



Greetings from the Project on Middle East Democracy!

Last week Congress was out of session all week for the Presidents' Day recess. News from the region was dominated by last Monday's parliamentary elections in Pakistan, in which President Musharraf and his allies were dealt a resounding defeat. Debate continued over recent political developments in Iraq, while the political stalemate in Lebanon continued amid heightened concerns of the potential escalation of violence. This week Congress will be back in session, and the House will have hearings on developments in Afghanistan and the Iraqi refugee crisis.

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 25, 2008

## *Legislation*

No legislation last week as Congress was out of session for the Presidents' Day recess.

## *Committee Hearings*

No committee meetings last week.

## *In Washington*

**Future of US Policy After Pakistani Election:** The overwhelming results from last week's elections in Pakistan against **President Pervez Musharraf** [have not stymied](#) the [Bush Administration's support for him](#), making some believe that the United States [appears](#) as [a force against democracy](#) and the Pakistani people. Many see the election results as a [chance to reshape U.S. policy](#) and a [strategic opportunity](#) for the U.S. to [assist the country in more non-military efforts](#) aimed at economic development. While some believe that the United States and other foreign nations should [resist intervening](#), many [called on](#) Bush to quickly [reach](#)

[out to Pakistan's newly elected parliamentary leaders](#) and to ask Musharraf to [quickly leave the political scene](#).

**Past and Current Bush Administration Policy:** When examining the Bush Administration's efforts to promote democracy in the Middle East, many [lamented](#) that the region's indigenous [democratic reformers are in retreat](#) as a result of the failure of administration policy to live up to its rhetoric. In the meantime, some [discussed](#) ongoing negotiations between the Bush administration and the Iraqi government on long-term military commitments, while others [noted](#) Saudi Foreign Minister **Sa'ud al-Faysal's** private meeting with **President Bush** and [speculated](#) as to its content. Some observers urged the Bush Administration [not to forget Iran](#) while the debate continues as to how the U.S. should [approach Iran](#).

**Assessing U.S Policy in Iraq:** In acknowledgement of the political [benchmarks of success](#) that have been achieved in Iraq, many still insisted that the U.S. must [withdraw](#) from Iraq and [questioned](#) the [alleged improvements](#) in Iraq. While many argued that [certain successes](#) can be attributed to our military efforts, while others argued that the Bush administration has strayed from neoconservative principles and that many problems in Iraq are a [consequence of this abandonment](#).

**2008 Candidates' Reactions to Foreign Policy Challenges:** Some argued that John McCain's stance on Pakistan is [part of a pattern](#) of support for authoritarian rulers, and many suggested McCain was [probably better off](#) switching the subject. Others [exhorted the Democratic candidates](#) to take on a few tough foreign policy issues that have been largely ignored up to this point in the campaign, suggesting they might find fertile grounds for [challenging McCain on his ideas about confronting Islamic extremism](#) and [McCain's potential Iran policy](#). Some concluded that while each candidate is [attempting to carve out a unique, transformational Middle East policy](#), there are few areas where their ideas substantially differ.

#### *Also Worth Reading*

On Friday, POMED and the Woodrow Wilson Center [held a panel discussion](#) examining the links between religious freedom and democratization in the Middle East, and the challenges posed for U.S. policy. Speakers included **Thomas Melia** of Freedom House, **Thomas Farr**, former Director of the State Department's Office of International Religious Freedom, and **Joe Stork**, Deputy Director of the Middle East and North Africa Division at Human Rights Watch. The discussion addressed the challenges of engaging religious communities and organizations in the region and convincing conservative Muslims that democracy can be consistent with their values.

#### *In the Middle East*

**Pakistani Elections:** In last Monday's [parliamentary elections](#), the opponents of Pakistani President **Pervez Musharraf**, led by the [PPP and PML-N parties](#), [won an overwhelming victory](#). While some highlighted their belief that the [predictions of massive vote rigging by the Musharraf government were unfounded](#), some

observation missions declared that [a level playing field was not provided](#) for the campaign, making the [defeat of Musharraf's allies](#) all the more remarkable. At the same time, others questioned the thoroughness of [election monitoring](#) efforts. Many [hailed](#) the lack of violence and viewed the elections as a "[triumph of Pakistan's middle classes](#)." In numerous [post-election analyses](#), some [focused](#) on the [loss of the Islamist parties](#), describing the results as "an [unmistakable rebuke of political Islam](#)," while others [maintained](#) that "the secular resurgence [in Pakistan] has far more [to do with material concerns than ideological ones](#)." In an analysis at the provincial level, some noted the Pakistani public to be [fragmented along ethnic and linguistic lines](#). Some analysts focused on what they felt was [still unclear](#) on how the [problem of widespread terrorist attacks](#) can be resolved. The [prevalent concern](#) was [whether the PPP and PML-N will strike a deal](#), and accordingly achieve the two-thirds majority needed to impeach Musharraf. Many urged Musharraf to [accept the consequence of defeat](#) even as he pleaded for [continued U.S. support and assistance](#) after the election.

**Backward Steps Across Region?** While the UAE [experienced a cabinet reshuffle](#) seen as a serious blow to reform in the country, many urged those interested in Turkey's ban on headscarves to "stop obsessing" and "[start cooperating](#)" on the reforms Turkey needs. Others analyzed the [political chaos](#) in South Yemen, suggesting that Yemen should reform and decentralize its governing structure. Meanwhile, Syria has [yet to extend an invitation](#) to Lebanon to attend the Arab League summit next month and come focused on the [abuses of power](#) of **President Bashar al-Assad's** cousin, **Rami Mahkluf**.

**Latest on Lebanese Crisis:** In examining the current crisis and the [very high](#) potential for Lebanon's political stalemate to erupt into widespread violence, some contend that [the only viable solution is the 10-10-10 solution](#), while others argued that these leaders are not ready for "[the politics of peace](#)." Meanwhile, others analyzed the various inquiries into the assassination of Hizbullah official **Imad Mughniyeh**, contending that this investigation will test whether Hizbullah can "manage to avoid [becoming another utensil in regional Arab antagonism](#) that is bound to get worse."

**Iranian Election's Candidates Reinstated:** In [previewing](#) the Iranian [parliamentary elections](#), many [discussed the ramifications](#) of the [reinstatement](#) of over a thousand candidates for the March 14th Iranian parliamentary elections, arguing that **Ahmadinejad's** conservative critics are [likely to pick up a significant number of seats](#).