



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week, before adjourning for the Easter recess, the House and Senate debated and passed their budget resolutions for fiscal year 2008, allocating funds for 20 broad accounts including international affairs. Also, the State Department released its annual country reports on human rights, covering 2007. In the region, Lebanese presidential elections were delayed for the sixteenth time, while Pakistan's fragile new coalition government was rocked by bombings in Lahore. The week ended with Iranians voting in Parliamentary elections on Friday in which conservative allies of President Ahmadinejad appeared to carry most of the country. Congress will now be in recess until March 31, while Vice President Cheney left yesterday on a 10-day visit to the Middle East, during which he will visit Oman, Saudi Arabia, Israel, the West Bank, and Turkey.

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

March 17, 2008

Legislation

From Monday (3/10) through Friday (3/13), the Senate debated and voted on scores of amendments to its budget resolution for fiscal year 2009 ([S.Con.Res.70](#)). This concluded on Thursday, with a marathon 15 hour session Thursday running well past midnight, ending with passage of the bill in a [51 to 44](#) vote. Most relevant to international programs was the **Biden-Lugar Amendment** ([S.Amdt.4245](#)), which [passed](#) in a vote of [73 to 23](#). This key amendment increased the international affairs allocation by more than \$4 billion to \$39.5 billion, matching the amount [requested](#) by President Bush last month. In a [212-207](#) vote, the House also passed its budget resolution ([H.Con.Res.312](#)), allocating \$37.9 billion for international affairs.

On Tuesday (3/11), [H.CON.RES.315](#), sponsored by **Rep. Joe Wilson** (R-SC), supporting the idea that coalition victory in Iraq is possible, was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Armed Services.

On Wednesday (3/12), [H.RES.1044](#), sponsored by **Rep. Zoe Lofgren** (D-CA), condemning the dismissal of the Supreme Court in Pakistan and calling for their reinstatement by the Government of Pakistan, was introduced and referred to the House Committee on Foreign Affairs. The bill "calls on the Government of Pakistan ... to restore to their positions Chief Justice Iftikhar Muhammad Chaudhry and all Supreme Court and high court justices and other members of the legal profession in Pakistan who were removed from office since the imposition of emergency rule, and to respect the independence of the Pakistani judiciary."

On Thursday (3/13), [H.R.5626](#), sponsored by **Rep. William Delahunt** (D-MA), the **Protect Our Troops and Our Constitution Act of 2008**, was referred to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, and to the Committee on Armed Services. The bill declares that no funds appropriated by Congress shall be used "to establish or maintain any permanent or long-term United States military base or facility in Iraq," and that "long-term relations between the United States and Iraq should be determined by the United States Administration taking office on January 20, 2009."

On Friday (3/14), [H.CON.RES.319](#), sponsored by **Rep. Robert Wexler** (D-MA), recognizing the fifth anniversary of the Iraq war and urging President George W. Bush to begin an immediate and safe redeployment of United States Armed Forces from Iraq, was introduced and referred to the Committee on Armed Services, and to the Committee on Foreign Affairs.

Committee Hearings

On Tuesday (3/11), the **Subcommittee on International Organizations, Human Rights, and Oversight** and the **Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia** of the **House Committee on Foreign Affairs** held a joint hearing entitled, "[Neglected Responsibilities: The U.S. Response to the Iraqi Refugee Crisis](#)." Featured witnesses were [The Honorable James B. Foley](#), Senior Coordinator for Iraqi Refugee Issues at the U.S. Department of State; [The Honorable Lawrence Butler](#), Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of Near Eastern Affairs, U.S. Department of State; [Ms. Lori Scialabba](#), Special Adviser to the Secretary of Homeland Security for Iraqi Refugees at the U.S. Department of Homeland Security; [Mr. Greg Gottlieb](#), Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator, Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance at the U.S. Agency for International Development; [Mr. Stephen A. "Tony" Edson](#), Deputy Assistant Secretary for Visa Services, Bureau of Consular Affairs, U.S. Department of State. Subcommittee Chairman **Gary Ackerman** (D-NY) gave an [opening statement](#).

