Pakistan will pose the [most difficult challenge for the new administration](#), and urge a mixture of boosting the country's economy, pushing for a peace deal in Kashmir, and slowing the financial flow to Pakistan's government and military.

### *In Case You Missed It*

**Can Obama Untangle the Iranian Challenge:** On Tuesday (11/18), the National Iranian American Council (NIAC) hosted an event entitled, "Can Obama Untangle the Iranian Challenge: Prospects for a New Iran Policy." Speakers included **Senator Thomas Carper; Senator Arlen Specter; Congressman John Tierney;** Former Assistant Secretary of State **James Dobbins; Dr. Farideh Farhi**, independent scholar on Iran, formerly of the University of Hawai'i at Manoa; **Joseph Cirincione**, President of the Ploughshares fund; moderated by NIAC President **Dr. Trita Parsi**. All participants agreed that the Obama administration should seize the initiative to engage Iran, but differed on how best to accomplish the task. Disagreement centered on using threats of military action to coerce Iran, and the utility of "carrot-and-stick" language in any future dialogue with Tehran. For POMED's notes on this

event, [click here](#).

**The Future of the Middle East:** On Tuesday, (11/18), the Rumi Forum hosted foreign policy analyst, former diplomat, and independent consultant **Stuart Schwartzstein** to discuss the challenges facing the Obama administration in the Middle East. He noted that the worldwide economic downturn will affect every country's ability to project power abroad. He said there is a strong need to reduce U.S. military costs and emphasize other instruments of U.S. foreign policy. He also discussed policy differences between the Bush and Obama administrations on Israel/Palestine, Iran, and Iraq. For POMED's notes on the event, [click here](#).

**Tehran's War on the West by Proxy:** On Wednesday (11/19), The Hudson Institute held a day long conference entitled, "Iran, Hezbollah, and Hamas: Tehran's War on the West by Proxy." Participants included **Martin Kramer**, Scholar at the Washington Institute for Near East Policy, and Harvard's Olin Institute; **Tony Badran**, Research Fellow, Foundation for Defense of Democracies; **Shmuel Bar**, Director of Studies, Interdisciplinary Center Herzliya; **Jonathan Schanzer**, Director of Policy, Jewish Policy Center; **Matthew Levitt**, Senior Fellow and Director, Washington Institute's Stein Program on Counterterrorism and Intelligence. Panelists agreed that Iran was a serious threat to regional peace, but while most panelists argued that Hezbollah and Hamas were fronts for Iran and interested only in continued violence, a minority disagreed, saying instead the situation was more complicated. [Click here](#) for POMED's notes on the conference.