On Wednesday (3/12), the **Subcommittee for State and Foreign Operations** of the **House Appropriations Committee** held a hearing on the "International Affairs Budget for Fiscal Year 2009," with testimony from **Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice**. Rice discussed new programs and aid allocation, as well as the administration's general foreign policy direction for the coming year. Notably absent was any mention of Egypt, from which Secretary Rice had just returned from a visit where she revealed the waiver of three conditions upon \$100 in military aid to the Egyptian government (see "Also Worth Reading" below). To

watch a video of Rice's testimony, [click here](#). To read Rice's opening statement, [click here](#). To read POMED's notes on the hearing, [click here](#).

On Wednesday (3/12), the **Subcommittee on the Middle East and South Asia** of the **House Committee on Foreign Affairs** held a hearing entitled, "[853 Days: From Gaza Disengagement to De Facto Power?](#)" Testimony was given by [The Honorable David C. Welch](#), Assistant Secretary of State for Near Eastern Affairs, and Subcommittee Chairman **Gary Ackerman** (D-NY) gave an [opening statement](#).

In Washington

Engaging Iran: Some [blame both Iran and Washington](#) for contentious relations, while others believe the [potential catastrophic consequences](#) are keeping both countries in check. Some analysts [claim](#) that a [better understanding](#) of Iranian Supreme Leader **Ayatollah Ali Khamenei** is essential to devising a more effective U.S. policy. Meanwhile, the Bush Administration [sanctioned](#) a Bahraini bank last week for supposedly aiding Iran's nuclear and missile programs.

Analysis of Fallon's Resignation: Last week, **Admiral William Fallon** resigned, largely seen as in response to a recent [article](#) in *Esquire* that quoted him [opposing the Bush administration](#) on several foreign policy issues, including [military action against Iran](#). Many were quick to criticize Fallon on his "insubordination" and his [too-gentle](#) foreign policy, specifically on the [Iraqi surge](#). Some [attributed](#) his resignation to his disagreement with General **David Petraeus**'s opinion on the effectiveness of the surge in leading to political reconciliation. Others saw this as highlighting [institutional problems](#) and [dissent](#) within the Pentagon. Some [agreed](#) with Fallon's [opinions](#) that diverged from the [policies of the Bush administration](#), especially those toward Iran.

Future of U.S.-Pakistan Policy: On the future American policy toward Pakistan, some argue for demanding that **President Pervez Musharraf** [take responsibility](#) and for a [legitimate democratic government](#) to take root, while others criticize the U.S. government for [demanding](#) certain privileges for American "military and auxiliary" personnel operating in Pakistan.

State Department Annual Country Reports on Human Rights: Last week, the U.S. Department of State released its [annual country reports](#) on human rights, covering the year 2007. The [introduction](#) to the reports noted serious concerns in several countries of the Middle East, including: "In Tunisia, throughout the year the government continued to intimidate, harass, arrest, jail, and physically assault journalists, labor union leaders, and those working with NGOs." "In Egypt, ... the government continued to hold former presidential candidate Ayman Nour as a political prisoner, charge journalists with libel, detain Internet bloggers, and significantly restrict freedom of association." "Syria's human rights record worsened this year, and the regime continued to commit serious abuses such as detaining an increasing number of activists, civil society organizers, and other regime critics."

2008 Candidates and Democracy Promotion: While the candidates [discussed promoting democracy](#) within Pakistan, some analysts suggest that the next administration should [abandon](#) the doctrines and strategies of **President Bush**.

Also Worth Reading

A few newspaper editorials last week condemned the Bush administration for waiving three conditions (requiring Egyptian government efforts to curb police abuses, enhance judicial independence, and reduce weapons smuggling into Gaza via tunnels) on \$100 million in military assistance to Egypt. The *Washington Post* [hoped](#) that Secretary of State Rice "felt at least a little shame" as she stood next to Egyptian Foreign Minister **Ahmed Aboul Gheit**, beaming with "the vindication of a diplomat who has just watched the U.S. secretary of state publicly repudiate the policy she once championed, in order to appease an autocrat."

The *San Antonio Express-News* [took a similar stand](#), arguing that such action only encourages the continuing campaign of arrests in Egypt, to which the White House [objected in press conference](#) last week. The *Express-News* asserts that, "Promoting democratic reform isn't a matter of going to war against enemies, and it's not an attempt to force American values on people who don't want them. It's about using the levers of American influence to encourage U.S. allies to act in the best interests of their people."

In the Middle East

Iranian Parliamentary Elections: As widely expected by most recent analysis, conservative allies of Iranian **President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad** [were victorious](#) in Friday's parliamentary elections with approximately 70 percent of the vote nationwide. Many fear that the elections will further embolden conservatives, and on Sunday, Iran's Culture Ministry [shut down](#) nine lifestyle and culture magazines for "publishing pictures and stories about the life of "corrupt" foreign film stars and promoting "superstitions."

In [previews](#) leading up to Friday's elections, most had agreed that the results could be an [indicator](#) of President Ahmadinejad's [prospects in next year's presidential election](#). Leaders of reformist parties [urged their supporters to participate](#), even though voter turnout was expected to be [low](#), indicating possible [frustration with the designated choices](#). Among the [issues](#) raised, some [highlighted](#) the [economy](#), particularly rising inflation and unemployment, as motivating factors for change in the elections, while others discussed the desire for [democracy](#). Some noted the [lack of student enthusiasm](#) over the elections and the U.S.'s [treatment of opposition parties](#). Many predict that a victory for the pragmatist faction of the conservatives will [probably not change](#) the direction of the government.

Lebanese Stalemate: On Monday, as Lebanon's presidential elections were [postponed for the sixteenth time](#), until March 25, many condemned **Bashar al-Assad** for prolonging the Lebanese stalemate in a vain attempt to cling to [rapidly eroding](#) Syrian influence in Lebanon. Some argue that the Arab League and **Secretary General Amr Musa** [lack the credibility](#) to help Lebanon make any real progress at this point. While Syria will [host](#) the [Arab League summit](#) at the end of the month, many worry about the Lebanese effort to [rebuild](#) and [advance](#)

the international tribunal on the 2005 [assassination](#) of **Rafik Hariri**. Some expressed doubts that the tribunal can [provoke any real change](#) in Syrian policy toward Lebanon.

Constraints on Freedoms in Saudi Arabia and Egypt: One Saudi woman posted a [video of herself driving](#) on **YouTube** in an [effort](#) to urge the Saudi government to expand women's driving rights, while some commentators argue that women in Saudi Arabia do [enjoy more liberties today](#) than they have in the past. In Egypt, a [crackdown](#) on opposition candidates running in upcoming local elections intensified, while one analyst sees the Muslim Brotherhood as [demonstrating its commitment to democracy](#).

Suicide Bombings Rattle Pakistani Politics: While some noted how **Nawaz Sharif** used the occasion of last week's [suicide bombings](#) to [accuse President Pervez Musharraf](#) of [causing unrest](#) in the country and attack his connections to the [Bush Administration](#), others felt that Sharif, Musharraf, and the PPP may be forced to [reconcile](#) their [differences](#) due to the vulnerability of the state. In an [analysis](#) of the delay in the formation of Pakistan's [new ruling coalition](#) for almost a full month, some [argue](#) that Pakistan's politicians are doing a reasonable job under the circumstances.

Turkey's Identity Crisis: In a [discussion](#) of how the Turkish public and opposition parties were uninformed about the government's incursion into northern Iraq, many wonder the [effects of Kurdish nationalism](#) in Iraq on Kurdish communities in Turkey.

Also Worth Reading

Mohammed Yaghi of the Washington Institute for Near East Policy [examines](#) the many obstacles confronted by Palestinian **Prime Minister Salam Fayyad's** Palestinian Reform and Development Plan (PRDP), arguing that the only viable solution is by seeking the backing of Fatah and **President Mahmoud Abbas** – a move that Yaghi sees as giving the reform plan the needed political base of support while potentially also strengthening the position of Abbas and Fatah.